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Interviewee: Roger Mailhot
(Mailhot's Sausage Co., Lewiston)

Interviewer: Don Dufour

April 22, 1994

Dufour: Could you give me a history background on your company? The origins of it? How it began?

Mailhot: It's long, ah, it's a long story. Ah, this is basically a family owned corporation, with myself as sole owner. But it started many, many years ago of course. 1910 was its origin, and ah, my grandfather, E. W. Mailhot,¹ known as Willie, was ah, the originator. He basically was by trade a baker and he worked for a company here in New Auburn, a guy known as Dupont, Philippe Dupont Bakery. And he worked with a friend, a very close friend, which was ah, F. R. LePage² and these people, all three of them made their marks in business in the Lewiston-Auburn area as Franco-American businessmen. Ah, my father and F. R. LePage eventually in the early 1900's started on their own in the baking business. This baking business was the LePage and Mailhot Bakery and it was located where Lacasse Bakery is today³ and I don't know if you know of these Lacasse people. I think there in ah, they're gonna also be interviewed for the Franco-American Heritage Collection. And that's where these two people started in business together in the baking business, o.k., as a result of working at Dupont's Bakery earlier.

Ah, eventually, that arrangement did not work out. They were great buddies, they were great drinking buddies, and they worked all hours of the morning and all hours of the night, you know, there was no end to the workload, and ah, one of the remedies was Dr. Beam's magic syrup. And ah, all in all finally the partnership dissolved and Mr. LePage went on to become a *very* successful man in the baking business. (Some muffled words) and whereas my grandfather went to work for D. W. Penley which was a meat concern, a great big meat concern in Auburn, something like Kirshner is in Augusta, you know. He worked there for a very short time and he bought out a young, ah an old man that was making blood sausage in town here. And that's how he got started in the meat business, and the first few years let's say from 1910 until my father got out of school which was in the late twenties, the only thing that these people made was blood sausage, known as *boudin*, o.k. And it was primarily a winter business. They made this product up until May. O.K., it started off in October until May. The rest of the time they closed down.

Dufour: Why was that?

Mailhot: Because ah, of refrigeration. O.K. It was very simple, a simple operation and mechanical refrigeration almost did not exist at the time. Ice was being used to refrigerate, and so blood sausage being very volatile as far as being able to be kept aren't at all. It just wouldn't be, you know. It'd spoil very

¹ Eugene William Mailhot, b. Lewiston, 1881

² François Régis LePage. LePage would found his own bakery which eventually became Country Kitchen Bakery, now one of the largest employers in Lewiston.

³ At 2 Chestnut Street, Lewiston.



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



fast. So when you started getting temperatures of 60 degrees and above, you know, ah, wasn't worth while anymore. He closed down and he went to camp. Went to Taylor Pond for the summer, you know. And ah, he and ah, by the way Mr. LePage were neighbors at camp o.k. and their friendship continued throughout their life. But with the coming of the thirties my father, Robert,⁴ came out of school and has to make a little more jobs for himself you know, he got married...

Dufour: So school meaning high school or college?

Mailhot: High school. He went to high school. That's it. And ah, he got out of there and went to work and here they started pork sausage manufacturing. In the late twenties. I'd say about 1929. Ah, and from then on, my grandfather died in 1940, but ah, even in the late thirties he was kind of sickly and had left the managing and the operation of the business to my father, Robert. So ah, they operated originally in New Auburn and they burned down with the Auburn fire, the New Auburn fire.⁵ The whole town just was leveled by fire. Was on Riverside, above the riverside. There were other ah, meat concerns Auburn Packing and several ah, operations and he was one of them. And they burned down so from there he moved to Bates Street. He moved his operation to Bates Street and that operated until the late fifties.

And by then we had gone to making other products such as breakfast sausage, such as Italian sausage, such as *creton* and also ah, we kept blood sausage going. But the other products of course, ah became more prominent ah, you know, the greater volume was developed and pork sausage was...???...than the original blood sausage. And in the late fifties when I came out of the service, I'd been to school, to college and a couple years of service, and I came back and worked for my father. We ah, at that time decided to come down on Bartlett Street from Bates and we built this ah, this little plant which was considered quite modern at the time, cement block construction vs. wood, you know and ah, to try to meet more stringent requirements of the state, you know, sanitation and so on. I ah, personally assumed ah, the directional, this company, a few year before my father died. We went on to expand the plant quite a bit and I'd say by 1978 as a guess, I assumed the ownership of the property and my father was in declining health at that time and IWe ah, continued on the expansion of products since ah, with the concern of people with ah, cholesterol and fats and so on, we took one of our great movers which is *creton*, a port spread item, and we ah, made a *turkey creton*, a turkey spread, using basically the same ingredients as far as spices are concerned so it has the same taste, but it has ah considerably less fat to it, so it's more in tune with ah, the needs of the concerned generations coming up with this fat problem.

Dufour: Now for you to keep in tune with this, was this your own direction, your own sight.

Mailhot: It was ah, no I ah, I'm quite conservative, I don't like to upset the apple cart or anything, but ah, we got calls for it. There was a couple of stores where we called on started making their own turkey creton. So I says, "Hey, they can sell it, why can't we on the ah, you know..."

⁴ b. Lewiston, 1912

⁵ May 15, 1933



UNIVERSITY OF
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Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Dufour: So was this a decision based on your own?

Mailhot: Ya, ya, so we also ah, it was always my father's dream to produce a ah, hind quarter and bologna operation and we, I've shown you this little smokehouse. It's one of the finest smokehouses produced, but it is a miniature smokehouse. It is made for industrial use and not laboratory use. And ah, we didn't have a great volume and we produced frankfurts here for about six years.

Dufour: Now what do you mean by industrial use or laboratory use?

Mailhot: Well laboratory use would be ah, small production you know, about 30 pounds you know, very small quantity to test you know. But this here you can produce 150 pounds batch at a time, which starting from zero, 150 pounds of products you know, couple of times a day is ah, what's considered for us to be good volume.

Dufour: Uh, uh.

Mailhot: And we did just that you know. But ah, the product was still ah, you know, we needed more equipment, more investments to mechanize it and we never received it to do that. So we've withdrawn from that production altogether, concentrating on those products that we presently make. Federal inspection came in and affected the whole industry in Maine, even Jordan's and Kirshner were all ah, State inspected but when they grew up to such a size that they wanted to ship their products out of state, they were the first to move on to Federal inspection to allow this. Eventually the whole meat industry was affected on the wholesale level with Federal inspection and this was about a dozen years ago for us, and today that's what we have, Federal inspected ????

Dufour: When this occurred did you notice a great financial burden?

Mailhot: This was quite a concern to us but we were reassured both by the State and the Federal officials at the time that the transition could be made for us. That our facilities would meet those requirements of the state. We have ah, you see this office here it's exposed cement block with an epoxy A, that's how the whole shop was when they took it over. But we found that washing this and cleaning this was quite a problem. We installed this ah, plexiglass covering on all our walls, white that you saw as you went through the shop, which made it very easy to wash down you know, and so ah...

Dufour: This work that you did, these improvements, did you do it yourself or did you have it hired out?

Mailhot: A lot of this was done by the employees here at the shop, o.k. Seasonal working ah, ay, comes the summertime things quiet down a little bit ay, let's cover this room up here. Let's start working on it. A lot of it was done ourselves. Ah, metal covering of those doors, those ah, refrigeration doors were all wood. We put stainless steel on the inside and out. That was done by Lebel's ah, Sheet Metal Works down on Lincoln St.



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Dufour: Did you build, did you also build the whole building?

Mailhot: The whole building was ah, built by Albert Ducharme which was a ah, an uncle of mine on my mother's side. Brother to my mother and he's a, was a mason contractor o.k. so basically he's the one that put up the building. Another Franco-American ah, contractor. And that's my story. Today I have one son coming up, Mark, he's graduating this year from high school, plans to take a couple years at maybe Husson's or he's got 3 colleges in mind. Champlain in Vermont, Husson in Bangor and also ah, Maine, Southern Maine, University of Southern Maine. So he's been accepted at all three schools and he is making (???) decision as to where he is going, where he'll be studying Business Administration with the idea of coming in here. I don't know if that'll be realized, o.k. If other opportunities open up and ah, ideas change from 18 years old to 20 to 21 you know, but right now he plans to come in to ah, to the sausage business. Time will tell.

Dufour: But as you were growing up, as you were younger, were you employed here? Did you work around here all the time?

Mailhot: Ya. I never did anything else, o.k. While I was in high school I would work with my father part time and I was not, I've got to admit,... (someone came in to ask Mr. Mailhot a question) so ah, ya, I would hang around, see the shop was, we lived in the building in front and our sausage shop was in back of the property. Double set of buildings. So I was always there hanging around to see where my father worked and ah, other employees. If you want to cut off, these guys here want to make use of this room.

Dufour: When you were going to school, um, were your studies directed towards this business? Or did you have intentions at that time when you were going to college to continue working here?

Mailhot: O.K. I graduated from high school sixteen years old. O.K.

Dufour: Sixteen?

Mailhot: Sixteen years old.

Dufour: How did you manage that?

Mailhot: I skipped a grade and I started early and all in all and my birthday was ah, the thirteenth of August o.k. I don't know, I was born in 1934, August 13, 1934. When I got out of school in June '51, I was 16 or somethin'. So my father by having experienced the prosperity of the after war years, World War II, there was a spurt, quite a bit of prosperity and so on. We had made a few dollars, you know, and ah, other of his friends, Regis LePage was ah, son to ??? LePage, was our neighbor at camp kind of encouraged him you know, send me to school, and he couldn't see having ah, me come in to the shop right away. I needed more maturity you know. So...

Dufour: Now the reason why they sent you to school was to learn the business atmosphere or just to, to



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



let you, give you time to like reach maturity.

Mailhot: It was just the idea that he had money to spend. He felt I was too young to start and being encouraged by other people in business you know, to send his children to college. I was the oldest of the family. On I went you know, I could hardly speak English very well, I'll tell you. But off I went to University of Maine in Orono. Thank goodness they had an open door policy, cause I would never have made it. But ah, ya, I took up at the time it was in Liberal Arts and ah, I took up Business Administration and Economics that was my major. That's what it was called; it was a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration and Economics. That's what I got. You know, I studied the whole thing, philosophy, and languages, I had French I had Advanced French, you know, Music, Art Appreciation and all these courses you know. It wasn't strictly Business or Economics. It was concentrated in that, but it was Liberal Arts. And, yes, probably with the idea of ah, coming back to Lewiston and ah the operation, see what could be made with the sausage business.

Dufour: Ah, the equipment that you had here at that time let's say starting with your grandfather and you know, evolving up through. Was this machinery made or was it bought or...

Mailhot: We might still have the original machinery, I'm not sure. We've got a truck out back there we hide it and lock it up. But some of this machinery dates back in the early 1900's. It's basically black metal. Ah, what you see in the shop some of that machinery is white metal, which means recently bought. But we still have black carbide steel machinery. That stuffer was bought right after, well it was bought during the war. It was bought through Joseph Jordans, of Jordan Meats in Portland. He had connections with the Buffalo people, and as you know, during World War II it was very hard to buy any machinery at all. Everything was going for the war effort. But these machines were made before the war and were stocked up, o.k., and Mr. Jordans, Joe, had enough pull in his buying capacity at Buffalo. He got us that particular piece of machinery during the war. We have another ah, Buffalo stuffer but a smaller machine. We needed more capacity, and ah, that's how we got that ??? still in production. We're still using it every day. And the mixer. The mixer is still ah, was owned again by Jordan's meat, and it was used in their operation with Farmer Kearns, another outfit that ah, dates way back when, you know in the early 1900's. We got that machine as a gift from Chet Jordan when we moved into this building. The machinery that we had on Bates St. was belt operated. One motor would operate all the machinery in the shop.

Dufour: One main shaft going down the center of the building?

Mailhot: That's right. And ah, we almost came close to bringing that system in here but that would have been a mistake and ah, through this gift of that machine it made it possible for us to ah to operate, to introduce machines that were operated individually through individual motors, ya. We got a mixer from Jordans, we got a grinder from Penley's in Auburn we bought one of their grinders, and the cubing machine we still kept on belt for a while until we finally bought a German machine which you saw in the back.

Dufour: Uh, uh. So you're saying you bought this equipment from all these different companies. Did all



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



you companies work together like that? I mean especially with that gift of that...

Mailhot: Ya, ah well with Chet, ah, he was a young man starting out, his father had just passed away and we were distributors of Jordan meats in town and were exclusive distributors in those years so ah, this is how that worked out.

Dufour: Distributor. You mean wholesale or retail?

Mailhot: On the wholesale level. That's right. He was not running his trucks into town. He was working through a distributor system here in Lewiston that was ah, that was Mailhot's, over in Biddeford it was Dave Shield and ah, and Bro. and ah, Bunny Stearns was one of his ah, eventually becomes Stearns' of Auburn here, was a distributor of Jordan's products and on and on. In other words, there was still makers in Waterville, in Augusta, of ah, sausage makers. O.K. Today we only have basically two or three makers of these products. We have Jordan's, we have people in Bangor, Bean, and ourselves in Lewiston. As far as I know...

Dufour: That make blood sausage, just truthfully blood sausage, or...

Mailhot: Ah, that make ah, sausage products. By that I mean frankfurters and pork sausages, a sausage kitchen. That is all that's left in Maine right now. Bean's of Bangor and Jordan's. Jordan's bought out Kirshner, they bought out Rice of Bangor and ah, you know, they bought out ah, at the time, I guess the division which was owned by ah, the ??? family. They operated, this guy operated ah, L & A Sausage here locally ah, twenty, twenty-five years ago. So ah, basically the Gurschicks, the Gurschicks of Rumford operated the sausage kitchen and they just closed down. These were, a lot of 'em were German immigrants o.k. They came on the boat with Joe Jordans and ah, that's what they were in Germany, they came with these skills and set up shop and went to town with it you know.

Dufour: So you, your grandfather, was he born here or did he come from Canada?

Mailhot: Ya. He came from Lewiston. He was born here.

Dufour: So his, so his parents...

Mailhot: He was not originally a sausage maker at all.

Dufour: Is that right?

Mailhot: O.K. He acquired the skills through working with Penley's for a year or two in between jobs, o.k. In between buying somebody out and moving from the baking business. O.K.? He was a baker.

Dufour: How did he, how did he ever decide to take the plunge from going from bakery to going to something totally different as meat processing?



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Mailhot: It's a long story. It's a long story. What happened, I come back to the original conversation, was that ah, these guys worked hard, worked long hours, ??? drinkers. And the calamity that my grandfather, at the time they had children and all of a sudden in a town would spread a kind of a disease or something, an epidemic or something. He lost three children in a row. His first three boys died on him. And when that happened he vowed never to drink again. Gave up drinking and he stopped drinking overnight, just like that. With, you know, made a deal with God so to speak, you know, in return don't let this happen to my family again. And he proceeded to have I believe eight children, eight more children.

Dufour: Wow!

Mailhot: Which all lived, o.k., and when that happened they separated, they parted company, the LePage, Mailhot, ??? and proceeded to get a new job, and looked on to ah, you know, at the time, to own your own business was a great big thing you know. He bought the darn business for \$500 bucks you know.

Dufour: And he worked like crazy to make it work.

Mailhot: Well, work like crazy, maybe ah, you know eight, nine months of the year the pressures of life was quite different. My father passed the route as a young man with a horse and buggy, o.k. carriage.

Dufour: That was your father.

Mailhot: My father. O.K., so, he was the first one to get a truck o.k. to operate with. They, they still operated with horses, you know as young people. So ah, you know, no wonder it is that Jordans did not send their trucks out. They were you know, just a few years out of the horse and buggy days, and refrigeration being what it was...

Dufour: It was still being transported with ice, blocks or was it...

Mailhot: Ya, well ah, very limited you know, but by the fifties of course refrigeration, mechanical refrigeration on wheels was in style, but still it's a carry-over from the idea you know, if you want to move out of the city somehow you made a mad dash for somebody's cooler in another city you know, and you take care of my products. You deliver it for me you know. In other words ah, the idea of having very expensive refrigerated trucks was still out of consideration for a lot of people.

Dufour: So instead of having one plant and trying to go out far you'd have your plant plus find somebody else and find someplace else...

Mailhot: That's right. Find other people that operate in other cities and you know, that was basically what happened to Jordans.

Jordans bought out Augusta Provision, operated that plant as a you know, plant to work out of the



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Augusta, Waterville area, and finally they bought Rice out of Bangor and operated. And same thing recently Bob ??? Meats over in the Caribou area ??? and by now these people are spread all of the United State. They ship all the way to Florida you know.

Dufour: Now these people having these different distribution centers did you also at one time do that or did you, are...

Mailhot: O.K., well by the time we got into the game ah, we stayed small and ah, I don't know if it's by choice or by necessity ah, you know, we weren't that aggressive, so ah, eventually when I took it over o.k. I expand when we thought a Federal inspection, maybe this might close us up. We didn't know what was coming. But it gave us an opportunity to go out of state and that is where I got in and ah, brought the route let's say, I, in the early years, I went out on the road a great deal. I was covering Lewiston and Auburn. One truck. And I said, why should I be selling Jordan's items which we made probably ten cents on the pound, still sold enough of the stuff, you paid your own salary. Why should I be doing this when I could go out and sell Mailhot's products in French centers. So I went out and went to Biddeford. I was probably still in my twenties. I went out in Biddeford, I went to Sanford, I went to ah, to Augusta, to Waterville and so on you know, where I felt was French people, Brunswick, o.k. At first, in the state. And then when Federal inspection came in says, hey, I know where there's a great big city. Not too far away, it's all French, and that's Manchester. So I headed for Manchester and on the way hey, I found other places, you know, Somersworth, Rochester, large French populations.

Dufour: So your father, did he, he didn't really go out and develop a big route then? Was it due, was it due to the fact that he couldn't go very far with what he had to transpor the material, or he just didn't...

Mailhot: My father, my father also did route work as a young man, O.K., and he was the lousiest driver you ever saw. (Laughter) Oh, yea, no question about it. I'd go out for a Sunday drive with him and I'd get sick. He would, you know, accelerate and withdraw and pump it up and withdraw. (Laughter) All that rocking motion got me sick. Half the kids in the car with him got sick, so we dreaded that Sunday afternoon ride. Ah, no we ah, we had one truck and was just so much we had to do we felt that you know, our driver was being paid from the income we got by selling Jordan items and we did Lewiston-Auburn route work. It did not really occur to us to push it any further than that,o.k. Expanding, that only happened later.

Dufour: So that really didn't drive you to develop other markets then? Ah, other different...

Mailhot: No we thought ah, we thought these guys, as a matter of fact when they, Jordan's, came in here in Lewiston-Auburn with their own truck. We thought they were pirates. Pirates horning in on our territory you know. The agreement had been made and we were given this territory you know, and this is ours. This Lewiston-Auburn was considered, you know as far as Jordan's was concerned, the old man now. There's a very honorable, honorable person and you know, trust his word and...

Dufour: This was, this was the handshake and...



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Mailhot: That's right. We were friendly. My father and he were very close friends. And he'd go down and visit with him on Saturday afternoons at his plant you know, and chew the rag and ah you know, and that was the agreement and as long as he lived Jordan's never put a truck in here o.k. When his son came of course he was driven to ambition. He assumed the business very young in life. He was in his early twenties and ah the agreement no longer stood.

Dufour: He had different ethics.

Mailhot: He had, he saw the coming of the super markets you know and we were in there ah at Bonneau's, we were at ah Sanitary Market, Food Town, and ah on and on o.k., well, he saw this as, hey, this is the wave of the future and with the coming of warehouse delivery for these stores such as the warehouse AGE, Hanneford and Shaw's you know receiving all their products. The idea you know was obvious to Jordan's by then this was gonna happen but at first he delivered store to store in the supermarkets, same ways we do today, o.k., but they more or less pulled out of that altogether and today they deliver warehouse and the warehouse handles the product. We're still a step away from that. We do deliver to a few warehouses but ah, not that much. We call in to individual store.

Dufour: Do you, do you see yourself going in that direction?

Mailhot: I'm sixty years old. I know which direction I'm goin'. I don't know where somebody else is going. (Laughter)

Dufour: Your son, do you think, if he decides, like you said it was a kind of situation where you didn't know which way he would really go with it, do you think he would take it?

Mailhot: My son will take it? He's talking about it. That's his part he just put in here. He made all-state for his team on hockey, so if he can get the games out of his head and get down to serious business, you know you got to ah, I don't think he really knows you know, the business of hard work yet. Something that he still has to acquire at this point. We keep our kids young forever.

Dufour: Uh huh.

Mailhot: O.K., that's...

Dufour: It's different how you were raised then?

Mailhot: Oh, yes. I didn't participate in any sports whatever. This guy here, an outstanding player in hockey, an outstanding player in soccer, he made all-state for soccer in his division and he's captain of his soccer team, captain of the hockey team, captain of the tennis team. Because of an injury received in hockey, and the operation that he received ah, about three weeks ago, he's not playing tennis this season. The guy's got all the time in the world but ah you know, he doesn't know what to do with himself. He's



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



lost.

Dufour: Ya, right.

Mailhot: Because he, he lived with his sports idea. He's a good student, he passes everything, but he's not an outstanding student in that ah, hey this guy's not going to Bates or he's not going to Harvard you know. Not going to become a physician.

Dufour: Well, he seems to have leadership skills.

Mailhot: Well, well apparently he's ah amongst his peers he's well liked and athletically he's got certain dexterity you know, abilities.

Dufour: Ya. Ah, so, your markets, like you, how did you develop your markets? Did you go out and drive to these people and say well, I've got this product and...

Mailhot: Ya, well,

Dufour: ...or was it by word of mouth or did you...

Mailhot: Well, in town here, it's a, market was established and products been known for generations so there's no, no problem. You know, anybody that opens up, they call us up and ah, they will call for the product. This is changing, of course uh. You don't have so many independents opening up anymore, you know, it's Shaw's or it's Hanneford basically and a few still leading grocers that make it worthwhile. The small corner market has just about disappeared. The convenience store you know, our products don't fit in there very well. People don't go to the corner market to get a pound of sausage anymore. Ah, a cup of creton or meat pie, whatever, our product is found in grocery store which is more or less super markets now. But employment came to ah, developing ah, expanding the markets, yes.

Dufour: Well, like you just...

Mailhot: We just went down the road, and introduced...knocked at the door, rang the bell and ah sold our products off and ah, in some places, my first area to go was Biddeford. I, I went there myself. And I came back here and I said "Dad, the guy told me it's about time you showed up."

Dufour: Ha, ha, is that right?!

Mailhot: And there was a maker there, Mr. Jainge, who would make blood sausage, pork sausage, pies and so on. But he had since passed away. The market area had been taken over by this L & A sausage for a few years. They went out of business and we were not at the time prepared. We didn't have the ah rolling stock, well I didn't have a spare truck. So what I did I let a few months go by and I purposely cut off some stores in town here to make time to go over to Biddeford and to me you know to travel 40 miles. I



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



wasn't ah, for a day's work and come back here, I found that ah very hard to do. I wasn't accustomed to traveling distances. I'd taken my lunch with me on the road, or I'd come back home, my noon meal, you know. We set hours. But ah, I came back to the shop after ah having been there a day, and I says, "They want this product, this product now that they think we can make a go of it." Matter of fact, let's advertise and tell people that ah, that we're in there, that the product is now available at your friendly grocers weren't called yet the super markets.

Dufour: Did people like that guy who said it's about time you came here, did he know about you, or did he just...

Mailhot: He knew about these products.

Dufour: Not that you made them.

Mailhot: No, that's right. We had contact with a certain family over there that had a couple of fairly good sized stores, the farm store. They would call in here couple of times a year to get ah, our product, blood sausage mostly, ok, they knew of our existance and they would supply let's say for about a month per year, wintertime, ah, blood sausage and some stuff that we made here. But that was the end of it. We would put it on the express and we would even go deliver you know and the check would come in the mail. We never met these people...

Dufour: Is that right?

Mailhot: that's the end of it. But we advertised in the Biddeford paper the different products that we made. One week we plan to buy sausage and one week blood sausage and another week something else, so as to ah, make those people aware of ah and develop to a good area and it encouraged us to go elsewhere and do the same. And we found the people receptive. There was still a need and a demand for french products which was manufactured. Oh I think ah, Kirshner was still making blood sausage in those years but ah, they were not very concerned with the item that was ah very limited volume, and when ah, when they discontinued it, Hannaford Bros. called us up. I didn't make the contact.

Dufour: They called you.

Mailhot: They called us and they wanted the product in the warehouse for distribution to ah their various stores. And ah that was, we went a few years with that and ah, we were going out of our minds here trying to make this extra volume of blood sausage. There was a man that was really making ah a batch a day. A couple hundred pounds of blood sausage. All of a sudden

Dufour: A day?

Mailhot: A day. OK. Besides his other work. Now he's pressed to make three batches a day. You know, when Hanneford calls up, he wants 600 pounds of blood sausage. Let's go make blood sausage. He got



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



sick of it in no time at all because all he'd do all day was make that, that one product, and it's basically made, all hand made, you know, without any use of ah mechanical machines, so ah, the guy, the guy was ah at one time for maybe three, four year, but ah we ah we weren't encouraged to do that. The guy, I didn't want to make the blood sausage myself, I do it on emergency basis, but ah, we pulled out of that. With the years blood sausage has ah diminished. We don't make as much volume on that. Today it's one of our smaller items.

Dufour: My *mémère* and *pépère*⁶ there and my father, they like that.

Mailhot: But basically, (???) beans OK. Beans and franks for the French people(?????) or even potatoes.

Dufour: Do you find that you know, you make this product by hand, is there a way to make it ah to automate that process or do you find that it wouldn't..

Mailhot: Yes. There was a maker in Manchester that we were aware of ah in the early years, I was still a teenager. I visited the plant with my father and ah to recall the name there ah, I forget off hand, I should have made notes of this. Affected with Alzheimers...ha, ha.

Dufour: Ha, ha.

Mailhot: But ah, with this man ah produced blood sausage and sold it to all the A & P's and (?) which was a great big chain. First National stores. Most of those stores are gone from this area now. Matter of fact, here we were making this product and there was a First National store on the corner of Pine and Bates St. in Lewiston and they would not buy our product. They would buy from this particular place in Manchester, N.H.

Dufour: Why?

Mailhot: Because ah again, was an agreement we had made for that chain you know to supply all. So he would ah, he would load this in steel drums, probably a foot square, no big deal, load it up with blood sausage, put ice in there and ship it by Railway Express. Wasn't UPS at that time. He'd put it on the train, ok, and from the train it got to the station, picked up here by truck that delivered to A & P stores, you know. That's how he would operate his ah his operation. Well that person had an automatic filling machine. So that man had developed an automatic filling machine so that he wouldn't have to scoop out, you know and put it through a funnel, and casing. So he'd just take the casing, put it onto the outlet and make 'em fill up, ok, and he was federally inspected which was quite a novelty for us you know, where you would send all of his, and he was exclusively blood sausage manufacturer, he would sell it everywhere in ah, New England and New York state. These ah, these large chains.

Dufour: But you didn't find it necessary or economically feasible to try to make that process?

⁶ Eugene William Mailhot and his wife, Odile (Morris) Mailhot.



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Mailhot: Well, ah no. We ah really ah, we really from years back, my father always told me there was no future in that product. Our, our market was going to the cemetery. (Laughter) OK?! Our market is dying. Our market was dying. Ah, my grandfather, the only thing that he made was blood sausage.??? That's the only thing that he made. He kept himself going, he kept his brother also part-time, he was a fireman and part-time he was working the sausage factory. They were two makers, two, two boys working together. Two men working together. And that's the only product they made. Now since then, you know, we're talking, introduced other products that always ??? made. There's a greater demand for other products than that. But still, hey, a hundred and how many years? A hundred and almost fifty years after the initial immigration from Canada the stuff is still being sold, so you know there still is a demand for it.

Dufour: Ya.

Mailhot: It's still worthwhile for us to make.

Dufour: Well until I say your, your emblem there I didn't, Mailhot's didn't trigger anything in my mind. I used to work at Cottle's, and I used to take your product and stock the shelves with it.

Mailhot: Ya. Unfortunately we don't ??? that well promoted, I'm afraid with Cottle's, Shop-N-Save. It's an accommodation 'cause there is a demand for it.

Dufour: Now, the process in making all these products, is this something that required a lot of time to learn or is this or is it like some secret family secret that...

Mailhot: There is a certain amount of stuff that you know we try to maintain the same recipe so that you know it's like you on ah probably other stuff that you taste. Me, when I was growing up growing up, I liked, I *didn't* like Royal pudding, chocolate pudding. I liked My-T-Fine, ok. I liked that thicker taste.

Dufour: Ya.

Mailhot: So my mother would buy us My-T-Fine chocolate pudding and when she switched over brands, boy, she learned that. Now, I love the red Jordan hot dogs and I didn't like let's say another kind of hot dogs, the skinless, eventually the skinless but originally they all had natural casing let's say, let's say Auburn Packing made up uptown, it's called Superior. Well, I didn't like that particular, ok we insisted on getting the red Jordan frankfurt. Well, it's the same thing ah. You develop a certain recipe, a certain taste, and ah people are born with that, they're raised from childhood, they recognize that taste and they will object, ok. A sausage is not a sausage. OK. Your sausage is distinctive. It's distinctive in looks, it's distinctive in taste. Not that our sausage looks better than the other guy. Looks probably not as good as the other guy. But that's not the point, ok. I have written testimony here from a particular Kenneth Roberts from Kennebunk. He's long since deceased but he's a famous author. Well known in that area. He wrote the novel Arundel, something about ah, the ah, big expedition, and the discovery and the mapping of the West. OK. All this I can't think of the name of it, but anyways, he came out one time and appeared in the part of the Portland



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



weekly mag..the monthly magazine that our sausage without any, has no comparison. It's the best sausage in the world OK. And it was printed. And it surprised us. I was told by people up in Rumford. I didn't receive that magazine. And, they showed me, here it is. And it's a he did a life's history on this particular author you know, and in that, boom!, comes this standout thing, this clip, and I kept it at home. I got it still today.

Dufour: Do you have a cop, I mean do you have other copies of that?

Mailhot: I made ah, one and I might still have it in the files here, I'd have to look it up, but ah, it's to say that here was ah a guy of course he was exuberant, you know, he went overboard on anything he said or did and that's how he got published, you know, but he made that, that statement and the publisher called me up on this. Are you aware...? So I told him my history and so on, and he published it, published the damn thing, you know. So if ever anybody wants any questions on my product now I can point it out to this article and say "Hey, this is a world recognized author, American author. He prefers my sausage. It's the best in the world!

Dufour: After that did you notice any increase in business, or...

Mailhot: Ah, some, ah, some people called up called in and ah ya, especially the inns on the coast wanted to know and ah you know if they could get the product. Ay, I can't go deliver on some island someplace and you know. It's available but you gotta be within reach here.

Dufour: So today, today do you have like a sales rep or do you go out on the road anymore to try ...

Mailhot: I've got three salesmen on the road ok. One of them is full time, and the other one works three days a week, and the last one is retired and he will go out and lend a hand and put in a full day's work. Goes out on ah, Mondays on his own. He's got a route to follow. He goes out ah, a little bit in Augusta, in Jay, Livermore Falls and ah, Rumford, makes his way back ???

Dufour: So how big is your market right now?

Mailhot: Ah,..

Dufour: How far out do you go?

Mailhot: Ah, probably too big. (Laughter from both) It's so much stupidity to have that mentality. We go from ah up north. I just go up to Skowhegan ok, that's as far as we go. Waterville and Skowhegan, but down below I do go as far as ah, New Bedford, Mass.

Dufour: Massachusetts.

Mailhot: Then I will call on that person once a week, ok, and it's sizable an account to make it worthwhile



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



to go down.

Dufour: Now with you going on the road as you did to develop these markets, did you, how did you develop your repertoire, you know to talk to these people, I mean how'd you learn, did you find that a learning experience?

Mailhot: Ah, yes, I don't ah, I don't ah, you know, I'm not ah...

Dufour: Well, more so than education in school.

Mailhot: I'm not very outgoing person but I felt that I blended in very much with the product that I sold, where I sold a product that I could identify with as part of my culture and finding all these ah frenchmen along the way we blabbed the time away, a few words of French, you know and "How's things in the mills of Lewiston, and how's things at the shop?" Well it all made for ah fun ah, touch and go you know and ah ay some people go and talk into accounts of their hunting experiences and fishing experiences but ah somehow ah they associate these products with the French. Here was a Frenchman calling on them and ah you know they could ah ??? with that and ah ???

Dufour: Well, like what you had just said there, the person I work for right now his father well, he didn't have no french ancestry, and he peddled milk and his father-in-law, when he got married, was french. Where he would try to peddle milk, he couldn't sell it. Where his father would, father-in-law would go to peddle milk he would sell it no problem, cause he spoke French.

Mailhot: Well, there is a connection, there's no... Hey, when you're in business you know, you ah, you do the best with what you've got. It's alright to ah, soft peddle your weaknesses and push on your strong points where it can be used, you know.

Dufour: Now, you've been in this for all your life. Now, you went to school in business and accounting, they give you a background in numbers and what not but, did you, how do you think you you know, learned most of your like business savvy? Just by on the road?

Mailhot: Ya, I think that ah, you look around here, there's no computers, we're still working on ah, you know, just my files, open it less as possible, you see all this junk all around it. You know, I'm still operating in a very old way. But I'm not ashamed of it, really. I remember ah, my father visiting ah, he had a business deal that he wanted to talk to, he wanted to borrow money from a multi-millionaire, the man was George E. Lewis and he operated Auburn Packing, and he made his money in refrigeration and meat industry and eventually made it possible for the Civic Center in ah, in Portland to build because he had made a major contribution. Anyways, he ah, he operated across the river here, Auburn Packing, he knew him, my father knew him personally, and he would go in and talk to him and would come back, my father was much neater than I am, ok, kept everything in its place didn't disturb too much. And he'd come back here and "I can't get over that office," well, there it is, (laughter from both) George E. Lewis' office. Things piled up on the desk and thrown on the floor and the filing cabinets and let's go, you know. That's ah...but



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



business, business ah, you know ah, everything is in God's hands as they'd say but ah still it's ah a lot of it is common sense. That's no longer the short of it. I mean people will recognize you for what you are ok, and integrity, we try to be as honest as we can and as straightforward as we can. We don't try to mislead them, and ah it is through this ah interchange of people and you know, you get to know who's dependable and let's face it, this being recorded and all that, an asshole. An asshole is a guy you can't trust cause he, he's a shyster, you know, and unfortunately you have to deal with everybody, but...

Dufour: It takes a lot of hard work to try to get a good reputation.

Mailhot: That's right.

Dufour: A long time.

Mailhot: Basically, basically, when you're in business for yourself, it is your reputation that carries the thing. How you deal with these people, and you have to deal with a straight hand, ok. And ah, I think that's what made us survive. If you lose that, I feel you lose the battle. You don't stand a shot. You are recognized for what you are. Basically, and integrity is large part of it.

Dufour: So say if your son were to come in here he would never get the insight or...like right now he's in high school doing sports...

Mailhot: Ya, ya well ah, you know, I hope that I have ah, if he so chooses that I'll have the time to pass it on. I do have employees here have spoken up for the business have spoke up to my wife also I hope that when you get out then you would consider us, you know, we are interested. And that just about floored my wife you know, this was at the Christmas party, this year, this year or last year, I would say last Christmas. But that would of course not be my choice. You know. As a bail out you know, eventually you have to reverse yourself, when you're no longer able physically and mentally able to keep things going, you've got to let go. But ah ??? your children, if you can. My son is my only son, it's the last of my children. Three daughters before that. Some of them did show an interest, passing interest, but really it's a I think there's some people that have women as ah, controlling ah, force. You have that in McKenzie today in Burlington, Vermont, but ah, that is not the ideal situation. In other words, when you have to deal with your employees it's hard, it's hard work and ah, I still believe that it takes a man to be able to carry on. The way I'm operating it anyway. If ever it becomes a desk job where you're talking on the phone, where you handle it through the office then that's something else. We're not at that point now where we can do that.

Dufour: Why do you say that. Why do you say it needs a man to well,...

Mailhot: Because ah, I feel that the owner still has to be in the store and my work inside here is still needed, ok. I am replacing another worker, in other words I'm putting time right on the bench, stuffing, linking and well, we no longer link by hand but I pick up you know, ah doing stuffing requires a certain dexterity and I can do that, whereas, most of the people here, there are only two people that can stuff the



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



product, which I'm one of those people. Not that it's a skill that can't be acquired, it can. They got to be left to do it, to try it and you know for weeks, maybe months before they develop that skill. Especially on small casing, small sausage. Probably anybody can stuff a sausage the size of an Italian sausage but you can't small. It requires a certain dexterity so...my son does not have it yet.

Dufour: So your, like your family, you said you came from a family of eight. Were you the oldest?

Mailhot: Well, my father, my father's f..ah my grandfather's family ok, my father's one of eight children. Three of 'em extra than that, died. My brothers and sisters, I had ah, we were four brothers and two sisters, we were six.

Dufour: And you didn't have any other brothers and sisters?

Mailhot: Well, yes we I had some that were interested in coming here but felt the business was not large enough to accommodate, ok, one that was very, very much interested. Ray. Ray went on to become ah, multi-millionaire on his own ok. And today he lives in Florida and he operates many businesses. He operates an inn in Kennebunk right now, The Schooner Inn, he operates the ah, again in ah, Florida also, ???, I think is the name. And ah, ????. He's also comptroller of a university up there and ah besides he's worked as a stockbroker, he's done many things.

Dufour: Wow!

Mailhot: So, he's ah, he did very well. Handled the ah he's owner of ah, a large inn in Kennebunk before finally selling out a few years ago, about ten years ago. I have another son that's a doctor, well an optometrist, another one that's a vice-president of finances at a local hospital, CMMC. And basically he's ah, he's the one that puts out the books for the year, ok. He sees to 'em day to day. But comes the end of the year he puts it all together and gives out the financials. I have two sisters, one who married to a teacher in ah, Framingham, ok. Fortier, and the other one is married to Don Casavant, a professor of physics at St. Michael's College in Vermont and she in her own right is a representative to the legislature of Vermont right now. Has been for a few years.

Dufour: Quite diverse. Holy smokes!

Mailhot: Oh, boy. I think I covered the children there.

Dufour: Your father, take you along to come into this business or any of your children, or did he just let you pretty much decide for yourself?

Mailhot: My father didn't want me in this business. The last thing that he wanted me to do, because he found things hard for him, ok. An owner of a small business does not get an annual vacation unless they're very well off, you know. So I get my vacation when I got married and I repeated it by going to Europe for our 25th.



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Dufour: In 25 years, that was your next vacation?

Mailhot: That was my next vacation, and I haven't had one since or in between.

Dufour: Wow! You're here all the time?

Mailhot: All the time. Unless I'm sick. So that's the way of operating a small business. Not the only way I suppose, but it's got its good points and it's got its bad.

Dufour: So how many hours a week do you figure you put in?

Mailhot: Oh, I put in a lot of hours, probably, tomorrow, see I get up here, I get here 6:30 and I leave quarter past five, sometimes I have to come back in the evening to receive meats. On Mondays put away the meats. And tomorrow I'm leaving for the whole day for New Bedford. Leaving at 6 o'clock and I'll be back at 2 - 2:30.

Dufour: Is that to service one of your clients?

Mailhot: That's right. Make that one drop and delivery and that's besides the work in my books, ok. This is the invoices that you see on the desk that haven't been taken care of and that Saturday afternoon and evening I have to tackle these bills and get on the ball here. My wife in the meantime ah, sends out statements, people that ah, owe us money she does this every week and she puts up payroll.

Dufour: So basically you wear a lot of hats running this business.

Mailhot: Yes. Thanks to my wife, I'd have to do that much more which would make it impossible.

Dufour: That right?

Mailhot: Ya, which is what my father was doing. My mother never worked ok, after she got married, and he was ah...

Dufour: Was it, now the reason why she didn't work things change so much that, maybe that he was able to do that as things change that you had to have someone else?

Mailhot: His load was lighter ok, his load was lighter than mine, I'm convinced of that, but you know, Saturdays he would work until ah until four o'clock anyways on his own, in his books. He would send out the statements, prepare the statements, he would pay his bills, ok and ah that's why really he didn't want to go out any further than he did because he didn't want any more work than he had. He had his hands full. And as far as my mother's concerned she had a large family and in those days she was at the age where ah women, women really started working I think. During World War II they started working, but by



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



World War II she had already five kids, so, so she was quite busy at home and the income was enough. Not that it was extravagant, but it was enough so as to be able to keep her at home.

Dufour: That's probably what was the driving force behind him not wanting you to come into the business?

Mailhot: Ya, he saw it was ah, you know, there was an easier way to make a living so...

Dufour: Now since you're running the business you also have to deal with your employees. Now to hire your employees what type of characteristics are you looking you know for possible worker?

Mailhot: Well, it's pot luck. I've had, we always had good people as ah, I think ah as the drug scene came along, recent years, I think that's complicated things a great deal. I've had ah people here on various drugs. I think I still have that problem. So you don't ah, you don't always have success. You used to be able to judge people ??? you know. People can be can have ah be affected by mood variations, whether prescribed or self-inflicted ??? or that changes people a great deal. There are people that are under doctors' care and psychiatrists and prescribe drugs and then there, they should be getting some or taking too many you know. So I think I've got that problem with one employee and I think a couple of others that ah, that have alcohol or drug related problems, no question about it. ???

Dufour: How do you deal with that?

Mailhot: When you deal, when you deal with people that are not on those ah dealing with those substances I think you can judge people pretty accurately.

Dufour: Just by talking with them, or...

Mailhot: Ya, by contact and so on you know, it's easy, it's you know, you're dealing on a plain surface, but when you inject drugs or alcohol or something, it's very confusing. Ay, last week a guy took off for a little lunch, he had his salary, what did he do, he hit the bottle. He comes back here, I had some sweeping to do in the yard. He did a, he didn't do a very good job of it, and I gave him the keys, my truck. What does he do, but he goes through you know, rolling, it didn't ruin the truck, he goes through the cement blocks by backing the truck up against the building, only to find out being told by my foreman, this man doesn't make any sense. He went back in the ??? room, and he was drunk. I didn't recognize that at first ok, only afterwards did I realize that the guy's got a drinking problem.

Dufour: So it's a constant battle, not constant battle but constant...

Mailhot: Yes, I can't clear people ok, I make them aware I don't want to reoccur, don't come in here drunk, you know, and so on but ay. You get that when people work for you.

Dufour: Do you find that, do you find that hard to do?



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Mailhot: If I can identify the problem, no I don't find it hard to do, ok...

Dufour: That right?

Mailhot: but I do have people that are under psychiatric care. Eventually, again I had to break down, ??? suppose to break down and I am aware that he is under the doctor's care and stuff like this, so. That is very hard to deal with on my part ok. I don't want to fail again. But he does show new changes ok as a result of that which I find it hard to deal with.

Dufour: What's the hardest part of your business, do you think? What parts do you enjoy the most, which parts that you don't enjoy the most?

Mailhot: I find that work that I don't like work. I'm a lazy person at heart. (Laughter from both) But ah, certainly, certainly ah, you know, if you can satisfy and be satisfied with your workers I think it's a, well, that is what makes a company. If you could do without workers that could ah solve a lot of problems. But ah, your workers basically are your main concern to satisfy your trade out there with your product. It's assumed, an assume given you know, you're gonna do that. This is what the goal of the company is. But my immediate concern is how do I satisfy my my team, my workers, ok. How can we set up an atmosphere here where you know, work is possible, we can work to the goals that we set for ourselves, and if we can get harmonious ah working conditions, direction within the crew, that to me solves 80% of the problems anyways.

Dufour: Now how do you get insight on that? Do you talk to your employees or do they come in here and let's say discuss...

Mailhot: Oh, they come in here and ah, I go out there remind them constantly that ah you know, personal problems of people are hard to deal with. ??? something that I was not really prepared to do. I thought I was dealing with a product only to find out that I'm really dealing with people most of the time ok. And that is hard.

Dealing with people. (Sounds like someone interrupted the interview) Does that complete the ah...

Dufour: Well, if, well he had to...we could stop anytime that you wanted or...

Mailhot: Ya, well we're all set.

Dufour: Could I have just one finishing statement?

Mailhot: Ya.

Dufour: Is there, now since you're in business would you do this again?



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTHERN MAINE
Lewiston-Auburn College

FRANCO - AMERICAN
COLLECTION
FRANCO - AMÉRICAINÉ



Mailhot: ??? I don't know.

Dufour: Or would you take a different career choice? You know hindsight is 20/20 but...

Mailhot: Ya, ya, well ah, I really, I, I enjoy it ah, I found it very hard work but despite, despite the hard work I think ah it's rewarding. I got a great deal of satisfying financially. As far as pleasing everybody and pleasing my wife, ??? but ah, there is an easier way of making a living than making sausage. And that's why we don't find too much competition in that domain. Not so many people working in that because it is hard, hard way of making a living. But it is a living, it's no ifs and buts about it.

Dufour: Well, is there anything else you would like to add to this?

Mailhot: I think that's ...before I incriminate myself I think I'll conclude.