



**Lon Hargrove**

**Southern Maid Donut and Flour Company**

**Garland, TX**

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Date: May 19, 2021

Location: Southern Maid Donut and Flour Company

Interviewer: Jaime Cantrell

Transcription: Sharp Copy Transcripts

Length: Fifty five minutes

Project: Southern Baking

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Jaime Cantrell: This is Dr. Jaime Cantrell, a contributor with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's May 19th, 2021, and we're at Southern Maid Donuts in Garland, Texas. I'm with Lon Hargrove, and I'm going to ask him to introduce himself and give his date of birth, please.

Lon Hargrove: I'm Lon Hargrove. I was born November 11th, 1933.

Jaime Cantrell: So tell me your first memories of Southern Maid Donuts.

Lon Hargrove: Oh, gosh. It's been so long. The company was started in 1937. Mom and Dad started the company in 1937, so it's been a long time ago, and I was only four years old at that time, so I don't know much about that beginning other than what I've been told.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, what were you told?

Lon Hargrove: Well, I was told that Dad was a route driver for a donut company.

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It was Dixie Creme Donuts. And there were other route drivers, of course. And this is the way I've told it, so I'll just go ahead and say it the way it is. They were wonderful salesmen. They occupied every donut sale that there was in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, these three guys. And they were doing a very good job with it 'cause the owner of the company had a secretary. A secretary in a donut shop in 1930s? That was kind of unusual. So they were doing a very good job for him. Anyway, the owner of the company got a divorce from his wife and married his secretary. [Laughter]

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And she knew all about who was making the money and who wasn't, and she decided that the route drivers were making too much money so we should cut their pay. At first, the owner said, no, we don't want to do that. But he finally [**consented** 0:02:16]-- how do you say that? Okay. And cut the driver's pay. Those three drivers quit immediately and went their own way, and that's when Dad started the Southern Maid Donut Flour Company. And went to all his customers and told them, "I don't have any donuts here today, but I'm gonna be here tomorrow if you'll let me bring you my donuts." And, of course, they all agreed. So the next day he sold them Southern Maid Donuts instead of that other kind.

Jaime Cantrell: And when you say, "Dad," you mean--

Lon Hargrove: My father, yes.

Jaime Cantrell: --J.B.--

Lon Hargrove: J.B. Hargrove.

Jaime Cantrell: J.B. Hargrove. Do you know anything about the original customers that he began selling to?

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Lon Hargrove: Oh, they were all the restaurants, basically.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: Of course, when he was driving for them, like I said, I was only four years old at that time, so I don't really know much about them except he told me that he was making the rounds, and he was very friendly, apparently, with all his customers. And he was at the

Brownies restaurant the minute I was born. [Laughter] So when he walked in the door they said, hey, Mr. Hargrove-- or J.B., what they called him-- you got a boy!

Jaime Cantrell: How did they know? Somebody called--

Lon Hargrove: They knew. I don't know how they knew, but they did know. Somebody apparently had called ahead of time. They knew his route, apparently.

Jaime Cantrell: Hmm.

Lon Hargrove: So that's how I found out about the customers. That's about all I knew.

Jaime Cantrell: Were there any-- or do you suspect there were grocery stores on the route, too?

Lon Hargrove: Oh, yeah. Definitely, yes. As a matter of fact, back in those days, there were no real supermarkets available.

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The grocery stores in the residential areas had what they called a bread box. It was a wooden container in front of each of the grocery stores and had a padlock on it, and the bread man had a key, and the donut man had a key, and the owner had a key. And when you delivered your product, you unlocked that bread box and put your product in there and locked the door. Then, after you've finished running your route, you make your route and collect for the money.

Jaime Cantrell: So what time did his route start?

Lon Hargrove: Way dark. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah.

Lon Hargrove: Early, early. That's why they had to have the lock box, 'cause the grocery stores obviously didn't open until the people woke up.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. Do you know how much a box of donuts was at the time?

Lon Hargrove: No, I don't.

Jaime Cantrell: How much is a box of donuts now?

Lon Hargrove: It varies depending on what kind you get. [Laughter]

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Jaime Cantrell: Yeah, yeah. Okay. So he started selling the next day and continued with the same restaurants and grocery stores, 'cause he'd built up a customer base.

Lon Hargrove: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: So there was a lot of loyalty early on?

Lon Hargrove: They were his customers, not the owner's customers.

Jaime Cantrell: Right, right.

Lon Hargrove: But the owner didn't know that. He assumed they were his customers. But the other two guys did the same thing. They quit that day, too. You're cutting my pay, I'm gone.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. So was it always going to be donuts? Did he think about doing anything else?

Lon Hargrove: Not that I know of. It was donuts all the way.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. And what kind of donuts originally? Glazed?

Lon Hargrove: Originally our logo calls for Southern Maid donuts, mixed glazed donuts. That's what it was. Just one product.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

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Lon Hargrove: Then eventually we put chocolate on top of 'em and eventually put jelly in one of 'em. And then, we got three or four hundred different varieties now.

Jaime Cantrell: My favorite is powdered sugar.

Lon Hargrove: That's typically the cake donut that we powder.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. So tell me, do you have memories of being in the first physical location? When did the first store open and it wasn't just delivery routes?

Lon Hargrove: Actually, the first store was at-- what's the address? It was on 2nd Avenue near Fair Park. And we did not have what we referred to as a store 'cause we did not open the front door. It was all wholesale at the back door. We had no cash register, no front door, none of that. But we did give guaranteed sales, much as the milkman and the bread man do today.

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Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: So we would sell you what we thought you were gonna sell, or Dad did. And then, if you didn't sell those, we'd pick up those stales and give you credit for them. Same way they do milk and bread today.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: And the people in the area where our shop was found out that we had good used donuts, so they'd come to the back door and buy day-old donuts. We got to where we were selling so many day-old donuts, we started making hot day-olds. And eventually we decided to not make 'em come all the way to the back door, we just opened the front door, had a big cigar box on the counter, and that was the way we opened up for retail.

Jaime Cantrell: Do you remember the counter?

Lon Hargrove: Um-hm. They were handmade. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: What'd it look like?

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Lon Hargrove: Just a wooden thing with a shelf on the top, with a shelf under it so we could put the boxes and bags under there. And the cash register literally was a cigar box.

Jaime Cantrell: What did the boxes look like at the time? The branding, the green and white, didn't happen until later, I assume?

Lon Hargrove: Yeah. That happened a little later. They were just-- had boxes you could buy from paper people. And, of course, those have varied over the days.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. But it was originally sold as Southern Maid, that was the--

Lon Hargrove: Oh, yes.

Jaime Cantrell: Where did that come from, the inspiration for the name?

Lon Hargrove: Well, my dad thought that my mother was a pretty much special lady, and she was his southern belle. Southern belle didn't work with donuts, so Southern Maid did. And he spells it m-a-i-d, not m-a-d-e.

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So it referred to her, and her picture with the antebellum dress and all that is part of our trademark.

Jaime Cantrell: So that was a stylized version of her?

Lon Hargrove: Yes, exactly.

Jaime Cantrell: And what was her name?

Lon Hargrove: Rosalee.

Jaime Cantrell: Rosalee.

Lon Hargrove: Good ol' southern name.

Jaime Cantrell: So were you popular in school because you had access to donuts?

Lon Hargrove: [Laughter] No. We didn't have any deliveries to the schools at that time, so they just knew that when school was out, I'd hop on my motorcycle and go to work.

Jaime Cantrell: And so were you making deliveries in high school originally?

Lon Hargrove: Actually, my deliveries amounted to house-to-house. I was a member of a Boy Scout troop and we picked up old newspapers, we picked up old metal objects. We did everything we could to raise money.

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And we were wore out on those things. And I was talking to Dad about it one day. He said, "Why don't y'all sell donuts?" I said, "Well, now, that's an idea." So the Boy Scouts at our church took over-- a friend of mine and I-- by this time I had a car.

Jaime Cantrell:           What year was this? When was this?

Lon Hargrove:            I was a junior in high school when I got my car.

Jaime Cantrell:           Okay.

Lon Hargrove:            Before that I was driving my mother's car. Once I got her car, she didn't have one, so Dad had to get her another one. [Laughter] But I got me a brand-new car when I was a junior in high school. But anyway, this one friend of mine and I would go down and pick up a hundred dozen donuts directly after school. They were still hot. And we would go and deliver donuts house to house. All the Scouts would. All the Scouts got tired of that.

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At that point, we had bought a bus, ropes, tents, tools, everything you can think of. We had more Boy Scout stuff than you can imagine, and we had more money in the bank than any other Scout troop in Texas. They got tired of it. Joe Bob and I said, hey, "they're not gonna do it anymore, we're gonna do it." So we took over the whole thing. And we'd still sell a hundred dozen donuts every afternoon on the way home. And we were still at the sandlot to play football before anybody else got there. But we were pretty careful about our choice of the areas. We worked at duplexes. There were lots and lots of duplexes and hardly any apartment houses at that time.

Jaime Cantrell:           What part of Dallas was this?

Lon Hargrove:            It was East Dallas, southeast of Dallas.

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That's where we lived, in South Dallas at that time, but then we moved to East Dallas, so it was back and forth. So we would park the car at an intersection and Joe Bob would go down, around, and back over two blocks. I would go in the opposite direction. We covered eight blocks in one trip. And we would knock on the door-- at duplexes, this was all duplexes-- knock on the door and stand there with four dozen donuts in our hands. At that time, we weren't watched by the health department-- weren't carefully supervised; put it that way. But anyway, we'd sell at least those four dozen on that trip around the block. And then, again, it didn't take us long because we had regular customers. They knew we would be there after school, and the mothers were always at home. The mothers didn't have a car, so they were at home. So we'd just knock on one door and sell two donuts at the same time.

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And by the time we walked around the block, we had sold the eight dozen donuts, the four I carried, the four he carried. And then we'd move down two blocks and cover another eight blocks. Pretty soon we didn't have any donuts left and we were at the sandlot waiting for the other guys to come play football.

Jaime Cantrell:        So you did that for three, four hours after school?

Lon Hargrove:        It didn't take that long 'cause we had regular customers.

Jaime Cantrell:        Wow.

Lon Hargrove:        And the donuts were still hot.

Jaime Cantrell:        So they wanted to eat 'em right then?

Lon Hargrove: Well, that's right, they did.

Jaime Cantrell: So I'm imagining there are a lot of children in Southeast Dallas who were eating donuts for dinner because you delivered after school. [Laughter]

Lon Hargrove: That's right. That's right.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, what did you do with all your money?

Lon Hargrove: We banked it.

Jaime Cantrell: Even in high school?

Lon Hargrove: Sure, sure.

Jaime Cantrell: You didn't spend it on . . .

Lon Hargrove: I went to the bank to open an account and the banker said, "I'm sorry. We can't open an account for you. You're too young."

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By that time I was already working also in the donut shop, and I was writing the checks for the other people. I was the quote "manager." [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: So how old were you?

Lon Hargrove: Fourteen. And so, anyway, I said, "Well, you already have an account with my name on it." He said, "No, we don't." I said, "Sure, you do." And finally I convinced him to have one of the tellers go get the signature card. And he said, "Go get this guy a signature card." So that's how I opened my savings account. Now, it was a checking account, actually. I put savings in after that. But anyway, at fourteen I had my own checking account, saving account,

whether I was old enough or not. But I already was writing checks on the Southern Maid Flour-- Donut account at that time, so there wasn't anything he could do about it.

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Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm, um-hm. So tell me about the flour, 'cause I just heard you say Southern Maid Flour, and then you corrected it and said donut. So what was the role of the flour in the larger production process?

Lon Hargrove: Well, Mom was in charge of that department, 'cause Dad was a peddler, and she was an excellent cook. I mean, he could sell anything, and good donuts were easy for him. 'Cause at that time, there weren't really any good sweet goods available.

Jaime Cantrell: So it was her recipe?

Lon Hargrove: Yes. Yes. Of course, she copied as much as she knew how to the donuts that he was already selling, but she was cracking eggs and separating them--

Jaime Cantrell: The yolk and--

Lon Hargrove: --the yolk and the yellows, and beating them and all that, and blending the shortening and the sugar and the eggs and all that.

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Then she put the flour together and she made all the donut flour, and he made all the sales. And pretty soon he bought a truck where he could go around bakeries and sold donut flour to bakeries all over Texas.

Jaime Cantrell: So starting in Dallas and then branching out?

Lon Hargrove: Um-hm.

Jaime Cantrell: Which bakeries in Dallas?

Lon Hargrove: Well, I don't even know which bakeries in Dallas, but he did go to West Texas bakeries and all that. He covered the State of Texas with this big truck of his.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. Yeah. West Texas is pretty far out there.

Lon Hargrove: Yes, it is. And we're doing pretty well in West Texas even now.

Jaime Cantrell: So let's talk about present day. What is the franchise legacy?

Lon Hargrove: Well, it's a lot more legalistic now than it certainly was then. The first franchise was done in Houston. My uncle bought the first franchise.

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It was a one-page document, said I'll do this if you'll do that, two signatures, and dated.

Jaime Cantrell: What was his name?

Lon Hargrove: Let's see. Which uncle was it? Six brothers married six sisters. They were in Oklahoma in the Dust Bowl.

Jaime Cantrell: Wow!

Lon Hargrove: I got lots of double cousins. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: So your uncle opened the first franchise?

Lon Hargrove: His name was Athey.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay. A-t-h- . . . ?

Lon Hargrove: E-y.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay. And he opened it in Houston?

Lon Hargrove: Houston.

Jaime Cantrell: Wow.

Lon Hargrove: On Navigation Boulevard in Houston, Texas. By this time, of course, we were doing pretty well in Dallas and didn't even think about more than one shop at the time.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: 'Cause Mom and Dad were it. She did the flour; he did the donuts.

Jaime Cantrell: And you made the deliveries. [Laughter]

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Lon Hargrove: Yeah. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: So the original franchises were within the family, too?

Lon Hargrove: Of course.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah, yeah.

Lon Hargrove: At that time-- we're talkin' in the [19]30s now; we're still talkin' about in the [19]30s and [19]40s-- we were still in the Great Depression in the [19]30s. So the family-- jobs were hard to get and all that, and pay was really poor. So if you could open a business and if you didn't sell your product, you could eat it. That was a real drawing card. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: How many donuts do you think you've eaten?

Lon Hargrove: Oh, gosh. I still eat lots of 'em.

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter]

Lon Hargrove: Lots of 'em.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, I probably want to return to your family again here in a bit--

Lon Hargrove: Okay.

Jaime Cantrell: --but let's talk about the Jones family in Shreveport.

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Lon Hargrove: Okay.

Jaime Cantrell: How did that connection take place?

Lon Hargrove: Well, Bruce Jones was a driver for Dad, for Southern Maid Donuts, and he was probably a better salesman than Dad, if I can say that. Course, they're both gone now so I can get by with anything I want to. And Mike probably will not object to that. Anyway, he was doing so well driving routes out of our donut shop-- by that time we were on Ross Avenue. This was in the mid [19]40s. And we had several drivers going out of there. And he ran two routes, just like Dad used to do. He used to run two routes. But, anyway, he'd pick up his donuts at midnight and deliver 'em same way we did before, go to the grocery stores and the restaurants and all that and deliver donuts, and come back and get more and sell 'em again.

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And he came to our flour plant one time-- this is after we'd started making improvements in our equipment so that Mom didn't have to do quite so much labor. [Laughter] But anyway, he

walked into our flour plant-- I called it flour plant 'cause that's the way we always thought about it-- and he saw several barrels, fifty-five-gallon barrels of shortening with dust on 'em. He could write his name on the top of 'em, 'cause it was dusty. We were making flour. There was a lot of dust. And at that time we were still coming out of the Depression in the early [19]40s. And about that time the war started and all that thing, but things were improving quickly, 'cause if you could make it, you could sell it.

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Anyway, he saw that inventory and he just knew this was a successful business. And he decided he wanted to have one of 'em. So he was one of our franchisees. And he and Dad went to Shreveport, found a location, and opened a donut shop there. And we did it the same way, no front door, no cash register, strictly wholesale.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: That's the way you get your product established. And it didn't take long, 'cause like I said, Brother Jones-- [Laughter] I call him Brother Jones 'cause he also was a Methodist preacher. And at that time there was a movie, Disney movie called *Song of the South*. Had Br'er Rabbit and Br'er Fox and br'er this and br'er that. So from that point on, I called Mr. Jones, Br'er Jones, and I abbreviated it the same way Disney did, Br'rer.

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Anyway, I still call him that, and Mike knows that, so he doesn't object to it either. But anyway, before he got into the donut business, Mr. Jones called. He said, "I sold goobs house to house-- that's glasses, you know." [Laughter] You wanted a pair of glasses, well, you couldn't get 'em at the drugstore then 'cause they didn't have drugstores either. And he did everything there was to

do to make a living during the Depression. And he did well. And the donuts really hit well, 'cause that was something he could do in a hurry and go back and do it double. So anyway, that's the same way he got his donuts started in Shreveport. And we don't deliver there anymore. It's well established. We got several donut shops there under Mike's wing. They send a truck, a Roadway truck, an 18-wheeler truck to pick up the donut flour here, and they take it to Shreveport and distribute it through Mike to all the other donut shops around.

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Jaime Cantrell: So if the flour distribution hub is here in Garland--

Lon Hargrove: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: --you have Mike in Shreveport distributing to the franchisees in Shreveport--

Lon Hargrove: That's correct.

Jaime Cantrell: --what are some of the other locations where flour is being shipped to?

Lon Hargrove: Oh, gosh. Well, as far as Japan-- well, let me show you. Here's the latest booklet from Japan proving that they're still doing a good job for us. These donuts are made out of the donut flour that's produced here in Garland. And you see, they're pretty nice-looking donuts. And then, all their different advertisements and all that to prove that they're doing a good job for us and staying with the franchise agreement.

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And they're just doing a great job. And same thing in New Zealand. And we're actually-- we were gonna open others but some way that didn't happen in other countries.

Jaime Cantrell: In terms of the US South, how far do the franchises go?

Lon Hargrove: I'm sorry?

Jaime Cantrell: In terms of the US South, how far do the franchises go?

Lon Hargrove: Well, we're in Florida, up the East Coast into North Carolina.

Jaime Cantrell: Louisiana, Texas.

Lon Hargrove: Oh, of course. Texas, Oklahoma, California-- I mean, we're in California but-- Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas, and Louisiana. We got that block.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. The Ark-La-Tex.

Lon Hargrove: Yeah. Well, we have other shops in other states, too. Arizona, yeah, all over.

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They're just everywhere.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, let's talk about the customers. What keeps people comin' back to Southern Maid?

Lon Hargrove: The wonderful product. [Laughter] It's like no other. The donuts that Dad sold for this other company were the best that were available, and Mom improved on it every step of the way.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: And we continue to improve on it as other products become available. We don't crack eggs anymore. World War II was a real benefit for the food business altogether.

Jaime Cantrell: Why do you say that?

Lon Hargrove: Well, the GIs were well treated, and American GIs were better treated than any other GIs in the world. They had what they called a field kitchen for these guys. They actually produced hot food for these people. In World War I they had hardtack.

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I don't even know how to describe that. I think the name of it describes it very well, hardtack. And that's what they opened with in World War II, but then it became such a venture, I mean, golly, millions of people involved all over. Thank goodness it never came here. It came close. Germany had submarines and so did Japan, they had submarines come real close to our waters. But mostly the fighting was all done somewhere else. There's a whole lot I can tell you about things that Germany and Japan did then, but that's history. It's not involved in the food business.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, how did World War II impact the food industry in the South?

Lon Hargrove: Well, just as a for instance, Safeway was a big distributor in Dallas.

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They're a distributor all over America, of course, but at that time they had a stronghold in Dallas. And they offered to buy everything that we were capable of producing. If you can make a donut, we want it. If you can make thousands of 'em, we want 'em. If you can make millions, we'll buy 'em. Dad knew not to fall for that trap, because it was a trap. Sears Roebuck did the same thing. All the different kinds of things that they were selling, they bought the companies. They offered to buy all that your company can produce, and then they bought your company for whatever they

wanted to pay for it. And he knew that history, and he wasn't about to let anybody do that to him. So he refused, and we just kept selling to anybody else that wanted 'em.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. Well, what would you say are some of the longest business relationships that you, via Southern Maid, has made in the Ark-La-Tex?

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Lon Hargrove: Well, Shreveport, of course, is our longest single-operating family-operated location.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: And that was in 1941.

Jaime Cantrell: When I spoke with Mike, he mentioned that in terms of the business relationship that the Southern Maid in Shreveport had, he mentioned Herby K's was a big sort of distributor for their donuts.

Lon Hargrove: Um-hm, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Were there similar grocery stores in Dallas that y'all had long relationships with?

Lon Hargrove: I'm sure there were but I can't name 'em for you.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah, yeah.

Lon Hargrove: I know this, if they bought donuts, they bought 'em from Dad.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: And if they continued to buy donuts, they bought 'em from our route drivers.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. What about customers that you remember over the years, just characters, just people that spring to mind that you just can't forget?

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Lon Hargrove: Br'er Jones is number one. [Laughter] B.C. Jones, Br'er Jones. He was the best friend a young man could have. My sister, Doris, was very much involved in the donut business. She just died three years ago. She was very, very important in the growth of Southern Maid Donuts, the flour company in particular. We have a Spanish customer, two at the Midland-Odessa.

Jaime Cantrell: That is out east.

Lon Hargrove: Well, that's west.

Jaime Cantrell: Or west, west. You're right.

Lon Hargrove: Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Almost to Alpine.

Lon Hargrove: They've been with us, oh, sixty years. I don't know how long. Well, I do, too. I was in the Air Force at Webb Air Force Base in 1956, [19]57, and [19]58.

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And while I was a student there in 1956, we opened the first donut shop in Odessa, Texas. So that's 1956. How long is that?

Jaime Cantrell: Over 50 years.

Lon Hargrove: And the Gonzalez brothers bought the-- the man who opened it was Bruce Jones' cousin. That's how that occurred. He also was an excellent salesman, and he survived the Great Depression by being a good salesman, as well. Then, when he decided to retire, he sold his business to his Mexican brothers-- I mean, I called 'em brothers because they're such great people.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. And that's the Gonzalez family?

Lon Hargrove: Gonzalez family, yes.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Lon Hargrove: And they still operate it even now.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

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Lon Hargrove: Excellent customers. Wonderful customers. As I mentioned, we're in California so I guess that's as far west as we've gone, other than the Pacific Island stores.

Jaime Cantrell: Do you remember any locals in Dallas that stand out over the years?

Lon Hargrove: Oh, sure. Like I mentioned, we were opened on Ross Avenue at the end of World War II. We were downtown Dallas. We moved from 2nd Avenue to 1101 Main Street during World War II so we could get-- at that time [every 0:31:47] was rationed. You couldn't buy tires for your trucks. You couldn't buy gasoline for your trucks. You couldn't do this and that. So we moved downtown for a central location at 1101 Main Street from 2516 2nd Avenue. I remember the address now.

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And actually, when we moved out of there, the First National Bank built a building on that location, so it was a nice central location. [Laughter] And we moved to 3520 Ross Avenue. That was before Central Expressway was built, and it was a major artery from downtown Dallas to North and East Dallas. Perfect location, bus stops, everything. We had our grand opening there in 1946, and one of the guys that was in World War II in the South Pacific is named Johnny Clifton. There were others, of course, but you asked me which one I can remember-- fondly remember.

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Johnny Clifton got off of the bus, walked into the donut shop, still had on his military uniform and what they called the "ruptured duck," his pin that showed that he had served in the military during World War II and was released from active duty. It was a pin that you recognized it as being one of the brothers. That's what they called themselves at that time. Of course, they still do. And we became great friends. He played a guitar, and I'd go to his house, and we'd sit around and play guitar, and I finally got him to talk about the war. Those people that were in that war did not want to talk about it. And one of the things you must never do to any military person is say, "Did you ever kill anybody?" Don't ever say that because that's the end of your friendship. They will never talk to you again. 'Cause that's what they did.

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It was a horrible thing. Anyway, he and I became great friends. That's one of the guys I remember. And he's one of the guys that I learned from, the business, how to do it. Nelson Wells was another one. He was not quite as close a friend as Johnny, but Johnny opened donut shops

all over the place and ran them himself after he left the Ross Avenue shop. And he died in the donut business, like so many others.

Jaime Cantrell: And Nelson Wells?

Lon Hargrove: Yeah. Let's don't put that in there. He opened his own donut business, called it Nelson's Donuts.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, let's go back to what you said about Doris being so influential on the flour side of things.

Lon Hargrove: Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: What did you mean by that?

0:34:59

Lon Hargrove: Well, she more or less stayed in the office. Now, she also traveled and taught donuts with new customers. She also did all that. But basically, I was on the street doing the peddling and she was here at the office doing the work. That's a similar arrangement to what Dad and Mom had. And she did a magnificent job of it. Believe me, if she hadn't been here, what I did would've been useless. My work was real easy because I had airplanes. I was an Air Force fighter pilot. I was an instructor fighter pilot, as a matter of fact. I taught other people how to fly fighters. And while I was still stationed at Webb Air Force Base in Big Spring, Dad bought my first airplane so I could come back and forth and back and forth and do stuff around here.

0:36:04

So that airplane would go 120 miles an hour. It was a real fine airplane.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Lon Hargrove: And I wore the wings out on that, so we bought another one that would go 150 miles an hour. I wore the paint off of that one, so then we bought one that would go 190 miles an hour, and that's this airplane right over here.

Jaime Cantrell: And what's that called?

Lon Hargrove: A Bonanza.

Jaime Cantrell: Bonanza. And what year was this?

Lon Hargrove: Oh, all of that happened-- the first airplane was in 1956, 'cause I was still a student at that time.

Jaime Cantrell: When you were at Odessa?

Lon Hargrove: Yes. Midland.

Jaime Cantrell: Midland.

Lon Hargrove: Big Spring, yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: Big Spring.

Lon Hargrove: Webb Air Force Base.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: Every fighter pilot, of course, is required to have a beer mug. My call sign was Dunker because it has to do with donuts.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, is that . . . !

Lon Hargrove: [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: Okay. That's a story you're gonna have to tell.

0:37:01

How did they find out? Did you like the call sign, or did you hate it?

Lon Hargrove: Oh, I liked it. It was double entendre. I would go dunk the enemy airplanes because I was a better fighter pilot than they were, and then it had to do with donuts in a left-handed kind of way. But all my students called themselves Dunker One, Dunker Two. I was Dunker Lead, they were Dunker One, Two, and Three, 'cause we always had four-man formation flights. But see, there's the signature of the Webb Air Force Base, web. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: In Midland?

Lon Hargrove: No. Odessa. Correction, Big Spring.

Jaime Cantrell: Big Spring.

Lon Hargrove: Big Spring was East of Midland, which was East of Odessa.

Jaime Cantrell: West Texas, whew. I've spent some time in Alpine, and there's just . . .

Lon Hargrove: Nothing there. [Laughter] You and three others.

Jaime Cantrell: Nothing there at all.

0:38:00

Well, let me ask you-- let's go back to your family again.

Lon Hargrove: Um-hm.

Jaime Cantrell: And you said Southern Maid, the name, was directly inspired by your mother. And you mentioned the logo of the dress. When I spoke with Mike, he told me the story about the dog and the cart.

Lon Hargrove: Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: So how long has the Southern Maid brand been what it is?

Lon Hargrove: Since 1937.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

Lon Hargrove: It's been registered with the trademark-- well, re-registered however many times it takes. Is it fifteen years that you re-register? Whatever. So I guess it was 1937. I was hanging around the flour plant on 2nd Avenue when a sign man came by.

0:39:00

We didn't have any sign on the windows 'cause we weren't open to the front. And he's actually the one that designed that Southern Maid logo, 'cause we didn't really have one at that time. And we gave him the spiel of here's "Mom, she's the southern maid, and here's my dad and all that." And so he's the one that actually designed the logo and even put it on the windows in gold leaf. The first logo was done in gold leaf on the windows.

Jaime Cantrell: And that was around the time that y'all stopped for the wholesale out back and opened the doors in the front?

Lon Hargrove: Yeah.

Jaime Cantrell: When did the green come along?

Lon Hargrove: I don't know. The green and white are good food colors, so that's how that occurred. Now, I don't know who actually convinced Dad of that-- or Mom or both of them-- but green and white are good food colors.

0:40:02

And green is one of the distinct distance legibility colors, so that fit very well with what we wanted to do.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: The sign man knew that. Anyway, he said, "You don't want to use red. That's not a good food color. So the next best distance legibility is green, and green and white, good food colors. Let's do that." So that's how it happened, I guess. I'm guessing at that.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, what kind of donut is your favorite? I told you powdered sugar was mine.

Lon Hargrove: The plain glazed donut.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay. Do you reheat them?

Lon Hargrove: Yes, absolutely.

Jaime Cantrell: Absolutely.

Lon Hargrove: After they're frozen. I really don't like a donut hot. I like it warm. And I'll wait for it to cool off to the point where I like it just like that. And then, we buy a lot of donuts. My family all buys donuts wherever our donut shop is in their neighborhood.

0:41:00

They're all good customers. Anyway, we don't eat all of them, perhaps, so we put 'em in the freezer. And Barbara told me yesterday she had a donut for breakfast. And I said, "Was that one of your . . . ?" [Laughter] She had one of your cake donuts for breakfast yesterday. Before I leave home, I put out her breakfast and take care of her, make sure she's got her orange juice ready to go and all this. We've been married sixty-five years, so we do stuff for each other, and it works real well. [Laughter] But she put away the stuff I had set out for her, and she ate a donut out of the freezer. And they freeze beautifully, and they microwave perfectly. The thing is, anytime you microwave a product that has flour in it, bread, anything else, once you microwave it, it's ready to eat or throw away. Try that with a piece of bread or a donut or a piece of cake.

0:42:02

Anything that's made with flour, if you microwave it, eat it now or forget it.

Jaime Cantrell: Um-hm. I had a friend in Shreveport who will microwave Southern Maid donuts the next day and eat 'em.

Lon Hargrove: Sure. And they're perfect.

Jaime Cantrell: Yeah. Well, it's coming up on that time. I wondered if you--

Lon Hargrove: Let me show you one more little thing here.

Jaime Cantrell: Sure. Of course.

Lon Hargrove: We're famous, of course-- you know Elvis Presley?

Jaime Cantrell: Well, let's talk about Elvis.

Lon Hargrove: Okay. There's his picture right there on our calendar.

Jaime Cantrell: [Laughter] Um-hm.

Lon Hargrove: Two pictures of him there, one with his shoes-- you know, when he had that don't step on my shoes, or whatever that was-- blue suede shoes. And the other one just holding a microphone. The only commercial that Elvis ever did in his entire career was for Southern Maid Donuts. And there he is proving it, right there on that calendar.

0:43:01

Jaime Cantrell: I heard in Shreveport the local rumor is that he was compensated with donuts.

Lon Hargrove: Well, he had all the donuts he wanted anytime he wanted 'em. He actually came to the back door where the drivers picked up their donuts, 'cause he didn't want people in the front buggin' him. And the people in the back already knew he was in there grazing around anyway, so they didn't pay any attention to him. Anyway, that's one of our stars. What is that? Four-thirteen. There never will be another donut in this . . .

Jaime Cantrell: *The Guinness World Book of Records.*

Lon Hargrove: Yep. On page 413, wherever that is. Now, there it is.

0:44:00

It's easy to open when it flops open. There never will be anybody who beats our record.

Jaime Cantrell: Largest donut. Okay. So I'm reading here from the food section of the *1979 Guinness World Book of Records*, "Largest donut. It took eight people to lift this 74-pound donut out of this specially constructed three-foot-deep cooking vat used to deep fry it, made by the Holly Drive Baptist Church Youth of Richardson, Texas, under the direction of Monty Maple

with the assistance of Southern Maid Donut Company, 5-foot 9-inch diameter." How'd that come to be?

Lon Hargrove: I'm not sure. I guess this pastor contacted Doris. She was the one responsible for doing all that. She did a lot of great stuff.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, what other kind of stunts or marketing publicity do you remember?

0:45:01

Lon Hargrove: Well, Br'er Jones-- you talked about the dogs and all that stuff. He thought it was a crime against children that Shreveport did not have a zoo. He just loved kids. Well, he loved people, and he was really good at it. And he thought it was a crime against children not to have a zoo, so he created his own zoo. He had those myna birds. Were you ever in the shop where he had those myna birds?

Jaime Cantrell: No. But I heard about a monkey, and I also heard about an elephant, so I'd like to hear your take on it.

Lon Hargrove: Okay. Let me see. It's all true, by the way. Oh, where are you? Oh, here we go. There's the elephant right in front of the Southern Maid Donut Shop.

0:46:01

We tried to keep track of how many donuts the elephant ate. We lost track. We couldn't keep up.

[Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: Do you remember what the last estimate was?

Lon Hargrove: No, I don't. I don't remember. Aside from the elephant and the white dogs that jumped through flaming hoops, and the monkey-- that monkey's another story. Get Mike to

tell you that one. As a matter of fact, he sent me a copy of the newspaper publication saying that Br'er Jones had been-- he told you about it? Okay. [Laughter] He's got the picture of the newspaper.

Jaime Cantrell: And I heard that Bruce is responsible for the animal ordinance in Shreveport for that reason. [Laughter]

Lon Hargrove: That's part of the settlement. [Laughter] That's right.

0:47:00

Jaime Cantrell: So were there any similar newsworthy stories happening in the Texas franchises?

Lon Hargrove: Well, there's one I can tell you now, but I wouldn't have told you then. There's a small window on the pilot's seat side of the aircraft.

Jaime Cantrell: The Bonanza?

Lon Hargrove: Uh-huh. There's a small window there, just like the quarter windows used to be on cars. Mr. Jones also-- he was from a small town in East Texas. I'll come up with it sooner or later. And his mom and dad are buried there. And there was no fund to keep the cemetery in shape, so he took it on himself to create that fund. Guess what he used? Donuts.

0:48:00

So he had a whole bunch of coupons printed up, and they were good for a dozen Southern Maid Donuts. How do you distribute 'em? We fly over and throw 'em out the window. [Laughter] That is absolutely illegal.

Jaime Cantrell: Where were y'all throwing these tickets?

Lon Hargrove: Right over the area where the cemetery is. And the people, if they cashed the coupon in, they bought more. That was another way you established customers. And, of course, the nearest one was in Wichita Falls. Theirs went to the cemetery.

Jaime Cantrell: Why do you think there's so much nostalgia around Southern Maid Donuts?

Lon Hargrove: So much what?

Jaime Cantrell: Nostalgia.

Lon Hargrove: Oh, well, it happened at a great time in the life of America.

0:49:01

The war, of course, the terrible position before the war, all of that is just part of the thing that created America that it was, and it has been so long. I don't know if you even noticed this, but this is an important part of how America became great. That thing right there says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Right there's a flag. I've got two of 'em in my drawer. I'm waiting for one of the guys to get okayed into the United States. He's waiting for his citizenship to come, and he gets a flag. I'm as sold on America as you can get.

0:50:00

And airplanes and Air Force and all the good stuff.

Jaime Cantrell: So would you say donuts are pretty all-American?

Lon Hargrove: They are American, period. As far as I know-- there's this possibility: There is a story-- how did donuts come about? A sea captain, his mom made these biscuits for him to take to sea, and they were getting rotten inside after he'd been at sea and all this-- now,

this is the story. I have no idea if any of it's true. But after the few days at sea, they were inedible because of what would happen in the center of the thing. Maybe the way she prepared them. I don't know. But then he complained about that, so she put a hole in it where that part wouldn't happen. That's one of the possibilities that's in that donut book over there.

0:51:00

Jaime Cantrell: Well, is there anything that we didn't get to that you definitely want to share?

Lon Hargrove: I love what I'm doing. I've done a lot of it since I was twelve. I got my first motorcycle when I was twelve so Dad wouldn't have to drive me to work. Course, I couldn't get a driver's license at that time, but he did get me a hardship driver's license, motorcycle only driver's license, when I got my first ticket. [Laughter] Cop stopped me on the way home one night from the donut shop, "Let me see your license, kid." I didn't have one. I said, "Well, my mom and dad are right behind me." They were supposed to come behind me. They stopped at a restaurant. Aaah! They didn't follow me home. Anyway, I had to deal with the cop by myself. So then he went to-- at that time there was a Texas Ranger station at Fair Park.

0:52:00

So he went there, and he told them the story, and wrote me out a hardship motorcycle license. [Laughter] So then he didn't have to take me to work anymore, I could go on my own. But then, later on, the first time I got my mom's car was the last time she ever saw it. [Laughter] But that was okay. It was an old [19]49 Oldsmobile, and she got a [19]51 Cadillac out of it, so she didn't care. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: She upgraded.

Lon Hargrove: Right.

Jaime Cantrell: Well, you still love what you do.

Lon Hargrove: I'm sorry?

Jaime Cantrell: You said you still love what you do.

Lon Hargrove: Oh, I do. Can't you tell? I love it. And it gives me the ability to travel and see people and do things. I've been all over the world. Some places I haven't been that I want to go to.

Jaime Cantrell: Where would you want to go to?

Lon Hargrove: I'd want to go to Israel. I have not been.

0:53:00

Barbara's been there. My wife's already been there. She's gonna take me, show me around. But anyway, there's no place on the east coast of South America that I haven't been. No place in Central America I haven't been. There's hardly any place in the United States I haven't been. I've been all over-- well, Japan a couple of times and-- I've been all over. And this business has given me that opportunity, and the ability to have airplanes. You just can't imagine how wonderful that is unless you have tried it.

Jaime Cantrell: And the next generation in your family, your daughter's generation and your granddaughter's generation?

Lon Hargrove: Well, Les Franklin and Sunny are my nephew and niece.

Jaime Cantrell: Oh, nephew and niece? Okay.

Lon Hargrove: And Rachael is Sunny's daughter.

Jaime Cantrell: Okay.

0:54:00

Lon Hargrove: And Les's son, Grant, is in the back learning how to make flour. So we not only have Doris and me as the second generation, Mom and Dad first generation, but then Les and Sunny as the third generation.

Jaime Cantrell: And then fourth.

Lon Hargrove: And Sunny and Rachael as the fourth.

Jaime Cantrell: Wow.

Lon Hargrove: It's really a family company. And there's another quotation I'll give you-- there's two of them. There's one way that goes the other way and the other way that-- "Where the brethren dwell in unity, there the Lord commands a blessing." That's a quotation right out of the Bible. There's another one that goes the other way. He said, "Where strife is, there's confusion and every evil work." We have no strife. We have perfect unity. And we are blessed. [Laughter]

Jaime Cantrell: Well, thank you so much for your time today, and thank you for your service, as well.

0:54:59

Lon Hargrove: Oh, I enjoyed every minute of it. You know that.

Jaime Cantrell: Wonderful. Okay.

[End]