



Bill Hoffoss
Hamburger Happiness
Minden, Louisiana

Date: February 16, 2022
Location: Hamburger Happiness, Minden, LA
Interviewer: Jaime Cantrell
Transcription: Sharp Copy Transcripts
Length: Fifty minutes
Project: Southern Baking

0:00:00

Jaime Cantrell: This is Dr. Jaime Cantrell, a contributor with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's February 16th, 2022, and we're here in Minden, Louisiana. I'm with Bill Hoffoss and I'm going to ask him to introduce himself and give his date of birth.

Bill Hoffoss: My name's Bill Hoffoss. I was born April 30th, 1951, here in Minden.

Jaime Cantrell: So tell me about how you got started in the Southern Maid business.

Bill Hoffoss: My family owned a hamburger place on the Sibley Road. My daddy started the name Hamburger Happiness back in 1963. And the interstate wasn't open then, and we got business, people started coming off the road and there wasn't enough seating in there.

0:01:01

Well, the building next to us was a grocery store so my daddy got the bigger building and that's when we started in the original Hamburger Happiness. We started making donuts in that building in 1969. And I had a cousin who worked at a Southern Maid in Shreveport, so he came and lived with the family for four months and taught me how to do the Southern Maid donuts. And I made 'em at that location on the Sibley Road for ten years-- or maybe seven years, and then me and my brother-- my brother at that time was workin' in the oil field. When he got out of the oil field, I taught him the donut and we opened a store at Dixie Inn at the intersection of Highway 80 and 371.

0:01:58

And we stayed in that location for thirty years. We had breakfast, donuts, and the hamburgers. And in 2004 I came to Minden, not the same location but on the same street and me and my wife

started up here with the Southern Maid Donuts and we've been here now going on eighteen years.

Jaime Cantrell: So you mentioned a cousin that had worked in Shreveport. Do you remember where he worked? What was his name?

Bill Hoffoss: His name was Richard Lazarus.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Bill Hoffoss: When he got out of high school he was working at a Southern Maid and he came over and showed us the donut business, lived with us for four months. And then he went back to Shreveport and became a fireman, and he was a fireman until he retired from the fire department over in Shreveport.

0:03:05

Jaime Cantrell: I know a lot of high schoolers, their first jobs in Shreveport was at a Southern Maid doing deliveries.

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: Did y'all ever do deliveries out in Dixie Inn or Minden, or was it always the location that--

Bill Hoffoss: We never made deliveries. We just had people come by and pick 'em up. If it was a big order a lot of people would call the day before and let you know. That way you knew how much extra dough to make to cover their order.

Jaime Cantrell: Do you remember the biggest order you ever had?

Bill Hoffoss: I really don't. I've made forty dozen before.

Jaime Cantrell: That's a lot of donuts!

Bill Hoffoss: I remember when the General Motors in Shreveport, Mike and them had a order for seven-hundred dozen for the General Motors.

0:04:02

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter] That's wild.

Bill Hoffoss: That's a lot.

Jaime Cantrell: So when your cousin Richard came over, was it always the original glazed donut, is that . . . ?

Bill Hoffoss: It was always original.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Bill Hoffoss: In our first location I started with every flavor they made, blueberry, cherry, Bavarian cream, cinnamon rolls, apple pies.

Jaime Cantrell: Wow.

Bill Hoffoss: And when I got to this location up here, we started droppin' some of the different varieties 'cause some of it cost a lot if you didn't sell it that day and throw it away. It got to cost a lot, so up here all I did was glazed and chocolate and cinnamon rolls and apple pies.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. Do you remember what he told you about how to make donuts?

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah.

0:04:59

Mike over in Shreveport, they do such a big business, their mixer is probably a-- my mixer is a thirty-quart bowl, and they probably got a eighty-quart bowl.

Customer One: He lies all the time. Don't believe a word he says.

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. I got a thirty-quart bowl and I mix-- a normal dough is fifteen pounds of flour, a gallon of water, half a pound of yeast. And when Southern Maid first started, we started making them, they had two flours, one we called a regular flour and one a premium. The difference was the regular flour you had to put powdered milk in there because the premium already had it mixed in there.

Jaime Cantrell: A lot of people don't remember powdered milk, like unrefrigerated--

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. There's a lot of them that don't remember, right. Yeah.

0:06:00

Jaime Cantrell: It didn't need to be refrigerated.

Bill Hoffoss: Unh-uh, no.

Jaime Cantrell: You kept it in the pantry. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. And then finally they done away with the regular and everything was premium flour. Now, that recipe you have to know-- that's the thing about making donuts. I could show somebody how to make a hamburger in three minutes but donuts you gotta watch that dough, how it mixes. You gotta know when to add more water dependin' on the--

Jaime Cantrell: Temperature?

Bill Hoffoss: -- humidity and stuff. Sometime it takes more water, sometime it takes less. You just got to have the feel of the dough for it to be right. Because if the dough's not right everything else ain't gonna go right.

Jaime Cantrell: When I was growin' up my mama told me that making candy was the hardest thing to make in the South because of the humidity and the temperature, and makin' fudge was so complicated.

Bill Hoffoss: Right, right. Uh-huh.

Jaime Cantrell: You think it's the same for donuts?

Bill Hoffoss: It is. It's the same.

0:07:02

I make my own biscuits here but it's still not like it is with the-- biscuits don't have the yeast in it like Southern Maid donuts. Southern Maid made a cake donut flour which stayed fresh a long time. It's kinda like the little sugar donuts that you'd get at a grocery store, but they didn't have to have yeast. And Southern Maid, your mixing time was once you started mixin' you mixed for about twenty minutes, then you cut it off, the mixer, and let the dough rise in the bowl for thirty minutes. Then you'd take the dough out of the bowl and cut it up in four different piles and role the air out of it and roll it back up into four different piles. And you'd let it sit there for about twenty minutes.

0:08:01

Then we started running it through the donut cutter that cuts the donuts out, put 'em on a donut screen, put 'em in a proof box, and they stayed in the proof box for about thirty minutes. Then they were ready to fry. During that time I was getting the glaze ready for my donuts, which was nothing but just a Southern Maid special glaze flavoring that goes in there with the water and the powdered sugar. And I was doing that when everything was--

Jaime Cantrell: Settin' and proofin'.

Bill Hoffoss: -- settin' through the process, uh-huh. So it's a two-hour process from the time you mix the donuts till they're ready to fry, whereas a cake donut just as soon as you mix it it's ready right then.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: So that's what was tough in the donut business is figuring how many to make because later on in the day if somebody come in and bought all your donuts it was too late to make another batch 'cause--

0:09:03

Jaime Cantrell: 'Cause it takes too--

Bill Hoffoss: -- by the time they got ready nobody wanted 'em, and so you just had to--

Customer Two: You get any money out of him yet?

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter] No.

Bill Hoffoss: [Laughter]

Customer Two: Pull it on him.

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Southern Maid's good but not like a cake donut. But I couldn't sell cake donuts. I tried. In my location they just wasn't-- everybody was looking for the hot Southern Maid donuts.

Jaime Cantrell: The yeast, yeah. So do you have customers that you remember being kids coming in and now they bring their kids in?

Bill Hoffoss: Oh, that's exactly right.

Jaime Cantrell: Generations.

Bill Hoffoss: Generations. I've got guys that come in here my age that brought their kids in there. Now they're grown and married and got kids and they're bringing their kids in here.

0:10:02

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: So over a fifty-year period of doing 'em I went through quite a few people.

Jaime Cantrell: That's what I like about Southern Maid because it's been a family business for so long. And then so many different families are part of it because they've been goin' when they were kids, and now they're adults and they've got kids.

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: And everybody talks about Southern Maid in Shreveport, "You gotta get a donut."

Bill Hoffoss: Oh, yeah. They even done a little survey in the paper one time about which donut's the best, Krispy Kreme or Southern Maid. Well, now, Southern Maid, that won over ninety percent.

Jaime Cantrell: That's not a fair ask! [Laughter] Not in these parts.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, that's right. And I know Krispy Kreme's nationwide, but the Krispy Kreme closed down in Shreveport. It's not there.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Yeah.

0:11:01

So you walked me through the process of making the donuts. It takes two hours. Flour, water, yeast. What is the biggest complication when you're making donuts? What can go wrong?

Bill Hoffoss: The complication would be-- when donuts first started, they had what they call a cake yeast made by Budweiser and you had to know the feel of that yeast because if the yeast was bad-- if it was spongy the yeast was no good.

Jaime Cantrell: Spoiled, yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: It had to crumble when you crumbled it to mix it up. And that's the main thing, that if your yeast was bad, you would waste a whole hour or hour and a half realizing that, hey, these donuts are not risin' like they're supposed to. So you'd have to start all over again.

0:11:59

And another thing was you don't want 'em to over proof. People say why don't you just wait and fry 'em when people get there and that way they'll be hot. Well, you can't do that because a donut

will rise and when it starts rising it'll start separating in the center. And when you put it in the fryer--

Jaime Cantrell: So it makes a line.

Bill Hoffoss: -- it starts sucking grease in there and it makes your donuts greasy.

Jaime Cantrell: In the inside.

Bill Hoffoss: You've heard people say greasy donuts. It's from being over proofed or say the grease is not hot enough, which I never had no problem with that. But if a donut got over proofed, I would just discard 'em and start over or whatever.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Tryin' to do the breakfast and the donuts-- and Mike in Shreveport, they're strictly in the donut business but ours was mixed in with the food business.

0:13:02

And if you got busy sometimes you had to just start over again.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: I didn't happen much, but I had to get down here at three-thirty every mornin', so it just takes a long time. It takes a long time. You have to be there early to get the process going.

Jaime Cantrell: When I talked to Lon Hargrove in Dallas, he told me that the original location that they started they had guys in the back rolling donuts, no air conditioning.

Bill Hoffoss: No air conditioning.

Jaime Cantrell: And that complicated the proofing process. And he talked about the drawers that he had that he put them in.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. The donuts do better--

Customer Three: You can't believe everything he says.

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter] You know, you're the third person to say that!

Bill Hoffoss: She's beginnin' to wonder about it now. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: I'm startin' to wonder.

0:14:01

Bill Hoffoss: But he's right. The donuts-- really you don't want it in air condition. Whenever your forehead is kind of sweating the temperature is just right.

Jaime Cantrell: Just right! That's when you know.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. It's got to be warm for donuts to do right.

Jaime Cantrell: So the first location was in 1969?

Bill Hoffoss: Our location? Yeah, here.

Jaime Cantrell: And then seven or ten years later the second location was in Dixie Inn?

Bill Hoffoss: Was in little Dixie Inn. And we stayed there for thirty years.

Jaime Cantrell: Wow.

Bill Hoffoss: And then I moved to Minden up here. Not moved my home but moved the business to Minden.

Jaime Cantrell: The business, yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: And I'm going on eighteen years here.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. And there's hardly any distance between Dixie Inn and in Minden.
It's what, five miles?

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Three miles. Right.

Jaime Cantrell: Not even.

0:14:59

So all the customers you had in the original location came down here?

Bill Hoffoss: They did.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: And when I first started makin' donuts in [19]69 a dozen donuts--

Customer Four: You know he went to the University of Texas?

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: I've got a lot of regulars that give me a hard time. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: I don't blame 'em.

Customer Four: Somebody said you was an A&M person.

Jaime Cantrell: I am.

Customer Four: Yeah. He went to Texas University-- or he went to Texas Tech.

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: I tell people I went to SMU, which I go, "Southern Maid University."

Jaime Cantrell: That's pretty funny. [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: So as a joke I say, "Yeah, I went to SMU."

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Let's get back to what I was sayin'. I forget the last thing we was talkin' about.

0:15:58

Jaime Cantrell: So the move.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, the move. When I first started makin' donuts in [19]69 a dozen donuts were seventy-four cents for a dozen.

Jaime Cantrell: A whole dozen.

Bill Hoffoss: And now a dozen's like \$7.99. It's just the difference in what stuff costs from what it is now.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: I used to could buy a sack of flour for seven dollars. Now a sack of flour is fifty dollars.

Jaime Cantrell: Forty years later.

Bill Hoffoss: Right, right.

Jaime Cantrell: I heard from the Hargroves that because of the pandemic there are supply chain issues. They're having trouble gettin' oil. They're having trouble getting--

Bill Hoffoss: Really, that's one thing that kinda got me-- the business had slowed down when the oil fields slowed down, and it all started with this pandemic they're havin'.

0:17:00

And my fryer-- I have a gas fryer. We always fried with a electric fryer which didn't take but, say, seventy pounds of grease.

Jaime Cantrell: Uh-huh.

Bill Hoffoss: Or I say grease, shortening.

Jaime Cantrell: Oil.

Bill Hoffoss: And oil, yeah. And the fryer I've got takes a hundred-and-fifty pounds.

Jaime Cantrell: 'Cause it's gas?

Bill Hoffoss: Because it's gas. You have to get the oil above the burners, or you'll have a flash up with a fire.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, my goodness.

Bill Hoffoss: And it took as much to get mine above the burners as the other one did, the electric fryer. So now my fryer used to cost me \$80 to fill it up, and now the price is \$250 to fill it up.

Jaime Cantrell: Because of how big-- yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. Everything went crazy on the fryer. And you change it, say, every thirty days 'cause donuts is a clean fry.

0:18:04

What breaks grease down like on another fryer, like French fries, is you have a certain amount of water on frozen stuff. Well, that breaks grease down. But I always call donut frying clean frying. There's nothin' that breaks the grease down.

Jaime Cantrell: The residue.

Bill Hoffoss: So you can go longer on changin' grease on donuts than you can on a--

Jaime Cantrell: 'Cause it doesn't get dirty as fast.

Bill Hoffoss: That's right. That's right. But it went from the price of the grease and sugar too. Sugar I used to buy for ten dollars a bag, now it's fifty dollars a bag, powdered sugar. Everything went up.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, when I was drivin' in, I saw a bunch of signs out on-- what is that, 20 comin' in?

Bill Hoffoss: Uh-huh.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. I saw a big billboard sign and then the closer I got to Minden I saw the sign comin' in.

0:19:03

Bill Hoffoss: Comin' in, right.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. When did that go up?

Bill Hoffoss: We had them billboards on the interstate for the location in Dixie Inn, which my brother uses those because he's still in Dixie Inn.

Jaime Cantrell: Right. And what's your brother's name?

Bill Hoffoss: Pardon?

Jaime Cantrell: What's your brother's name?

Bill Hoffoss: His name is John.

Jaime Cantrell: John? Okay.

Bill Hoffoss: Um-hm. Him and his son, Adam, run the one in Dixie Inn.

Jaime Cantrell: And then you're over here three miles down the road in Minden.

Bill Hoffoss: Right, right. Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: So did they stop makin' Southern Maid donuts about the same time as you did or they still makin' 'em down there?

Bill Hoffoss: They still make donuts there.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, they still make a few of these. I send a lot of people out that way.

Jaime Cantrell: When they come in and they want--

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Yeah. So tell me about the first store.

0:20:03

No air conditionin'. What else was different? Did you hand roll?

Bill Hoffoss: Well, I can go back and say when I left this location in Minden for a short while I went to Shreveport on Youree Drive and worked in a shop that my daddy could've bought but we ended up coming to Dixie Inn, me and my brother. But I worked at a location on Youree Drive-- no, Mansfield Road.

Jaime Cantrell: It's still out there.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, but it's a liquor store now.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, the building.

Bill Hoffoss: The building's a liquor store.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Isn't that funny how that happens? [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: Right. A story I always tell people I remember was there was a program on TV called *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*

0:21:00

Regis Philbin, when it first started, he was the host of it. Well, one of the questions-- got to the very last question. It was a two-hundred-fifty-thousand-dollar question. And the question was, "What was the only product Elvis Presley ever endorsed?" Well, I knew what it was. So I'm sittin' there, and I wasn't very good with nothing else but I knew that. And the guy said, "Well, let me call my buddy."

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, did they call you?

Bill Hoffoss: No. No, it wasn't me.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, okay. [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: He called his buddy and his buddy-- there was four answers and one of them was Betty Crocker. And the guy said, "Betty Crocker." So he lost his two-hundred-fifty thousand. But I'm sittin' there knowin' what the answer was.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Elvis Presley, Southern Maid was the only product he ever endorsed because he was at the Hayride when it started.

Jaime Cantrell: At the Municipal Auditorium.

Bill Hoffoss: All the country music players they all knew Bruce Jones.

0:22:03

He was a big promoter of the Louisiana Hayride.

Jaime Cantrell: And he was down there with the radio?

Bill Hoffoss: Uh-huh.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. I heard from Mike, 'cause I asked, I was, like, "There's so much mythology, there's so many stories about Elvis and Southern Maid."

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: "And that one commercial endorsement that he did, is there an audio recording?" And Mike was, like, "Nope." He's, like, "If we had it, we would've . . ."

Bill Hoffoss: Right. Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: And that's what tells you it was on the spot.

Bill Hoffoss: Uh-huh. It was right, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: I don't--

Jaime Cantrell: And-- oh, go ahead.

Bill Hoffoss: Mike, when I started, he probably was real young and he probably told you that Hargrove and Bruce Jones started the Southern Maid franchise.

Jaime Cantrell: They were buddies.

Bill Hoffoss: That's right. And Hargrove took Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas and Bruce Jones had Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.

0:23:02

There were six states in [inaudible 0:23:04].

Jaime Cantrell: And they split 'em with the--

Bill Hoffoss: And they split the states up. And now Mike and them have sold all their rights to Hargrove except for their locations in Bossier and Shreveport and my location here in Minden. They still have that.

Jaime Cantrell: So your franchise was with Mike?

Bill Hoffoss: I'm still tied in with Mike, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Bill Hoffoss: But anybody else that wanted to start a franchise they'd have to deal with Hargrove, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. I went out there twice, 'cause they're out in-- I say Dallas but it's Garland.

Bill Hoffoss: Garland, Texas, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: And I went to the production facility and as soon as I walked in, I could smell the flour and how sweet it was in there.

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah, Lon, the stories he had were just so incredible.

Bill Hoffoss: Um-hm.

Jaime Cantrell: So if your franchise is connected to the Joneses, you must've been close with Bruce?

0:24:01

Bill Hoffoss: Really, Bruce died maybe-- I don't know how much longer he lived, but when Bruce died, they moved their location one block up to Kings Highway and Youree Drive-- I say Youree Drive; not Youree Drive-- Kings Highway and--

Jaime Cantrell: Hearne.

Bill Hoffoss: Hearne Avenue, yeah. Kings Highway and Hearne Avenue. They moved one block up to where they're at right now, right by the I-20. But Bruce, I didn't know him like my

daddy did. When we'd pick up flour we would go to that location and pick our flour up and I knew him a little bit from that. But I can't remember how much longer he lived. Then I dealt with Mike's daddy, Johnny Jones.

0:25:01

And Johnny and his wife run the Southern Maid. And Mike wasn't even-- he was younger. I think he had him a band or something.

Jaime Cantrell: He was a musician he told me.

Bill Hoffoss: He was a musician, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: He was out on the road.

Bill Hoffoss: And after his daddy passed away Mike and his mama run the location where they're at now.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Mike told me that it was his mother who was responsible for the Miss Mary, the dog on the logo.

Bill Hoffoss: That's right. His mother is a super nice person, super nice.

Jaime Cantrell: He credited her for so much of the success of the--

Bill Hoffoss: Right. Yeah. She was the bookkeeper and kept everything--

Jaime Cantrell: Going, yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Mike took over that part of it, but he liked her handling that part of it.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: And Mike handled all the ordering.

0:25:59

Jaime Cantrell: So tell me about some of your local customers, some regulars that come in that have been eatin' donuts here forever.

Bill Hoffoss: When I left Dixie Inn and come here lots of my customers were from Minden.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: And they drove every day to Dixie Inn. It's kinda like just a family-type place.

Jaime Cantrell: Just go in and sit down and-- yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Just like it is right now. Like these guys, it's just like a big family. Yeah, a lot of my customers they stayed here. When I moved to Minden, I got a lot of support from Minden because I'm on a one-way highway now. On this same highway back when we first started it was a two-lane highway.

0:26:58

And in the [19]70s, about [19]78, they put another road, split the business, where my traffic is going out the interstate.

Jaime Cantrell: Right.

Bill Hoffoss: And so I was hoping how the business would be on a one-way road, but it has really turned out to be good.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. You mentioned the oil fields and that so much of the early business was because guys were working out in the oil fields. Tell me more about that.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Well, what it was, in the oil fields they had what they call safety meetings, and they would have a big event.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay. I don't know anything about this.

Bill Hoffoss: A safety meeting is where you get all the people in the oil field together and they just have a meeting about what's going on. Anyway, it's a safety meeting. They would always buy lots of donuts.

Jaime Cantrell: To have them out there. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Yeah. They might by fifteen dozen or twenty dozen.

0:28:01

And I just done donuts for-- I've got people out of Oklahoma that come down and teach the water-- everybody that's affiliated with the water departments around in the parishes, they have to go to a school. And this guy from Oklahoma, he'll call me and tell me that they're gonna have the school this weekend. And that was a lots of donuts. Then I also made donuts for the state fair.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, really?

Bill Hoffoss: And that's right by--

Jaime Cantrell: For the Louisiana State Fair?

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay. Tell me about that.

Bill Hoffoss: They would be for the agriculture department when they had the livestock show over there. Well, the girl from Homer run the livestock thing at the state fair so she would always stop and get donuts from me.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

0:29:01

Bill Hoffoss: Just so many people supported me, churches. Around Easter I'd make some donuts. I have a lot of support, but it got to where when the oil field shut down that was the major part of the donuts, even though you had people buying three or four donuts or half a dozen. The price of the stuff is really what shut things down.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Bill Hoffoss: The pandemic, it just messed a lots of people up. I was fortunate right here that my place is run by me and my wife and my two daughters and so I never had the problem of not having enough help.

Jaime Cantrell: Employees, yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: But a lot of these chain places, that's the reason some of 'em went out or they cut their hours way back 'cause they couldn't get the help.

0:30:05

But like I say, I was fortunate, we was, that we never had that problem.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. So were you always the baker or did your wife and your daughters ever do the baking?

Bill Hoffoss: Now, my wife and daughter--

Jaime Cantrell: You have one daughter or two?

Bill Hoffoss: I have two.

Jaime Cantrell: Two. Okay. And your wife's name is . . . ?

Bill Hoffoss: Donna.

Jaime Cantrell: And your daughters' names?

Bill Hoffoss: Daughter is Koen, K-o-e-n and Jeannie.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, I know a Jeannie.

Bill Hoffoss: Jeannie, yeah. And we all just worked in the family business just like we did out in Dixie Inn, but we had two families, my brother and his kids and me and mine.

Jaime Cantrell: So there was even more help.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. There was more help there.

0:30:59

And plus we run it out then till eleven or twelve at night, mainly because we had had some video poker machines which made you stay open later 'cause people--

Jaime Cantrell: So people would stay and eat.

Bill Hoffoss: They would stay and eat. And I'm not no gambler but it helped pay the bills.

Jaime Cantrell: Sure. Sure. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: So up here, I told my wife, I said, "When we come to Minden if we can make a living and pay our bills just workin' breakfast and dinner . . ." and so far, we've been able to do that. I've been fortunate. We can make a good living just-- and so we close at three in the evening. That way I don't have to worry about the evening help calling and-- that's a problem. Help is a problem with anybody-- calling saying they can't come to work.

0:31:58

And you've been there all day so to keep it open you've got to stay there for the whole day.

Jaime Cantrell: Stay yourself, yeah. So y'all open here, what, seven or eight?

Bill Hoffoss: Right now we open at six is when we cut the lights on.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh.

Bill Hoffoss: But all my friends know I'm in here with the lights off, so they come in.

Jaime Cantrell: Early!

Bill Hoffoss: And I'll open the door and make coffee. And I'll make 'em somethin' to eat, but we don't cut the lights on till really six o'clock. And I used to make donuts for this Holiday Express down there. They have what they call a continental breakfast, you know.

Jaime Cantrell: Uh-huh.

Bill Hoffoss: And I get a lot of business from the hotel because they don't cook breakfast. But I have made donuts for their continental thing to put on the tables down there.

Jaime Cantrell: For the guests at the hotel, yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, that's right.

Jaime Cantrell: So you mentioned that-- I gotta go back to this because I'm curious. You said the yeast that y'all used was from Budweiser.

0:33:01

Are you talking about the beer company?

Bill Hoffoss: Uh-huh. It smells of it.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, my goodness.

Bill Hoffoss: When that dough-- when you pick it up and put it on the table, you get a beer smell.

Jaime Cantrell: Really?

Bill Hoffoss: Just like a beer. Just like you opened a can of beer. It's Budweiser.

Jaime Cantrell: It's yeast, yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. It's yeast, uh-huh. Beer is made from the yeast. And now we use what they call-- and Mike even uses it-- Saf makes it and it's a brick pack. It's hard like a brick and when you puncture it all the air goes out. You don't have a problem with the yeast with that. I guess all the places use it now, brick pack.

Jaime Cantrell: When did y'all stop using Budweiser?

Bill Hoffoss: We used it probably the first fifteen years at Dixie Inn.

0:34:00

And we got away from it. And Mike had got away from it too.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, you mentioned mixin' for twenty, let the dough rise for thirty, and then you make four piles to get the air out. Are you doing that by hand at that point?

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Yeah. Rolling it by hand.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, I got a roller and I roll it up in piles and get all the air out of the dough. And it sits there and rises again.

Customer Five: Don't let him lie to you.

Jaime Cantrell: Fourth person to tell me that this mornin'. [Laughter]

Customer Five: Yeah. Makes you wonder, huh?

Jaime Cantrell: So you're using your arms?

Bill Hoffoss: Right, yeah. I believe that's why I've got carpal tunnel in both hands from all these years of makin' donuts.

Jaime Cantrell: Makin' donuts. And so you make the circle too?

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Well, what it does, this cutter-- now, my cousin that taught me how--

Jaime Cantrell: Richard.

0:35:01

Bill Hoffoss: -- I never did do it but he could hand cut 'em and flip the donut up on his thumb.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh!

Bill Hoffoss: And then he would just lay 'em out, where ours the cutter went through there and it rolled the dough to say a two-inch thickness. And then when it went through the second roller it rolled it to a one-inch thickness, and then it run under this cutter that cut out the donuts. And all you had to do then was pick the centers out. Which the centers is what I use to make my cinnamon rolls and apple pies.

Jaime Cantrell: Sure. 'Cause you've already done the work.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. Right. And that's what I use to make-- and plus, that dough is going to be a little tougher, which does make the best cinnamon rolls.

Jaime Cantrell: Uh-huh.

Bill Hoffoss: The first dough that makes the donuts it isn't really good for a cinnamon roll.

Jaime Cantrell: 'Cause it's aerated, it's too light. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: That's right.

0:36:00

And the texture is more firmer on the cinnamon rolls and apple pies, which it works out good like that.

Jaime Cantrell: And plus, people associate the similar taste. They like it 'cause it tastes similar.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. I used to make twists, and I still made 'em up here. And it's made from the same dough, but it's twisted up and people claim, "Man, these are different." But I don't know why it's like that. It's made from the same dough.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, well. It's amazing how people will look at somethin' and be totally convinced, totally convinced. [Laughter]

Bill Hoffoss: Right. Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: I have heard people say that the Southern Maid donut recipe tastes different than it used to. And when I talked to the Hargroves they were, like, "No, we use the same recipe."

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, we use the same thing.

0:37:00

If I was gonna say one thing about the taste, and maybe it's just me, but when they got away from the cake yeast you didn't have the Southern Maid smell of the dough whenever you worked-- when you call working your dough, that's when you're rolling it.

Jaime Cantrell: Uh-huh.

Bill Hoffoss: It just seemed like it wasn't the same smell, even though the dough always tasted great.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. So how do you know if the texture is going to be good or bad?

Bill Hoffoss: It's the feel of the dough. When it's mixin' you want to wait till the dough pulls itself away from the bowl.

Jaime Cantrell: Right.

Bill Hoffoss: But you still got to cut it off and touch it. You want it to be not sticky to your hands--

Jaime Cantrell: A little elastic.

Bill Hoffoss: -- but you can tell if it's too--

Jaime Cantrell: Wet.

Bill Hoffoss: -- tough and you might have to add a little more water to it, but not much. When you add water like that you kinda gotta sprinkle it in there.

0:38:01

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: But like I say, a donut, it's not like makin' anything else. You got to know what you're doin' for the dough to be right. Believe it or not, weather, even though you're in a building, it seems like the donuts know when the humidity, they know when it's twenty degrees outside, they know when it's 80 degrees outside.

Jaime Cantrell: Or when it's 98!

Bill Hoffoss: And you have to maybe make the water a little warmer in the wintertime to compensate for even the building being a little cooler. I don't know of anybody that's just in a perfect airtight condition building that maintains the same temperature, so you have to kind of know the temperature.

0:39:00

They had a book on Southern Maid donuts that I never did-- I glanced over it. But the book was *A Perfect Southern Maid Donut*. The water temperature, the room temperature, and the flour temperature all had to be exactly the same.

Jaime Cantrell: When I was growing up my grandmother kept her flour in the refrigerator.

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: And now you go into people's homes, and they've just got in a cabinet.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Flour is subject to anything. I never did have a problem, but I've had people talk about-- especially on a plain flour, a certain time of year weevils will get into flour.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, sure, sure. Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: And that's why lots of people used to keep their flour in the refrigerator.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah, I remember it. And you could see it.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. Right. Yeah, you could see that. But I never really run into that problem.

0:39:59

But that's the reason the old timers used to put flour in the refrigerator.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Well, do you remember the first time you ate a Southern Maid donut?

Bill Hoffoss: I do, and I never dreamed I'd be makin' 'em. But we would leave Shreveport and there wasn't no interstate. We'd go the old Red River Bridge. And right at the foot of the bridge was a Southern Maid Donut shop. I can't remember the guy's name. But we'd always stop there, and my dad would get a couple of dozen donuts, hot. I mean, they'd be hot and man, they were good, really good! I never dreamed that I would be makin' 'em. And back then we had a business before we had this Hamburger Happiness, it was a truck stop on Highway 80, Ranch Corral Truck Stop. Now, we made a donut called Daylight Donut out of Arkansas and it was just a cake

donut that you put on the counter where the truck drivers sat at the counter. And it was kind of like the donut that you would dip in your coffee. It was that type donut.

0:41:02

Jaime Cantrell: Okay. Yeah. So it was cakier? It was hard?

Bill Hoffoss: It was a cake donut, kinda like that.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Yeah. And what was the truck stop called?

Bill Hoffoss: It was called Ranch Corral Truck Stop.

Jaime Cantrell: Ranch Corral.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Hmm. And it was out on 80?

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. We was there from [19]58 to [19]70. We had both places running. We had our hamburger place down there, but we had the truck stop out there till [19]70. And it was a twenty-four-hour operation. It had motels and a café, and I think back when we had the café, we had good home cooking. It was right across from the shell plant. When Vietnam started-- and it was a bad deal, Vietnam-- but business-wise the shell plant was wide open.

0:42:01

We had this lady that cooked, and she could really cook. And you could get-- this isn't doing with Southern Maid, just the difference in the way the price is now-- you could get two big pieces of fried chicken, creamed potatoes, beans, another vegetable, cornbread or roll, a glass of tea, and a dessert was eighty-seven cents.

Jaime Cantrell: You're kiddin' me!

Bill Hoffoss: Eighty-seven cent. We sold many of 'em there.

Jaime Cantrell: So what kind of desserts did y'all make?

Bill Hoffoss: Just cobbler or a piece of pie or something like that.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Pies, yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: And made money.

Jaime Cantrell: Sure.

Bill Hoffoss: Made money at eighty-seven cents.

Jaime Cantrell: People were hungry.

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: And you could walk across the street.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. Well, the stuff didn't cost as much to--

Jaime Cantrell: Eat out.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, that's right. You could buy a new car for twenty-five-hundred dollars.

Jaime Cantrell: So you had the Ranch Corral for about a year at the same time that you had the Hamburger Happiness?

0:43:00

Bill Hoffoss: Well, really, we had the Ranch Corral for about four years.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Bill Hoffoss: And then we got the Hamburger Happiness. We kept the Ranch Corral Truck Stop open till about [19]70.

Jaime Cantrell: Uh-huh. And then the Hamburger Happiness in [19]69?

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. That was the donut shop but Hamburger Happiness on this road we started in [19]63 and we moved into a bigger building. The smaller building, the original Hamburger Happiness, that's when I started the donuts in that building in [19]69.

Jaime Cantrell: What were the addresses, the [19]63 and [19]69?

Bill Hoffoss: Well, we got our mail through the business at the home.

Customer Six: You ain't believin' all that crap he's tellin' you, are you?

Jaime Cantrell: Fifth person to tell me.

0:44:00

Customer Six: [Laughter] I've got some good ones [inaudible 0:44:03].

Bill Hoffoss: The mail here-- I've got the mail here, but the mail in them businesses there, I'm not sure what the actual address was on the truck stop. But like I say, the mail come to our home.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: We just used that. It's just like the one at Dixie Inn. The mail come to my residence. I'm sure it had a physical address, but everybody knew it at the intersection of 371 and

...

Jaime Cantrell: 80.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, 371 and 80. That's right.

Jaime Cantrell: Thirty years, that's a long time.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah, that's a long time.

Jaime Cantrell: I mean, that's a lifetime.

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. Yeah, it is. But all this time we were doing-- me and my brother was in the hay business.

0:44:58

And we had family, we had help back in Dixie Inn. And my wife and my brother's wife would kind of run sometime through dinner and we would be doing hay. We was in the hay business. Then later we started plantin' soybeans. We had 750 acres of soybeans.

Jaime Cantrell: In this parish?

Bill Hoffoss: In this parish, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Wow.

Bill Hoffoss: We done the farmin' till about [19]90. We had cows. We had three-hundred head of cows. And it was a job 'cause there wasn't no round rolls of hay back then. Everything was square bales. You had to pick it up, square bales. Anyway, it's kind of gettin' away from the Southern Maid, but that's kind of the life story of how I grew up.

Jaime Cantrell: Hey, it's still what was goin' on. Yeah. And just think, you were liftin' those hay bales and you were rollin' out the dough, so you were workin' hard!

Bill Hoffoss: Rollin' out the dough. Yeah.

0:46:03

Jaime Cantrell: Well, do you have any memories that you want to share? Do you have any final thoughts you want to . . . ?

Bill Hoffoss: You know, back when we was in school and worked-- talkin' about work for the family, everybody worked. I went to Louisiana Tech for four years, but we commuted because I worked there at the business.

Jaime Cantrell: So Tech is in Ruston?

Bill Hoffoss: Pardon?

Jaime Cantrell: Louisiana Tech is in Ruston?

Bill Hoffoss: In Ruston.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Uh-huh, it's in Ruston. It was about forty-mile drive. We drove it every day for four years. But even when I was in high school in Minden we didn't goof off. When we got through with our basketball game or somethin' my dad said, "Hey!" We had so much business from-- everybody stayed in town. Nobody had money to go to Shreveport. On the weekends all the kids was in town.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Bill Hoffoss: Nobody went off nowhere.

0:47:00

So we had to be there at the business. We didn't get a chance to-- soon as we got through with our ballgames we'd go straight to work.

Jaime Cantrell: So seventy-four cents to start with?

Bill Hoffoss: To start with for a dozen.

Jaime Cantrell: For a dozen.

Bill Hoffoss: Uh-huh, that's for a dozen. Now one donut is seventy-five.

Jaime Cantrell: Seventy-five. [Laughter] I mean, time, you know. So one donut is seventy-five.

Bill Hoffoss: You know, your electricity, you look at what it costs now and what it cost back then.

Jaime Cantrell: And water. Sure.

Bill Hoffoss: Man, the building we rented down there-- we didn't own the building down here. I own this business right here, but the building we was at, the fellow that owned it, he liked my daddy. And we had such a long lease on it, and it was just like owning it.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Y'all had been there so long.

0:48:01

Bill Hoffoss: And the rent wasn't terrible. It wasn't terrible back then. But my dad, during the farming, we had just opened up in Dixie Inn, me and my brother, my dad got killed in a accident on the farm.

Jaime Cantrell: I'm so sorry.

Bill Hoffoss: And so my mother kept running the place up town. Me and my brother was at Dixie Inn. And she ran it for four more years until she finally just gave it up to somebody else. We dropped the lease on it.

Jaime Cantrell: It's amazing to think about how much family work goes into . . .

Bill Hoffoss: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: When you talk about forty-- how long have y'all been owning-- so [19]63?

0:49:06

Bill Hoffoss: Yeah. My daddy worked in the oil field. Back when I was real little, four or five years old, he was always in the oil field. And he heard about a café that was goin' up which was the Ranch Corral for sale. So that's the first food business he'd ever been into.

Jaime Cantrell: What was his name?

Bill Hoffoss: Buddy.

Jaime Cantrell: Buddy.

Bill Hoffoss: They called him Buddy. His name was William, W.L. Hoffoss, but everybody called him Buddy.

Jaime Cantrell: And that's how he got started at the Ranch Corral?

Bill Hoffoss: Uh-huh. That's how he got started at the Ranch Corral.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, I love hearin' these stories because you don't realize how they're all interconnected until you start talkin' to people.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. That's right.

Jaime Cantrell: And something like Southern Maid Donuts, it lives in people's memories.

0:50:01

They care about it like it's their place even when it's not.

Bill Hoffoss: Right. That's right.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Well, thank you. I'm gonna go ahead and stop the recording.

Bill Hoffoss: Okay.

0:50:17

[End]