

Episode Title: Jon Pardi's Elk Tacos

Episode Summary: In this week's episode, Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of *Southern Living Magazine*, talks to Jon Pardi about his recent digital series for CMT, his California roots and how his grandmother influenced his track to being a country star.

Episode Transcript:

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Welcome to *Biscuits and Jam*, from *Southern Living*. I'm Sid Evans, editor-in-chief of *Southern Living Magazine*.

Today's guest has been making some friends in the kitchen during quarantine, getting acquainted with his airfryer, his pressure cooker, and Instant Pot.

JON PARDI: The instant pot is amazing. We cook chicken noodle soup, elk chili, so it's definitely one of my favorites. And it's in like half an hour and it's so juicy, so good.

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Jon Pardi is a native of Dixon, California, a farming town near Sacramento, but his style of country music revels in the old school charm of Nashville. Since his breakout year in 2017, when he took home ACM and CMA awards for best new male vocalist and best new artist, Jon has been making his mark as a modern country outlaw. He has an irreverent new digital variety show called Pardi Time with CMT, about life on his Tennessee farm, and his new album Heartache Medication is a tribute to whiskey, honky tonks, and legends like Willie, Waylon, and Merle.*

On today's program, Jon tells us that if country music weren't on the table, the hard labor he learned as a teenager would certainly keep him employed.

JON PARDI: I can weld; I can drive big equipment. I can fix fences. I can run a ranch if I want to, you just did that with your father. You did that with your friend's dad, you know, you just were helping out and you didn't know that you were learning stuff at the time, but you were just doing it.

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Plus the influence Jon's grandmother had on his career, and more on Biscuits & Jam.*

(Theme music ends)

SID EVANS: Well, Jon Pardi, welcome to Biscuits & Jam.

JON PARDI: Biscuits & Jam. Glad to be here.

SID EVANS: I want to start by asking you a little bit about California. You grew up in a little town called Dixon. Tell me a little bit about life in Dixon when you were a kid.

JON PARDI: Life in Dixon was growing up around farmland and livin' in a small town and working with my dad, going to school, wanting to sing music, country music, Tom Petty, rock and roll.

San Francisco was probably an hour 45 minutes away and we had Sacramento 45 minutes away. We'd go to the big city life but Dixon was just a quiet little town and, it's kind of grew into a commuter town now, but back before we left, it was still kind of small town Dixon.

SID EVANS: And this is really farm country.

JON PARDI: Oh, yeah, you can farm anything out there. I mean, from hay to tomatoes to watermelons are out there and you got almonds, olives, grapes, I mean anything. I didn't think there was cotton in California. I know cotton farmers and it's just, you can kind of grow everything out there cause you have so much control of the water. And you always got sunshine and when I say control the water, you know that water is sacred, it's sacred out in California. So it's all recycled in reservoirs and they're always running through it. So they've got a good system.

SID EVANS: So what did your parents do for a living?

JON PARDI: My dad was in heavy equipment land leveling. And my mom worked at UC Davis for a little bit and then kind of stayed home to take care of us and was like team mom for all my football.

SID EVANS: So what were some jobs that you had as a teenager? Were you working for your dad at all?

JON PARDI: I worked for my dad every chance I got. Worked at grocery stores. That one didn't last long. It was a little too boring for me. longest job I had in high school I was at the, uh, at a Ford dealership out there. I was shuttle guys, washing the cars.

Like from 15 on, I was working for an A/C company that we'd go put A/Cs in houses and where you can get a work permit and learn how to do that. And then 18, I went and worked with my dad and then at 22, I left for Nashville. But I was playing music all in between these jobs. So that's why the jobs never lasted.

SID EVANS: So Jon, who was the cook in your family?

JON PARDI: My mom. My mom is definitely the cook. But my dad's also a really good cook too. So it was my mom and my dad.

SID EVANS: So did you have some favorites that they made when you were growing up?

JON PARDI: Oh I still do. Um, basically my mom's food. She likes to use a lot of butter. I try to get her off of that. Like, you know, you don't have to use so much butter these days, but she's just got her recipes. Her chicken enchiladas are good. Chicken and dumplings are good.

She always made good tacos. My dad, he makes great elk tacos. I mean, we make elk tacos a lot, but he makes the best elk tacos. And he's really good at cooking steaks.

SID EVANS: Are these elk that you and your dad harvested?

JON PARDI: Yes. We go, elk hunting every year. We love, the, spotting stock and the challenge of elk hunting. And we also love the way it tastes. And it's probably the best that you can hunt in the U.S. I think, you know, is elk and and what you get to eat. It's just great. There's so many good recipes. It's awesome.

SID EVANS: Yeah, I've had it. I love it. And if you get one, you're going to have some meat for a long time.

JON PARDI: My freezer is full. Like I'm just like giving elk meat away. You want some?

(Instrumental music break)

SID EVANS: So, Jon, what about the holidays? Was that a big thing in your family growing up?

JON PARDI: Yeah, when I was a kid, of course we love Christmas as kids. Couldn't wait. We'd always get up at like 4:30 in the morning, make everybody mad and you know, have to go back to bed.

Thanksgiving was always fun. My dad's side of the family is big farmers. And so we'd go out their big shop out there and eat, have Thanksgiving and stuff. And then it turned into, you know, going to my house for Christmas or going to my mom's house for Christmas. And that's been a lot of fun.

And so my dad's been coming out here for Christmas the past couple of years, we have a lot of fun. We get a lot of work done. We cook and eat, have a great time. Then of course, we go to Northern California where my mom's at and we'll have a great Christmas out there, see all my cousins. I have so many cousins and a lot of family, so I do miss them and it's good to go out there and see them.

It's a lot more adventurous, let's put it, now. The newer, uh, Thanksgiving and Christmas is like adventure. Whereas, when you're younger, you just kind of go where you're told to go.

SID EVANS: So Jon I've read that your grandmother was a big influence on you in terms of music. Can you tell me a little bit about her?

JON PARDI: Her name was Loretta. I always thought it was cool, like. You know, you never know it, but like when you hear Beatles get back, it's like, "get back Loretta," little stuff. So my

grandmother loved country music. That's all she listened to. So when I was a little kid, that's all we listened to.

And we sang probably from age 2 on we're always singing. She'd kind of sing to me. I seen him back. Of course, I didn't know what I was doing. And it just kept growing, going into this thing to where we'd sing karaoke together. And my grandma was not like a great singer. She just loved to sing. And entertain, she was just one of those people that just sang, cause they loved it and I just kind of caught on from that and just listening to the great music that she would play me. From Merle Haggard to Randy Travis, bunch of George Strait, Alan Jackson. She loved Alan Jackson, loved Brooks and Dunn. She just loved great country music. And I kinda grew up listening to that. And I remember when I was trying to write songs and she'd try to help me and she'd listen, you know, just being like a good grandmother.

And, it just kind of helped me always have a way to be like, "Yeah, do that. You should do that. You should do like George does, you should do it like Allen does." When you're a little kid, you don't know what you're doing. So I still don't know that we still don't know where we're doing, but we've got a good, you know, grasp on it.

And, and from learning to play guitar at 9 and, exploring music without knowing you're exploring it, I guess if that makes sense. Like I'm just having fun playing music. And I guess that's just kind of stuck with me and still does now, but she's definitely the one that put that music in my ear and I don't have any other family members that play music.

I'm the only one that plays music. I'm only one that sings in my family. Um, I take that back. I do have cousin Coleen in San Luis Obispo. She does play the bass and sings and stuff too. And she's a fantastic painter. So I do have one artistic person in my family. But my grandmother wasn't ever really known as an artistic person, more of just like karaoke singer and loved country music. So it kind of worked out.

SID EVANS: You know, Jon, you mentioned Merle Haggard, and he was born in California. I wonder if you had a special connection with Merle because of his California roots.

JON PARDI: Always, you know, I love being in a state where Merle Haggard was, you know, he put his claim on it and I put my claim on it.

It's just, you know, It's different now it's music is everywhere. Whereas then, it was like, you know, he worked so hard to bring his music to branch out and worked really hard enough to where, you know, I mean, hell, he saw Johnny Cash in prison, you know, like crazy stories like that. And then going down to Bakersfield, and it's just way different these days.

Like I'd love to be able to hang in California and be a part of Nashville, but it's not, that's just not how it is. Dwight Yoakam, you know, he's, he was born in Kentucky, but I had this conversation with Dwight, like, man, you just can't, you wouldn't be able to do what you can do in Nashville in California.

So it's hard for me cause I want to be like, yeah, I'm with California. But I'm not, but I'm born there. I go back all the time. I have family there. I love that state. And you know, I feel like that's more bigger audiences and I always take claim in it because I want to be known from California also because of Buck, Merle, and Dwight. They're claimin' there, we got Gary Allen he's from California. He's out here too. And I got Brett Young now, Tyler Rich Cam's comin', the California crew, and Devin Dawson. And so it's kind of grown into this thing to where we're all kind of doing our things and we're kind of in and out of California, but we like support and love are our heritage of California country.

SID EVANS: Jon, was there an early performance that you remember where you started to realize that this music thing might be more than just a hobby?

JON PARDI: I think when it turned into like a real life thing it was definitely at 18. I realized I wanted to do it full time, I wanted to play music. And I just wasn't mature enough, you know, like it's hard to just go out on your own at 18 and be like, I'm going to go to Nashville.

I've never been anywhere out of Dixon. It was hard for me, especially, you know, parents getting freshly divorced and not really knowing what the hell I'm going to do. So headed up to Chico, California and tried a junior college out there and Butte College, a great school. Chico's a great school, but it's also a great party school. And I ended up starting a college country band out there called Northern Comfort. And I toured around Northern California for about three or four years playing all the dive bars and just having fun when it played some fairs and, and I started writing, I was writing a lot of the songs that people were requesting and buying our CDs.

And like, I still, to this day, I'll get requests for a Northern Comfort song. And I think that's when it really kind of set it that I can do this. I can, I can move to Nashville. I can write melodies. I can write songs that people actually want to hear and I believed in myself enough. I was Mr. Confidence. I didn't care. I was like, "Oh, I'll show 'em, I'm country."

I just had the edge to me and I still do. So it just kind of helped having that and having the experience of playing all the bars. And basically I went to Nashville a couple of times when I was about 18 and about 20. And I realized that I should at least go when I'm 22 and I can drink because it's a lot easier to play bars when you're over 21.

I never thought, like I'm going to move to Nashville and become, so the biggest country star. I never really thought that I was like, I'm going to move to Nashville and kind of figure out that and figure out songwriting. I never really set out, I'm going to go there and try the country music thing.

SID EVANS: So it sounds like you had a kind of rough time around the age of 18, and I wonder if some of that toughness served you well, moving to Nashville and trying to make it as a country star.

JON PARDI: Yeah. Well, I get a lot of tough from my father and I always give Dixon a big shout out from when it comes to tough and hard-working. Cause that's what they were. That's what my

dad's friends were. They were the blue collar rednecks. They go to work every day and they have a lot of skills that not many people have anymore. Like I can weld, I can drive big equipment. I can fix fences. I can run a ranch if I want to. You just did that with your father. You did that with your friend's dad, you know, you just were helping out and you didn't know that you were learning stuff at the time, but you were just doing it. And I learned so much from being from Northern California, and I always loved that. And the part where I'm from, I always give 'em credit of that's where I get the toughness from, the kind of Western attitude, straight talking very kind of cowboyish.

SID EVANS: Well, you've been in the South for a long time now. You've been in Nashville for a while. I'm wondering, how, uh, the South is treating you these days.

JON PARDI: I've been in Nashville for 12 years and I love Nashville. I always say I grew up in Nashville. The 22-year-old didn't know nothing coming to the South. You know, I had a PA system, a dog, a couple of guitars and, and a album that I recorded in Chico, California, and I was coming after Nashville. And if you would ask me at the time of 22, what I thought was a great restaurant, I would told you Olive Garden.

But, I just didn't know I was a kid from Dixon man, like I didn't see a lot. I didn't go high-rise dining San Francisco. We're very small, kind of country people.

So going to Nashville was like my first big experience being in a city, going to bars, meeting people at publishing companies and kind of going around, but it's not really a huge city either which it makes Nashville so special.

SID EVANS: Was there one artist in particular who really gave you a hand up in your early days?

JON PARDI: Well, I definitely Dierks Bentley and Luke Bryan and Eric Church took me out on tour in the early years. Justin Moore more took me out on there. So many people at Loser's Bar and Grill helped me out. I played there from like 2009 to 10 and, and always in and out of Losers. And—

SID EVANS: That still one of your favorite places?

JON PARDI: Still one my favorite places. It's tough to go in there. Cause once you go in there, it's hard to get it out of there. And if you don't remember when you get out of there, but it's a good time and it's just kind of been my spot that I got to call home. You know, everybody kind of artists has their kind of home bar that you can use to, you know, get drunk and get all crazy or sing songs back in the day. I think it's kind of cool to have that home spot. Yeah. Like you put my claim, like, yeah. I used to run back here a lot, you know?

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: We'll continue with Jon Pardi after the break.

BREAK

(Biscuits and Jam Theme begins - Fiddler's Barn on Epidemic Sound)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Welcome back to Biscuits & Jam, from Southern Living. I'm Sid Evans, and we're talking with Jon Pardi.*

SID EVANS: Well, Jon, I know you love the Ryman. You proposed to your fiance Summer during a show at the Ryman last year. Tell me a little bit about how that came together.

JON PARDI: Well, I met Summer through my mom. Summer does hair. And, my mom's friend was getting her hair done by Summer and Summer was just kind of single. She was kind of over the dating thing. And, the word was that she mentioned to Summer that she knew somebody who was tall and that's how it kind of started, or that's what they tell me.

But anyway, I'm glad I met Summer like that and we started dating and then you just kinda know. We get along really well and we understand each other and she's definitely learned her fair share of the music business and dealing how to be with an artist and all that stuff. There's a whole lot to learn with that.

And so I didn't know where to propose, but I thought the Ryman. We had two sold out shows at the Ryman and like the Ryman is such a magical place. It's got a lot of spirit there, you know, and it's just a country church and I always loved playing there. I love going there and it's like, what other cool spot would it be to ask my girlfriend to marry me in front of everybody?

And, I just thought that would be special. And we had all the camera guys there, so I already, I didn't have hire a separate camera crew to go to some remote location. It just worked out really good and it was really memorable and we loved it and and we're finally coming around next month to get married.

SID EVANS: That's great, well congratulations.

JON PARDI: Thank you.

SID EVANS: So I want to ask you about your new album called *Heartache Medication*. So the album was released last fall before the days of COVID-19, but you said that the whole album was meant to make people feel better. And I'm just wondering if that has resonated with fans even more than you thought.

JON PARDI: Um, I hope so. It's a tough year for all of us. And I think *Heartache Medication* has all kinds of feel good in there and some sad stuff to make you feel good. It's like, there's a song called "Starlight" I kind of based around my grandma. "Starlight" was written in 2014, believe it or not. It was about my, my grandmother and, uh, friends that I've lost that, you know, you can kinda kinda sense they're still around, sense they're helping out some way some power. And I feel like "Starlight" could mean even more now these days where you don't know what's

happening and kind of lean towards the spiritual side, or you know, leaning towards somebody you miss kind of think about em in a, in a fun way, a happy way, not in a really sad way.

I love that record. I loved making it and we're currently getting songs together for the fourth record that I don't even know when the hell that thing's going to come out, but, um, we're working on it. It's taking our time, though.

SID EVANS: Well, I wanted to ask you with "Starlight," if you would mind just singing a little bit of that or just a verse or so.

JON PARDI: It's a little higher up. *(Singing with guitar)* "I've been blessed and I have sinned / Wear the scars of where I've been / Lucky to be alive and breathe / In this midnight air / I swear you're right here / Get the chills on my skin / And that's when I get this feeling."

("Starlight" begins to play: "You're shinin' down on me, showing me the way / Angel in the night here to save the day / Like a light out of the dark, straight across the sky / Up there in that starlight, starlight tonight / Yeah, tonight.")

SID EVANS: So listen, I want to hear about your new show that you started called "Pardi Time." It looks like you had a little time on your hands and decided to have some fun.

JON PARDI: Yeah, we did the "Off the Road" for the CMT and they kind of came back with like, Hey, would you want to do, you know, some episodes of hanging around the house?

Cause I can do fun, funny. And we get a lot of action out here. And so yeah, we kind of came up with a whole list of things to do. And it's been fun to watch the episode. And of course they're not crazy long, so it's not like you need, you know, "we're going to need 45 minutes of stuff."

So it makes it nice. That's about the attention span these days, of you know, just flipping through socials, you can go about 10 minutes. Um, but it's been fun. Summer is a great cook. So that's been a fun thing to do with the show is have our own little cooking stuff and, it kinda gives a normalcy to 2020 for everybody that watches it.

I think it gives a little bit of an intimate look to my life and just how I like to have a good time and still manage to be functional. And every episode always makes me laugh. So I hope it makes everybody else laugh.

SID EVANS: Well, it seems like you've got some skills with that instant pot.

JON PARDI: We've got an airfryer and a pressure cooker, but the instant pot is amazing. We cook chicken noodle soup, elk chili. So it's definitely one of my favorites and it's in like half an hour and it's so juicy. So good.

SID EVANS: Well, Jon, you know, I know you were going a hundred miles an hour, before all this hit and you were touring all over the country and playing sold out shows everywhere. What have the last few months been like for you in general?

JON PARDI: It's been great time at home. It's been fun with friends, seeing a lot more artists than we never we ever have because we're not on the road. We all wanna see each other. But I've been getting by, you know. I feel like I'm going a hundred miles per hour around my house now, not in the country. Setting up lights and getting this computer ready and getting these phones ready and writing songs and knocking down trees and, fixing fences, dreaming, still dreaming, still got dreaming, you know, you can't get rid of dreaming.

But it's been a crappy year and it's been a challenging year for all of us, been a challenging year for the world. And I feel like we're all sitting on 'go' just to be back to cross that line right back to normal. I hope we get across that line soon. But you know, I can't sit and think about the negative when I can just be at home and think about the positives and I'm blessed for that.

SID EVANS: What are you looking forward to the most when we get on the other side of this?

JON PARDI: I'm looking forward to that feeling that we never known before. And that is I'll never moan about another show I don't want to play or showing up for a meet and greet, and I feel like that first concert we play is going to be the same for the crowd.

I think people are going to cry. I think people are just going to be so just in awe that they're back to normal, and I can't wait for that.

SID EVANS: Well, me too. And, Jon Pardi, thank you so much for being on Biscuits and Jam

JON PARDI: Biscuits & Jam baby.

***Voice Over from SID EVANS:** Thanks for listening to my conversation with Jon Pardi. You can catch his digital variety series Pardi Time on CMT's social media, and his latest album Heartache Medication is available wherever you get music.*

Southern Living is based in Birmingham, Alabama, and this podcast was produced and edited in Nashville, Tennessee. If you like what you hear, please consider leaving us a review on Apple Podcasts or telling your friends about the program. You can find us online at southernliving.com, and subscribe to our print publication by searching for Southern Living at www.magazine.store.

Biscuits and Jam is produced by Heather Morgan Shott, Krissy Tiglias and me, Sid Evans, for Southern Living. Thanks also to Ann Kane, Jim Hanke, Eliza Lambert and Rachael King at Pod People.

I'll see you here next time for more Biscuits & Jam.