

Lucero Martínez interviewing Angelina Tallaj
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Guttman CC, New York

LM: My name is Lucero Martínez and I'm interviewing Angelina Tallaj in Guttman Community College on October 16, 2019. Do you give me permission to record this oral history?

AT: Yes

LM: I just want you to make sure that you don't have to answer any questions that you don't have to answer.

AT: Okay

LM: Where did you grow up ?

AT: In the Dominican Republic

LM: Describe your favorite meal growing up

AT: It's like a meat stew sancocho that has like plantains and yuca, and like three different types of meat... it's like... basically like a soup, like a very thick soup.

LM: Is there any significance about the food ?

AT: People consider like the national food of the Dominican Republic because I think we are the only ones that do it especially has like a type of like meat con loganiza that I think is only us who do it is like a spicy chorizo and then I think the combination of plantains and yuca and yams and all the different types of meat I think is only the Dominicans who can do it so that is the significance. It feels really ethnic... very Dominican

LM: Does a certain food remind you of loved ones ?

AT: Yeah definitely, there is a type of cake that we Dominicans call Dominican cake because it has a different texture from American cake and that usually reminds me of like birthday parties, my mom baking for me and my siblings for like birthdays so I still go to Washington Heights sometimes to buy the cake because it reminds me of my mom

LM: Is there a specific name for the cake ?

AT: They just call it the Dominican cake but like.. Yeah like when you see Dominican bakeries, that's kind what they do and then the cake is filled in with like Caribbean things like guava, pineapple, and we also have tres leches which is so very Caribbean so sometimes for birthdays, they do tres leches cakes. When I have a birthday, I still want Dominican cake or if I'm home,

my mom will bake one for me. It's like a big things for Dominicans to have like our specific type of cake

LM: Do you know how to make it ?

AT: I don't know how to make it. She usually makes it. I mean I have a basic idea of what the differences between that and American cake like our frosting doesn't have cream cheese like the frosting here is much more fluffy... almost like the frosting they do here for like merim pie so i have a basic idea how it's made but I never actually made one

LM: So it's different?

AT: Yeah, it's different from the cake here

LM: Do you have any memories in regards of preparing that cake with someone?

AT: Yes, especially with my aunt because my aunt use to sell cake for...You know.. Fast food. That's what she did to make money. So she had like...whenever I would go to my aunt's place, I would help her make cakes and she make this huge wedding cakes, birthday cakes, she always had tons of cakes in her living room, and then sometimes I would help

LM: You still do it with her?

AT: My aunt my passed away a long time ago. So I think I seen my mom make the cake lately but I don't really help too much because I only go home once a year. My mom lives in the DR

LM: What is currently your favorite meal to eat ?

AT: Still sancocho.The stew that I was telling you about but there's also another kind of stew that Dominicans make like a lot of soups and stews and things like that. There is another that we call asopao which is with rice, chicken, and like tomato base is almost like tomato soup with chicken and rice inside. I really like that too.

LM: If you could pick anyone in the world, who would you eat our favorite meal with and why ?

AT: Probably my mom and my siblings because I don't know, my husband is not dominican so even though he likes Dominican food doesn't mean the same things so with my family is like we have the same memories of the food growing up so yeah probably my mom and then I would say my siblings

LM: Is there any food that you would not eat ?

AT: From anywhere? Or Dominican food ?

LM: From anywhere

AT: There are some things that I don't like I hate cucumbers, I don't like lamb, yeah there are things that I don't too much. I'm not a very picky eater but sometimes there times that I don't like to eat chicken either. Like a little food like that. I don't like vegetables, I don't really know how to say it in English called tayoca. I don't like some of the squash, I don't like that

LM: Is there any food you don't eat because of your culture or religion?

AT: No, I don't follow any religion

LM: Are there any certain food you only eat on special occasions?

AT: I think Dominican cake is one example because I only eat at birthday parties and things like that. There's certain sweets that my family make only for Christmas time like turrone, we only eat it during Christmas times. I don't know if you know what turrone is. Is something really Spanish, something called pulvoron which is like another Spanish sweet, also just for Christmas. When we do Christmas dinner, we usually have a lot of gummy bears and things like that, that we usually don't eat at home during the year but we have it during Christmas

LM: Only Christmas ? No other events?

AT: Christmas only, just around that time

LM: Who in your life cooks the best meal ?

AT: My mom and my babysitter. The babysitter that I had when I was young. I still remember her flavors were so good

LM: Would you help your babysitter?

AT: Yeah, sometimes I would help her cook. I didn't learn that much but yeah

LM: But what did they cook ?

AT: Dominican food. She did a lot of stews and things like that but also rice and beans, and she did something that we call like arroz con pollo, the rice and chicken cooked together.

LM: Only your babysitter or both your mom and your babysitter ?

AT: My mom and my babysitter, both. Talking about food that we eat at a certain time of the year, we Dominicans do some sweet beans. I think we are the only people who have a desert

based on beans but we only do it during holiday week. It's like a holy week, lent holy week time. Nobody cooks during Christmas, it's usually March, April

LM: So it's like a religion thing ?

AT: It's not attached to religion but...well actually maybe because you know how some during lent people, catholic people give up meat so we give up meat, we use to do more like beans and the one way preparing the beans is sweet so yeah

LM: What does eating well mean to you ?

AT: Balance like having enough vegetables, not very greasy food, having basically everything like some carbs, some proteins, some vegetables, some fruit like a balance meal and not of junk food or oily stuff or unhealthy stuff

LM: Do you have a favorite restaurant ?

AT: I do actually, there is a Dominican restaurant I don't even know the name, I know is in Broadway between 161 and 162 in Manhattan, I don't know I just go there. I think it's called Tu Sabor Latino or something like I don't remember. But it has the best Dominican food.

LM: And what do you order there ?

AT: Sometimes sancocho, sometimes rice and beans like I went last night and I had a steak with rice and beans and it was so good

LM: Do you go frequently ?

AT: Yeah, like once or twice a week because I live around there

LM: How does the food you eat or cook make you who you are ?

AT: Because it connects you to my culture so like, not that I only eat Dominican food but like I feel like I need to eat Dominican food is what makes me feel Dominican, is what makes me feel part of my culture, what makes me feel part of my family. My family was also part Mediterranean so I also like Mediterranean food even though I don't cook it

LM: Is there a food that reminds you of home ?

AT: Yeah, cakes, Dominican food, rice and beans, tres leches

LM: Why?

AT: Because that is what we cook at home, especially the ones in special occasions like the cake since that was like a special location kind of thing, yeah it reminds me of home. Dominican food is really rich so anything Dominican kind of reminds me of home. Is kind of more of a Dominican thing. There are different kinds of food, rice and beans, and then pork, and then a lot of plantains. Plantains definitely reminds me of home

LM: Do you eat any type of food that is not Dominican ?

AT: Yeah I eat everything, sometimes Indian food, sometimes middle eastern food, Mexican food I love, so yeah I eat kind of everything

LM: Okay. If you could go anywhere in the world to try new food, where would you go and why ?

AT: I think I would go to Morocco because I love Mediterranean food, fish but then it would also have middle eastern influence, I think I would go there. It would be Mediterranean, Spanish, Middle Eastern, all that kind of stuff I like besides Dominican food

LM: Would you go with anyone ?

AT: I would go with my husband, I think he will have fun trying new food. We have fun trying new food together that's like one of our favorite things to do is to go to restaurants and try new food

LM: And you do it like often ?

AT: We try to, especially when we use to live in Brooklyn one day we went to a Japanese restaurant, another one was Malaysians restaurant. We would try to have taste of different ethnic foods.

LM: What is a meal or snack, you can eat all the time and not get tired of ?

AT: Rice and beans is a meal that I feel I can have everyday, plantains I feel like I can have everyday, let me see for snacks I'm not sure. I mean I love sweets so I would probably would never get tired of but I try to not to have it, you know it's not that healthy

LM: But what kind of snack would you eat ?

AT: I'm not even sure like I think I eat a lot of nuts. I like nuts, different type of nuts. I love avocado I don't know if that's snack yeah I don't know. I don't eat snack too much so it's a little hard for me to answer that question

LM: It's okay. What is the most important meal of the day to you ?

AT: For me, is noon time but here in the US is kind of hard to do. In the Dominican republic the strong meal is at noon and then people eat light dinner but here is the opposite so I still really

enjoy having a strong meal at noon but when I'm in Guttman, I can't really go have tons of rice and beans because I would get super sleepy and tired, but I would say I still feel more attached to what I eat at noon than what I eat at night. Sometimes I get home and if I have rice and beans around Guttman for lunch, sometimes I all I have is a piece of fruit for dinner or like a salad

LM: Was it hard for you ?

AT: To adapt ?

LM: Yeah

AT: Yeah, I still feel like my sister still wants to eat stronger meal around noon than at night like when I eat really light at noon, I'm so hungry for like the rest of the day. I don't know the way I grew up eating is the way my body likes to do it.

LM: How do you feel when people appropriate your cultural food?

AT: Dominican food is very popular in New York I don't know if I would call it appropriate. If I was Mexican, I would probably feel Americans appropriate Mexican food because they kind of like prepare it so differently in the US than they do in Mexico. Dominican food is not all that different than the way it's prepared here and there. So I don't know that I could say Dominican food is appropriated. It's definitely enjoyed by a lot of people here because there's a lot of Dominican restaurants

LM: So it's prepared the same way

AT: Yeah I would say in New York City it is

LM: Do you prefer food from home or fast food restaurants?

AT: From homes. 100 times.

LM: Me too. Have you ever faced real hunger ?

AT: Yeah actually when I was an undergrad, I was really really really poor. I would live for a slice of pizza for the day then just be super super super hungry and not have money to buy other foods

LM: Okay. I finished with the questions, thank you