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Interview with Ron Vozar

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Ron Vozar

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Event: Interview with Ron Vozar, the interim manager of the Seventh Day Adventist Book Center and Quality Health Foods store

Place: Seventh Day Adventist Book Center and Quality Health Foods store

LF: This is Lurette Frost interviewing Ron Vozar on the 5th of February at the Adventist book center and quality health food store in Mt. Vernon Ohio

LF: Could you may be start off by telling me a little bit about the Seventh Day Adventist church and community in Knox County?

RV: The Seventh Day Adventist church has been in this community for a little over a hundred years. Probably from the late 1880s is when they started here and it started as a small church meeting in a home and it eventually started a college here. It was a nursing school, which then became a full-fledged health school. And then it eventually changed from a college campus to a high school campus, which is Mt. Vernon Academy. There are now three churches in the area. There is the church at the Mt. Vernon Academy – the Mt. Vernon Hill Church, which is the larger of the three. There is one downtown on Edgewood St. called the City Church. And then there is one in Fredricktown. So there is the three churches. We also have the state headquarters for the Adventist church in Mt. Vernon also.

LS: Could you maybe tell me a little bit about the religion, some background about the different beliefs?

RV: The basis of the Seventh Day Adventist or Adventism is a denomination. We believe the Bible from Old Testament to New Testament is one revelation of God's word and that there was one theme throughout the Bible. So God didn't change his mind through and change things. Thus, when he created the Sabbath in Genesis we continue worshipping on the seventh day all the way through time. Thus we go to church on Saturday much like the Jewish believers do. Rather than changing it to a different day as other Christian groups have done. We also believe again from Genesis that God in creating man gave a specific diet to man. When you read in Genesis it talks about the diet he gave Adam and Eve and he basically said that he gives herb-bearing seeds to be food for them or in the King James to be meat for you. So we recommend, its not a tenet in a sense that it is a law you have to be but, it is a recommended diet for man in general, mankind, to be vegetarians. Thus, we have the unique diet as being vegetarians as a recommendation for not only Adventists but for people in general. It has been like this since the 1860s when the folks first discovered them in the Bible. We also believe that at the time of Noah that God then gave meat as a part of the diet of mankind and that was in response to after the flood when the vegetation had been killed off by the flood then meat was allowed in the diet, but only certain types of food and the Bible calls them clean meat and unclean. Thus the kosher diet, as the Jewish folks call it, is something that we would hold to be a Biblical diet that folks are allowed to eat. The name Seventh Day Adventist

comes from our two major beliefs that are different, especially when they were formed. Seventh Day comes from the fact that we worship on Saturday the seventh day of the week. Adventist means that we were looking forward to the Second Coming of Christ. Those are the two major beliefs of our church. The general beliefs then are at fault within the realm of normal Christendom. We believe in Jesus as the founding father of our faith. Salvation only comes through him.

LF: Would you say that most of the people in your church are vegetarians?

RV: No, actually I'd probably say most of them nowadays probably aren't. Most of them eat vegetarian meals, but as far as being a strict vegetarian or a hundred percent vegetarian I would say that's probably less than half of the people are probably full-time vegetarians. Most of them would eat probably beef or chicken, those things that would fall into the realm of clean meats. I think that even within vegetarianism most Adventists would be considered lacto ovo vegetarians, which means they would eat dairy products and eggs. Although there are quite a few who are vegan where they eat strictly plant-based foods. Our store here tries to provide products for both types of vegetarians, those who eat dairy products and those who don't.

LF: Do you think that being vegetarian is so one can stay more healthy in general?

RV: Exactly. Adventists believe that when God created man that he had in mind that we would live in a world of happiness, in a world of joy. One of the parts of our joy is not having sickness and disease. In Eden there never was a plan for anyone to be sick or any one to suffer with various diseases or malformations. But after sin came into the world through the choices of Adam and Eve then sin came into the world, and thus sickness and disease. One of the ways in our mind that God plans for us to overcome some of the faults of sin is to live a healthy life. By doing so we can minimize the various diseases that came as part of sin. So a vegetarian diet we believe is one of those things that creates a more healthy life style. Along with vegetarianism we also believe drug use, which includes tobacco, alcohol, caffeine, those casual drug uses, which are acceptable in our cultures - we believe those things are harmful not helpful in people's lifestyles. So we believe that there are certain things that are normal activities that should happen as a part of health, which includes getting plenty of rest, sunshine, and exercise. While the diet is definitely an important aspect because it is something that happens at least three times a day for most people that we control what is going into our bodies. But our lifestyle overwhelmingly is what is going to promote good health not only what we eat but our activity levels. I think we often, like most people, understand the principles of living that out is not always the easiest thing. I think each person still suffers with the ability to sit down rather than exercise and to eat something because it taste good rather than because its healthy for you. Overall, the whole goal of Adventist Christians is to strive to do what is best, which includes taking good care of your own body through a good lifestyle.

LF: If somebody was sick would they go to a traditional doctor or would they try and change their diet?

RV: There are two mindsets within Adventism. The major goal, of course, is to live a healthy life, and thus minimize sickness and disease. But when you do get sick I think the average response is what can I do naturally or is this a serious thing or can I do something naturally. Adventists promote natural healing as much as possible. We're big on using vitamins, herbs and those things because we know often that those are some of the very basic things that promote healing of having the body help heal itself. There may be some type of imbalance or something that might help in healing. But at the same time, Adventists have a system of health of hospitals throughout the world and medical schools. In fact, Loma Linda University is one of the biggest medical universities in the United States is an Adventist institution. It was where they did the first heart transplant of a baboon into a child. While we promote natural healing as much as possible there is no doubt that Adventists promote normal medical practice also and have medical schools and doctors throughout the world.

LF: In the medical schools do they teach them the importance of herbs and diet?

RV: Definitely. I think while its normal medical school there is also the branch of nutrition. There is also a balanced teaching of nutrition and there is also the school of public health where they actually produce not medical doctors, but there more folks that are promoting good life styles. In fact we have a good friend locally whose son in law is in Guam right now in a hospital. And his job there is teaching folks how to take care of themselves through life style changes rather than just medical practices, and thus promoting the normal things we talked about like good eating habits, exercise and plenty of rest and sunshine. The basics of good health as part of a lifestyle changes in changing high blood pressure, diabetes in response to those types of diseases. I think throughout the United States and probably other parts of the world there are private Adventist institutions that teach short-term courses for folks that are more like practical nurses. There focus is on natural healing through using heat fermentations where they use hot and cold water treatments to help the blood flow, the use of herbs, the use of activated charcoal in treatment of diseases. That is an old wives treatment for poisoning, even hospitals now take poison centers who use charcoal to counteract poisoning. There are also groups who would use that as treatment for other illnesses and it's a natural treatment just using charcoal. Some things like that are things that Adventists try and promote using natural forms for treatments.

LF: Is there anybody you know that has changed their life and made it so much better by changing their diet and becoming healthy?

RV: I think personally I could testify. I was not raised an Adventist I was raised in a normal American family eating all the normal American types of foods, high fat and high cholesterol diet. I think in changing in the late 70s to a vegetarian diet my health is better because of it. But I think in dramatic ways I've had a number of friends who have overcome for example cancer treatments through the use of natural diets and natural remedies. We have a friend here in the church who had cancer of the esophagus and through natural treatment he was able to overcome some of the responses to his cancer treatments. He actually couldn't eat because the cancer of the esophagus, he couldn't get

the food to go down and if it went down it had a hard time of staying in his body. And through his natural remedies he was able to help minimize the suffering that he was having during the treatments.

LF: You said something about Loma Linda, and I've seen that name in a bunch of places. Who is Loma Linda?

RV: Loma Linda University is an Adventist owned college university, and they also have a medical school. It's in the suburbs of Los Angeles in Loma Linda California near Ontario California. It's a huge medical school, a whole huge university in southern California.

LF: There used to be a Loma Linda factory here. What does Loma Linda mean? Is it a person?

RV: Loma Linda is named after Loma Linda California. They started the medical school, and then they started a food plant. They were producing vegetarian entrees that were made from vegetable products, soybeans and wheat gluten patties. It was during the time that folks want to have vegetarian entrees to replace the meat entrees, and didn't know how to produce it so they began to can them. Then they had another plant here in Mt. Vernon which this plant actually produced soymilk. That was actually owned by the Seventh Day Adventist church through the early 80s or mid 80s. It was eventually sold to Nestles, and then it closed. Nestles moved it to another location in another state.

LF: And they were still producing soymilk?

RV: They were still producing soymilk in Mt. Vernon. Probably one of the biggest products they produced here that was actually world famous was there baby formulas that were soy based rather than cow based milk. It was for lactose intolerant babies, which apparently there are a ton of.

LF: When did Loma Linda food start?

RV: Probably in the early part of the last century in the 1900s.

LF: And the factory here, was that there for awhile?

RV: I think that started with Dr. Harry Miller who was one of the guys who developed soymilk. He was known as the China Doctor. He was a world famous Adventist who went to China as a medical missionary and was originally from Mt. Vernon. He started one of the first hospitals in Mt. Vernon that was here and is now the living center. I'm trying to speak from memory now – how this worked. He was one of the partners in that hospital, but at the same time he was soybean scientist to discover different ways of using soybeans for food and medical use. One of the things he developed was a commercial way of producing soymilk. It was from his experiments and his successes with developing soymilk that the Loma Linda milk plant developed here in Mt. Vernon.

As far as I now timing wise, it happened around World War II either right before or right after the war.

LF: Is he still alive?

RV: No, I think he died probably in the late sixties.

LF: So he was the first person to invent soymilk?

RV: I don't know if he invented soymilk, but he developed commercial ways of producing it. I think that's the way it went.

LF: Was Loma Linda a big factory, did they produce for the entire nation?

RV: Oh yeah. They actually exported their milks. It was a huge factory. I think the fact that Nestles bought them shows you that they were after the baby formula because it was a unique formula. They had plants to produce not only a liquid soymilk but they actually had huge sprayers that would spray the liquid and then dry into a powder. So they had quite a set up there.

LF: Another question kind of about organic or local foods. Is there any belief against using pesticides on you food, and how that might effect your body?

RV: Yeah, I think Adventists are as careful as possible to use organic foods. I think that is more of a personal thing. I think its stress is to be as natural a possible, but in today's world I think a lot of folks will buy what is available locally. There are some that will only eat organically produced foods, but I think you'll find that there are different levels of concerns about that. In general, I think that in every type of food or eating habits that we always recommend as natural as possible and eating foods in whole rather than processed if possible. That's the most natural form, so it's the best form. But you also find if you walk through a store that a lot of food we sell are processed vegetarian foods, and that's because a lot of folks are moving from meat to a non-meat diet need a crutch. We have a Loma Linda brand, Worthington foods, Morning Star Farm foods, and these are commercially processed vegetarian foods that are typically called meat analogues. Their meant to replace meats and their like meats. For example, we have something called breakfast links and they are an imitation sausage. In the mindsets of the health educators in our church they are meant to be a crutch to get people to move form a meat diet to a non-meat diet. To often, you'll find that people will stop midway and stay eating meat analogues as being the natural part of their diets. While they're healthier than a meat diet, more often than not they're not as healthy as going to a full natural diet.

LF: So you're the store manager here. Is that for the bookstore and for the health food store?

RV: Yes

LF: I looked up on your web page that had your card. And now is it just the book center web page, is that right?

RV: Yeah that is actually a national Adventist book centers. There is at least one in every state.

LF: Is this the only one in Ohio?

RV: Yes

LF: So what does your job entail as manager in the store?

RV: Basically I'm in charge of all the aspects of management including making sure the stock is up to par, overseeing employees, and in various departments I'm also the buyer for the products, and making sure the stock in the store. We also have other folks in the store that buy various products. I oversee the general buying functions of the store. The main function of a manager here is to actually help develop the philosophy of the store. We want to make sure that were here not only to serve the Adventist church, which is one of the main reasons we were started is to serve the specific needs of Adventists and their diets, but also to serve the general public. A lot of folks in Knox county don't realize that were here to serve them so we advertise locally to let them know that the store is open for general public consumption too. A lot of folks walk in the store and say I know you guys were here but I didn't know I was allowed to come in; I thought you almost needed a membership card to come in. But we're here for the public.

LF: How do you decide what items to sell?

RV: I think demand like any store. I think demand is definitely part of it. We base a lot of our decisions on what people are looking for or what is being produced. It's a blend of that. We try to get things that are as natural as possible that we know folks will buy. We also we'll order things in special, we'll do special orders for folks to. A lot of the time those special orders become things that end up being a normal stock item. There are so many products on the market that sometimes folks we'll find something in another store and in another state even. And if they say "hey I tried this product, It's good. Can you get it?" We get it in and we end up stocking it for general consumption.

LF: So would you say your customers are mostly Seventh Day Adventist community in Knox county?

RV: No, it's probably a really good mix. I'd say our average customer, specifically for the health food store, probably is a non-Adventist that has health concerns. Especially we have more and more folks that are discovering us as a vegetarian store and are coming here to get their vegetarian supplies. For example, I don't think there are many stores in the whole state of Ohio that would have the selection of meat substitutes that we have both in the can and the frozen areas. Let alone the pricing we do, we try to have better than competitive pricing. In the bookstore while we have a large Christian population,

the average book store person would be a Seventh Day Adventist. Just because of the concerns some folks have of what we stock, as far as fitting in with their beliefs.

LF: Do you sell any local products here?

RV: We sell some. There is not a lot that is produced locally. But for example, we supply honey that's produced in Mt. Vernon actually in Danville, Simpson's Bee farm. Some of our soybeans are produced locally. We have some of our wheat berries are produced locally in Fredricktown. The soybeans come from Gambier. The popcorn we sell is produced in Gambier. Our bread is baked locally up in Fredricktown. I guess our goal is if we find folks that produce things locally we'll definitely choose that over getting something from another area. Especially if the quality is comparable, and most of the time it is. If not superior. One of the things I'd like to say about honey is if you pour honey from a different area you also have honey that's coming with pollens that come from a different area, which can effect allergies. That's why its always best to buy honey that's produced locally because your body is used to the pollens in the area and sometimes you can have an allergic effect to the honey or to the pollens in the honey. The most natural honey is the unfiltered honey, which would also have the pollens in there. That is one of the many reasons we recommend a locally produced honey.

LF: As a community in Knox county, how do you foster the relationship you have with food? Do you have dinners?

RV: As a store we do normal things. We do advertising, radio advertising, we have sales that we promote through various means including newspaper advertising. In the business sense we do normal advertising things. In the community awareness sense we try and promote various things. One of the biggest things is support various health seminars and for example three months ago the Fredricktown Adventist church had a cooking school. They were teaching vegetarian cooking so we helped sponsored that through various ways. They taught people how to cook with out using meat. Starting in February the 22nd, the city church in Mt. Vernon is going to be sponsoring a stress seminar, how to live with a less stressful life or how to deal with stress in your life. Again we are going to do our best to support that, in promoting that. So I think that's one of the biggest ways that we try to promote these educational public events that are happening in Knox County.

LF: Does the church have, I mean do people eat together a lot or if somebody's is not so well off and it is maybe more expensive to eat vegetarian are there ways to help them out?

RV: Our church has a monthly potluck after church and that is one of the things that churches do on a regular basis. But I think more than that just in informal ways a lot of families get together. I think that is one of the things that with in the Adventist church, because of our unique lifestyle, which is different, although it is becoming more common. Vegetarianism in general is becoming more common, but in general it is different and so I think that there is a smaller community awareness within our own

smaller community that folks informally get together more often just to share recipes and take care of each other in that way.

LF: In the store are there ways, books to educate people about vegetarianism?

RV: Yeah we do our best to provide free pamphlets. We have a little, when you first walk in the door, we have a little stand set up there, which is our community reference area. We provide free recipes and we try to do that on a regular basis. Put up pamphlets or brochures that either we produce our selves or some of our food companies will produce that we provide free of charge. We also have a whole area of health books and cook books that are for sale. They are the larger variety that promote the cutting edge thoughts on things or just new ways of preparing foods, both using natural ingredients or using some of the meat substitutes that we sell.

LF: You said in Fredricktown they had he cooking class, was that an ongoing thing?

RV: Well it went on for I think six or eight weeks. It was once a week they would meet together and they would share recipes and it was a very formal thing. They had? and food demonstrations with a mirror and it was like the things that you could see. It was like the state fair where they show the guys who are doing the various food demonstrations or on TV on a cooking class. They would show you, first they would give the principles of health. Here is why we would do this, these are the things, the way the body uses foods and then here is what you can do and the types of recipes that will help respond to the need that your body has. So they went to showing the various allergies or the various ways that for example, that meat is not digested well by the human body and then here are things that you can do to help overcome that. They talked about high sodium diets, they talked about the needs of soy in our life or vitamins in general. How to get the highest vitamin contents out of your food by using foods that are more natural rather than processed. Making meals that respond to various allergies for example, if you have lactose intolerance or if you have a wheat, because a lot of our products even the meat substitutes are wheat based or soy based, how to get away from those.

LF: Is there any body I could talk to about that?

RV: No, I can get you some names. Dale Glass is one of the folks that I mentioned earlier that heads that up.

Side Two

RV: So Dale Glass is the one person who is heading that up and he is the one that I mentioned earlier that was helped by a natural diet in overcoming some cancer problems. Stephanie Howard is the other that kind of head up that, but Dale is the major person they you need to talk to about that. I could probably get you some other folk if you need to talk to people involved in that. It is actually a small group of folks that just informally have gotten together to help spear head a health outreach to the community. This cooking

school was their first activity and the stress seminar that is coming up in late February is their second. They want to do on going programs to help have health education within Knox County.

LF: Is there any thing else? I am trying to find the direction of where my article is going to go. Kind of trying to get a broad scope of the importance of food.

RV: Sure there is probably, the other thing that we see here, the average American doesn't really think about what they eat. They eat what they like. Normally what happens is that a diet gets made of a lot of processed food, white bread, high fat, meat. Adventists have discovered, based on Bible principles, that the diet should be more natural and more vegetarian. Now science has been proving this to be true. So we hear of a diet being low in meat, if not eliminating meat if possible, high in nutrients and low in fat. We are finding that a lot of folks are not discovering this, although you hear this on the news almost daily or at least weekly you hear some type of a health report, but most folks don't respond to that until they have a health problem. Whether if it is high cholesterol or they become diabetic or if they find out that they have an allergy, most folks don't respond to their dietary needs until something happens to them and they are forced to change. Of course once they are forced to change it is kind of like the old joke: to get a mules attention you need to use a 2 by 4. Sometimes the health problem is the 2 by 4 and it finally gets through to you even though folks have heard about these things over and over again. It is a health problem that helps them to realize that they need to change their life style and eating habits. So I guess what our concern is, just in general, not only as a church but also just individually, that we change not because we have health problems but to prevent health problems. No mater what folks believe, of course we believe in the holistic person. The spiritual aspect is as important as health, or more important in a sense with a view of eternity. Just to have a healthy life people should make changes in their diet and be concerned about what they eat. That to grab a piece of fruit rather than a donut, to eat foods that are healthier rather than foods that are high in fat or processed. Folks will live a more healthy life if they do these things.

LF: Do you think that people enter the church sometimes when they have had health problems and they are searching for help and a new beginning to their life?

RV: Sure, definitely that happens. We have folks that discover either through the store or a friend or even a relative who was an Adventist. And they new they were Adventist and they new that they were different but, until they had a health problem themselves they really didn't understand it. When they found out that some of our lifestyle things will help them personally, then they discover the holistic approach that we have to life. Our health aspect is only part of what we believe and that then integrates with our spiritual beliefs and finding that the basis for every thing that we believe is based in the bible. In discovering that I think that a lot of people have joined the Adventist church, because of our holistic approach to life.

LF: There are three churches and services are on Saturdays?

RV: Services are on Saturdays and each church has its own flavor. The hill church is the largest of the three, the city is the next largest and Fredricktown the smallest. Each of them are active in their own ways. They each have their own style. The hill church is more of the traditional larger church and the other two are probably a little more smaller and a little more homey. Each have small groups that meet and are very conscious about trying to bring people in and trying to fit them with folks that fit their own lifestyles.

LF: Did you grow up in Mt. Vernon?

RV: No, I am originally from Pennsylvania and moved here back in '84.

LF: Did you know about the Seventh Day Adventist community here when you came?

RV: Yeah I came here, I was already a regular member of the church and came here to be the assistant manger of this store. Then I had left and my wife and I have our own business, and then they called me back in July to come and be the manager here. They are actually going to get another full time manager that is coming. I was here as an interim manager until they get a full time manager.

LF: What is your business?

RV: We have a business called bible games company. We publish and produce bible games for Christian bookstores.

LF: Is there any thing else that I have not asked that you would like to say?

RV: We covered quite a bit. Feel free to come and talk to me again.

LF: Yeah I definitely might come talk to you again.

RV: Probably one of the things I should say is that, the things I say I am speaking as an individual. I am not an official spokesman for the Seventh Day Adventist church. I am speaking from my own experience and things that I have seen and know personally. If you need any official statement from the church you would have to talk to some one across the street.

LF: Thank you.