

Episode Title: Lee Brice's Sausage Perlo

Episode Summary: In today's episode, Sid Evans, Editor-in-Chief of *Southern Living* Magazine, talks to country star Lee Brice about his grandfather's oil tank gas grills, shifting from football to music while in college, and the stories behind his hits "I Drive Your Truck" and "Hey World."

(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, I'm joined by an artist who got lessons in cooking from all sides of his family growing up—whether it was his grandmother making biscuits every morning from scratch or his grandfather's dedication to barbecue.*

LEE BRICE: Not only did he cook old school like on a pit burning your own coals and just kind of doing it the old school way. But he also upped it and started building these big grills out of big oil tanks. but he would do all the welding, every nut, every bolt. He literally figured out how big he needed every hole for the gas burners. you know so that was a big part of barbecue and stuff like that growing up.

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *Lee Brice was born and raised in Sumter, South Carolina and had equal passions for sports and songwriting while attending Clemson University. When an injury officially sidelined his football career, he set his sights on Nashville in 2001 and slowly made a name for himself in Music City. With multiple ACM awards under his belt, he released his most recent album, *Hey World*, last year. On the stirring title track—a duet with vocalist Blessing Offor—Lee speaks for a lot of us looking for a break from it all.*

(Lee Brice's song "Hey World" plays: "Hey world, leave me alone / I don't wanna turn on the TV / ain't nothin' but bad news on / Yeah the rain can wait / For another day / This heart's worn out / It's had all it can take / Hey world, leave me alone")

Voice Over from SID EVANS: *On today's show, Lee explains how one of his aunts influenced his obsession with music, and how there's still a little sibling rivalry in the family when it comes to singing.*

LEE BRICE: Aunt Henri is the kind of the root of the music that everybody—even the sisters, all kind of sit there and wait on her to play. Then they—she'll even direct them to the day. "No, no, no, no. Laurie, you're flat. Now, you need to get—," you know what I mean? Like, it's so funny to watch them sing these songs because they still act like sisters, like to this day, and Henri will call them out. It's funny.

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Plus his dad's sausage perlo and much more today on Biscuits & Jam.

(Theme music ends)

SID EVANS: How are you doing, Lee?

LEE BRICE: I'm good. I actually uh, I just kind of signed a new publishing deal and I had a meeting with them in person for the first time and, over here at my barn. And actually, if you could see, we're on Zoom.

SID EVANS: Yeah.

LEE BRICE: And so I'm in my barn/man cave/hunting lodge/kitchen. So we had a meeting here instead of going somewhere else. And I actually decided to try for the first time myself to cook some—from scratch biscuits because I do these elk sausage, egg biscuits that I've been trying to do. But I've always done the premade biscuits. So this morning I got out the flour and the the oil and the, and the buttermilk and made my own biscuits. And so it was, it was a fun venture. So I've been up since 6 cooking.

SID EVANS: Well, how'd that go? How'd they come out?

LEE BRICE: It was good. They were a little bit crumbly. I told everybody I was like, look, these are, these are biscuits made to be eaten with a fork and a knife.

SID EVANS: Lee, we got a really good biscuit recipe I can send you if you need one.

LEE BRICE: OK! Alright!

SID EVANS: Well, Lee Brice, welcome to Biscuits & Jam.

LEE BRICE: Right? That's funny how that just worked into there, huh?

SID EVANS: Well, it's great to have you on. Where am I catching you right now?

LEE BRICE: I've got a barn that I kind of set up. It used to be just a big, shop. And when I got when I kind of got a hold of the property, I said, well, I want to put a TV in here in case I want to watch a football game. And if I'm going to put a TV, I want to put a chair. Well, if I'm going to have a chair, I better put a couch. Well, if I'm going to do that, better put a stove over there so I

can cook some dip or some barbecue: And so that's where I'm sitting out of right now. And I also have a studio in it. So I also write and record right in the same room. So it's cool.

SID EVANS: So this is on your farm in Nashville, right?

LEE BRICE: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

SID EVANS: So tell me a little bit about that farm.

LEE BRICE: One of my best friends, Dallas Davidson, he's a huge songwriter. He's written 20, 30 number ones in town. And he had this farm and he was going to go back home and write from home in Georgia. And he said, man, you ought to just get my farm. And I came to it and I said, man, I can't afford this thing. But once I got here, I just felt some kind of energy. I said, now I got to have it. So I figured out a way. I got it. And then I found out all these stories—or I actually realized about eight months later after I'd been walking the property, knew every inch of it, that actually brought my band over for the end of the year kind of pig roast. And I had, you know, kind of give them a bonus and hang out with them and let's all do that. Well, my bus driver came up to me and he said, “hey, man, this farm is—I mean, it's awesome, man. Congratulations.” I said, thanks, man. I love it. He said, “Well, I didn't know you bought the farm that we shot the videos for ‘I Drive Your Truck’ and ‘A Woman Like You’ on. And I went, “What?!”

SID EVANS: Wow.

LEE BRICE: And like, it blew my mind. And now all of a sudden all the memories came flooding back. Because when you go shoot videos, you know, you go to a random place maybe and you don't really take in where you are. You're just working and you're kind of doing what you got to do.—This farm and I connected like in a lot of ways. And now my family, my boys and my little girl are growing up in the way I want them to grow up, you know? Like, they don't talk about iPads or TVs or nothing like that. When they're out here, they're digging holes or looking for arrowheads or riding on a bike or a four wheeler or something, you know? And getting in the river, the creek. And it's a big part of my life right now. And, you know, hopefully I want to build a house on it at some point.

SID EVANS: Tell me a little bit about Sumter, South Carolina and, and first and foremost, we got to talk about how to pronounce it.

LEE BRICE: Well, it's Sumter. But there's no "P" in it. People think it's Sump-ter. You know, they're like—I'm like, well, it's sumpter, but it is Sumter. But it's S-U-M-T-E-R. So Sumpter. We

have a big Air Force base there, which I really didn't, you know, didn't connect with a lot. But it is a big part of the...the town. It's a huge—Shaw Air Force Base, —but, you know, I just grew up way out in the country and I still love to go back and my friends through high school and even past that are still some of my best friends just don't really get to see them but like once a year. So we get back at Thanksgiving and go cook a whole whole pig, or cook a bunch of chickens and, you know, barbecue. You know what I mean, barbecue. It's South Carolina. So we do it the right way.

SID EVANS: Was cooking a big part of your family growing up?

LEE BRICE: Yeah, a huge part. The biggest part of the cooking part of my life was growing up my grandparents and every day grandma got up and she made a full—I mean, from scratch, every single day, biscuits and eggs and bacon. When you were at grandmama's house, granddaddy was up at three, going to go milk the cows. And then -my daddy's daddy, Granddaddy Bryce, it was all barbecue. Not only did he cook old school like on a pit burning your own coals and just kind of doing it the old school way. But he also upped it and started building these big grills out of big oil tanks. But he would do all the welding, every nut, every bolt. He literally went through, and figured out how big he needed every hole for the gas burners. And like, he drilled every piece of them and they were beautiful, you know? And he had the secret sauce, so that was a big part of barbecue and stuff like that growing up. I mean, a lot of it is kind of for both sides of the family.

SID EVANS: And what about your mom's cooking? I heard in an interview somewhere you were talking about chicken and rice?

LEE BRICE: Oh, yeah. Well, that was my favorite.-But it's not just rice and chicken. I mean, it has some stickiness to it and some butter and like a lot of stuff that, you know, Southern—and then when daddy did it, he'd put a little sausage in it, like a little perlo and it was more like a perlo.

SID EVANS: Um, so uh Lee, in terms of holidays, I'm wondering if y'all had big family gatherings? Was that a big thing in your family?

LEE BRICE: Very big.

LEE BRICE: We lived on a dirt road called Bryson Road. And it started with my great granddaddy's house and across the dirt road, my granddaddy built a house when he got old enough and married and had all the kids and my daddy and like all his brothers and his two sisters. And then those brothers, when they grew up, they built right beside there. And so I grew up on this dirt road street of all my uncles and aunts and my great granddaddy and my granddaddy, all in one dirt road.

LEE BRICE: So we were together kind of all the time, you know, in that neighborhood. So, yeah. We had our Christmas together. You go to dinner and this and that, and grandmama cooked macaroni and cheese and Granddaddy did a big whole hog and stuff.

LEE BRICE: But then on Mama's side, she had a bunch, a bunch of sisters and she had one brother. And they sang all the time. Like they grew up singing together.

SID EVANS: Really?

LEE BRICE: Gospel stuff. And so that was a big part of that. Aunt Henri had brought the dressing and Floriana, the youngest sister, she brought these little chocolate muffins with this homemade simple custard on top of them, but it's like the—a treasure.

And daddy would cook a ham and, Uncle Al would cook a whole pig and like we would have barbecue there. And, a lot of those gatherings, I mean, we still do to this day. I go home one time of year, basically, for that. So it's almost like a big family reunion. Remember those?

SID EVANS: Yeah.

LEE BRICE: Like every five years you'd have a big family reunion. But it's like that every Thanksgiving in my side of the family. I mean, it's huge.

SID EVANS: You mentioned Aunt Henrietta and I heard you mention her another time on an interview. You were talking about her sweet potato pie. Was that something special?

LEE BRICE: Honestly, the biggest thing about it Aunt Henri, is she's the oldest sister.

LEE BRICE: When they were growing up, she was probably 12 or 13. And my mom and Judy, and then they were like younger than her and they were playing gospel songs. But Aunt Henri was the only one who played, she learned to play piano.

With so much soul and passion and delicacy and swagger and all of it. And so she taught me the very basics. A couple chords when I was like 7 years old and the very first time I sang in public, I was seven and I sang for the whole church and played on the piano, "Oh How I Love Jesus." That's where my love for music kind of started. I mean, I loved it earlier than that. I was always picking around on the piano and I just was mesmerized by being able to sit there and pick those keys and just hear those melodies in my head that she taught me how to put it in the chords and play a song. You know what I mean? But Aunt Henri is the kind of the root of the

music that everybody—even the sisters, all kind of sit there and wait on her to play. Then they—she'll even direct them to the day. “No, no, no, no. Laurie, you're flat. Now, you need to get—,” you know what I mean? Like, it's so funny to watch them sing these songs because they still—they still act like sisters like to this day and Henri will call them out. It's funny.

(Instrumental music break)

SID EVANS: Well Lee, I want to jump to Clemson for a minute. So you went to Clemson for college. You played football. And, you know, you made a pretty dramatic transition from football to music. And I just want you to talk a little bit about how that happened.

LEE BRICE: Well, it wasn't really a transition. Um, my whole life, it was football or music. I mean, when I was 10 years old, I was writing songs—I mean, seriously writing songs. In my mind, as a 10-year-old, I was very serious about what I was writing and playing and football was also a huge passion of mine because, number one, I loved it. But my daddy, you know, he played football and he was so good and he got recruited to play at Clemson, but he didn't go. He stayed home and had a family. And so I always had this thing in me that said, I'm going to play for Clemson one day. And so that kind of drove me through my, you know, middle school and high school years of really putting a lot of effort into football. And that was, you know, a humongous part of my life. I could have gone to a lot of other schools with better offers and this kind of stuff. But Clemson was where I was going no matter what. But the whole time, though, you've got to remember, I was writing songs. Even when I was at Clemson, I was sitting in the—instead of studying, I'd go to the stairwell where it sounded all crazy, up and down the hallway. And I'd sit there and play guitar and write songs for hours. And it got to be where there was this thing. People would come out and they'd sit on the stairway and study while I played for hours. I mean, there were people stacked above me up floors and all the way down floors. To where they came in the afternoons when they knew I'd be out there.

LEE BRICE: When I got hurt at football and it was kind of done and met my goal. I played at Clemson. more like a well, this was—this is supposed to happen because now it's time for me to really do what I was kind of born to do. And so I went and visited Nashville and it all just happened. I mean, it all just kept happening and so.

LEE BRICE: I know it seems like a big transition from a big burly football player to a guy singing love songs, but the truth is I was doing both the whole time, like since I was 10.

(Biscuits and Jam Theme plays)

Voice Over from SID EVANS: We'll continue with Lee Brice, after the break.

[BREAK]

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

SID EVANS: So, Lee, was that transition to Nashville tough for you? What was—what was your Nashville move like?

LEE BRICE: I was still at Clemson. I had a semester to go still. There was something pulling me. So I basically came here for the summer and lived in an apartment of this other dude that I never saw. He was just gone. But my friend hooked me up and let me kind of stay in this guy's place for the summer. And I just knew I was supposed to be here. I was writing all summer with Doug Johnson. He was a humongous part of the beginnings of everything for me in Nashville. [CUT] So he was able to really just give me a real perspective of what Nashville was and what the music business was and writing songs and all that.

LEE BRICE: At the end of that summer, I decided um I said, well, I'm not leaving. So I just—I was done. I didn't go back ever. And my friends were like, "Man, you left and you just never came back. Where are you? Like, you're missing class." I'm like, "man, I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you, I'm in Nashville. I've been here." Like... and so my parents came up. They help me cosign on a little apartment on the outskirts of Hickory Hollow, outskirts of Antioch, right outside of Nashville. I just kind of honestly just fell into Nashville and fell in love and just worked and worked. I had this work ethic of—daddy said, look, I mean, if you're going to do this, just work, you know? Work. And I didn't have a backup plan. This is what I was going to do, you know? You never know if you're going to make it as an artist or this or that. But I mean, I was writing songs and I just knew this is what I was going to do. And so it it never felt scary to me to be in this town and worrying although— it was very hard and skinny times for a very, very, very long time. I still never—I just never doubted it, I guess. You know? I just always knew at some point it was going to happen and I guess I'm still, you know, waiting on it to happen, but I think it's already happened in some ways.

SID EVANS: Well Lee, you've always been such a talented songwriter but, you know, one of the songs that you really broke out with big time was a song called, "I Drive Your Truck", which you mentioned earlier. And I'm just wondering why that song spoke to you so much and why you think it resonated in such a big way?

LEE BRICE: I mean, it resonated because it's the song that it is. They just wrote it to the wall. It's just this magic song. In fact, the day I heard it, I was there. I was almost finished with my album at that time. I was looking maybe for like one more big fun tempo rockin song. Right? I went into a pitch meeting and had 10 different publishers in town all around one big roundtable. And

we were going to go around that table three or four times and let them all play me songs. And I told them. All I need, I got the ballads, I got the love stuff, I got everything. All I need, all I want to hear is big rockin' uptempo, fun party, whatever. That's what I want. That's what I need. So that's what they did for an hour. And then the meeting was over. Rusty Gaskins, who's one of the best pluggers and just best people in this town. Pluggers as in a person who runs a publishing a company and like pitches songs to artists from his writers. He said, "man, I got this song." He said, "Do you...do you have time for one more?" And he said, "but, man, this isn't uptempo. This isn't like some," he said, "But I think it's the song of the year."

LEE BRICE: I was like, "well, OK!" So he starts to play "I Drive Your Truck." And I got through the verse. And I don't even know if I made it to the very end of the—of the first chorus and I stopped it. I said, "OK, I will record this song tomorrow. It's on hold. Yes."

It's about this father who was talking on the radio doing an interview. And they were talking about his son who had died in battle and he had died going back, trying to go back and save his friends over and over again. And so, as Connie Harrington was driving down the road, one of the co-writers on the song, she's listening to this interview and they said and the person said, "So how do you deal with the fact that your son grew up wanting to be a soldier? Right? And then he goes off in like... early into his career, he's gone. He's taken from you. How do you deal with that?" And the father was like, "You know, honestly, I actually get in his truck and I drive around and everything is still like he left it. And I feel like I'm connected to him. And I just...I just talk to him and and that's where I feel like I'm still hanging out with him."

And we called him one day, we found out who he was, we called NPR, we found out with that interview, we found his name, found out the story and got his contact and called him and let him know that, "hey, this is...this is your story. This is your story." And we flew him in for the number one party and let him get up. And he spoke about his son and spoke about the whole ordeal. And I mean, really, there's even more and more stories that go along with that song that are just kind of like these serendipitous, crazy things, like the day it went number one was like the anniversary of his death. I mean, it was just so many things happen like that. They were just breathtaking.

(Lee Brice's song "I Drive Your Truck" plays: "This thing burns gas like crazy But that's all right / People got their ways of copin' / Oh, and I've got mine / I drive your truck / I roll every window down / And I burn up / Every back road in this town / I find a field, I tear it up / 'Till all the pain is a cloud of dust / Yes, sometimes, I drive your truck.")

SID EVANS: I want to talk about your new album a little bit, which just came out last fall. It's called *Hey World*. And there's some wonderful songs on that album. And I want to ask you

about the title song, in particular, which is so timely and which you recorded with a very talented black artist named Blessing Offer. And he's been blind for most of his life. And I'm wondering if you can just tell me about that collaboration and and that song and how that came to be.

LEE BRICE: Yeah. early in, kind of, when the this whole pandemic and all kind of starting and we didn't really know what was going on and it was really kind of locked down and hardcore. I had never really done a Zoom-write. We're Zooming right now. Right? I've never done anything like that and really would have never probably wanted to because, you know, writing a song, being in the room with somebody is a whole different thing, you know, I had a date booked with with a good friend of mine, Adam Wood and Dallas Davidson. And so we decided to try Zoom to try to do it over this phone. And just like I'm sitting here with you right now and this same spot, and I just remember we were just talking and figuring out what we were going to write.

And Dallas said, well, I mean, it's I don't know about a title, but I know that this happened to me this morning and seems like it has some something in it, and he he said that that morning, about 7 o'clock, he was watching the news and his little 4-year-old son walked in and asked him—said, "Daddy, can we turn the TV off?" And Dallas was like, "well, I mean, yeah, we can, but like why? Like why don't—you know, I'm watching the news." And his son said, "because it's scaring me." And Dallas, and it just took me back. I'm like, well, heck, it's scary to see all these numbers and all this stuff and all these questions for an adult, much less a 4-year-old. He said, so I immediately turn the TV off and realized that right in that moment. So he said, all I got is this, "Hey, world, leave me alone." And "I want to turn on the TV, ain't nothing but bad news on." I said, "well, that's what we're writing."

So we got into it and, yes, it came from that moment and from what was going on, but the gist of the song, we didn't want to make it feel like it was just a part of *this* because... 10 years ago and 10 years from now, there's always going to be times in people's lives where they just—there's just too much noise and too much stuff and too much things going on. And you just need a minute to get away from it. You need a minute to, like, be quiet and have a time to either yourself or to you and your kids and that's all you need, you know? And so we wanted the song to be timely, not just timely, but also timeless. I had always thought about having another person sing on this song with me. I didn't know who it was, though. You know? I was like, I don't know who it is or why. And then Enzo, my manager, played me, randomly, because hey man, I was talking to this other manager today and he's working with this other guy and I just thought you'd love this guy's voice and what he does. And he played me a song by this guy named Blessing Offer, and all I knew about Blessing was this voice that I was hearing. I was like that -whoever that guy is, I want him to sing on this song with me. I had no idea at the time that he had been on whatever *The Voice* and he had songs out. He's done other stuff. I had no idea.

I didn't care. I didn't care if he had never done anything with anybody, ever. I was like, this guy's singing with me on this song.... And it's really special to be able to have two completely different walks of life, you know, kind of feeling the same way and singing the same thing on the same song.

SID EVANS: Well, Lee, would you mind just singing just a little bit of it, a verse or so?

LEE BRICE: Yeah, I was like, [sings] *Hey, world, leave me alone. I don't want to turn on the TV. Ain't nothing but bad news on.* You know, it's got this thing, there's a lyric in the song, it's like, all I need is right here, right here at home, you know? So I just want to sit back and listen on this porch swing and listen to the pines sing. Which I can remember sitting on the porch swing in Camden, South Carolina, when I was like 13, a guitar, and that's all I heard, was the wind blowing through the pines and that porch swing kind of creaking on the chains. And so those pictures really set—I mean, those are real pictures coming from a real moment and those were the most peaceful—at peace content moments of my life were things like that. And so I think all of us, if we could get to a place like that in our, you know, in our busy lives every now and then, I think it's probably healing in a lot of ways and just kind of rejuvenates you.

SID EVANS: Speaking of rejuvenation, I just want to bring it back to the farm for a second. You know, you've obviously been spending a lot of time on the farm and you shoot a lot of videos on the farm with your family. And it almost feels like you're making a documentary of your life. And I just wanted to ask you about that.

LEE BRICE: You know, that's really true—I've even verbalized that before where it's like with "Boy," we shot out of here. I had my daddy up here and my momma and and all my kids and let's just get a little eight millimeter old school camera and run around and film each other, and I cooked hot dogs up there on the hill by the pond and and the dogs running around. We were fishing and we literally looked back and said "These kind of videos that we're going to be doing, we got a music video out of it, but we also got like the best family footage ever, like true family footage that we'll always be able to look back on." And it's documented like a documentary like you're talking about. For the most part, it's really fun to come out here and be able to show footage or photos that are from literally from my life and from where I spend my time. So it's easy to make them feel natural because they are natural.

SID EVANS: Lee, other than biscuits, have y'all been doing a lot of cooking?

LEE BRICE: Yeah, I built a pit out here to cook, you know, like anything on, but like it's made kind of to cook a whole...a whole hog on, you know? And like like old pig—old school pig pickin, um you know? And we have—you know I do a lot of wild game, you know? We have dove shoots

and we come out and we, you know, we do all that stuff. And um and like today, I told you I cooked some elk biscuits in the elk and egg and cheese biscuits and I made biscuits for the first time, like from scratch and, you know, I think they turned out pretty good. I'm a find out how to make them a little fluffier. But other than that, I think I did pretty good for my first time. I mean, we cook a lot. My wife is amazing. She came from roots of, you know, Italian food.

LEE BRICE: So she can do all that from scratch. Immediately we got married and she started just trying things and she'd make something she's never made before. And then she's really gotten healthy. And so she'll make turkey chili instead of, but it's like still she figures out a way to make it all taste so good and she put so much love into it that everything she makes, even if it is really, really, really, really healthy. Like, somehow she makes it awesome, you know?

SID EVANS: Well, if you had to come up with a last meal right now, what would it be and where would you want to have it?

LEE BRICE: Oh, man. That's tough, but I'll probably say, you know, if I could get my family to come up here to this farm. You know, my mom and daddy and some aunts and stuff and have daddy cook the chicken and rice, but more like the perlo style. And then mama cooked my grandmother's macaroni and cheese uh and maybe some really, really good collard greens.

I know there's some meat in that chicken and rice, but a little bit of that, my granddaddy's, which is now my daddy's and mine, I've been making of that barbecue that would pretty much put me over the edge, maybe some butter beans that.... I'm good to go.

SID EVANS: That sounds like a pretty good way to go out, Lee.

LEE BRICE: Yeah, buddy, it would be. I promise.

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

Voice Over from SID EVANS: Thanks for listening to my conversation with Lee Brice. His latest album *Hey World* 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.

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We'll see you back here next week for more Biscuits & Jam