



Text Version of Audio Story: Jell-O

They came in waves in the early part of the 20th century, millions and millions of immigrants, people with the dream, the dream of being an American. Most of us alive today in the United States are closely related to someone who came through Ellis Island. The immigrants got off their boats and waited in line to present their papers. Their feet had landed on the soil of the greatest nation in the history of the world, a nation founded on the ideals of freedom.

As a welcoming gesture to this new land, they were given a taste of America, a taste that I think is symbolic of who we are. It was jiggly and wiggly. You could do almost anything with it, make almost anything out of it. Yeah, it sort of was symbolic. It came in almost every color. Imagine, after such a long voyage at sea, it must have tasted so good. For the first time, they were tasting freedom and for the first time, they were tasting this stuff. It looks so funny, but it sure tasted good — a complimentary serving of Jell-O.

My nephew Zane is 6 years old at the time of this writing, and one day we were sitting together eating Jell-O, and I said, “*Zane, what do you think Jell-O is made out of?*” You know, because I didn’t really know. And Zane looked at me as if I was the dumbest guy in the world, and he said, “*Duh,*” like I was some kind of moron. “*Jell-O, Uncle Nelson, is made out of Jell-O.*” What can I say to that that wouldn’t make me look even dumber yet in the eyes of a 6-year-old?

I did a little research. The story of Jell-O, I learned, is one of the best stories of salesmanship in our great history. Some guy invented the formula we know today as Jell-O in his basement, but he couldn’t figure out how to sell the stuff. He became discouraged and sold the formula to another guy for \$450. He didn’t have much luck either, at first. But then he developed some of the most ingenious sales tactics in the history of modern business. One of his many tactics was to take a team of men into a new town, slide free Jell-O recipe books under every door, and then go to the local grocer and say, “*Hey, we’ve just given a free Jell-O recipe book to every woman in town. We think you should stock Jell-O on your shelves.*” It was a recipe for success. What the guy paid a few hundred bucks for ended up making him millions.

Here are a few fun facts about Jell-O provided to us by a nice lady named Donna Smithon, from Hunter Public Relations in New York City. Yeah, Jell-O even has a PR firm.

More than three quarters of a million boxes of Jell-O gelatin are purchased daily in America.

Strawberry is the overall all-time favorite flavor.

When compared nationally, households in Utah purchase, on average, twice as much Jell-O as other households.

When hooked up to an EEG machine, Jell-O gelatin creates movements identical to the human brain.

Some flavors of Jell-O gelatin have been discontinued for obvious reasons — coffee-flavored Jell-O, chocolate, celery-flavored Jell-O.

The town of Leroy, New York, the birthplace of Jell-O, has a Jell-O museum.

Bill Cosby started as the Jell-O spokesman in 1974, making him — at the time of this writing — the longest-tenured spokesman for a brand name in history.

I've learned a lot about Jell-O doing this story. But I guess the thing that I have found to be most interesting is ... duh ... Jell-O is made out of Jell-O!

From somewhere behind the radio with the music of Johnny X, I'm the American Storyteller.