

Antonio Ramírez interviewed by Jennifer Lucero
October 19, 2019
Bensonhurst, NY

Jennifer Lucero: My name is Jennifer Lucero and I am interviewing Antonio Ramírez in Vivi Tea on October 19 of 2019. Do you give me permission to record this oral history?

Antonio Ramírez: Yes I do.

(Claps)

JL: Where did you grow up?

AR: Uh.. I grew up in Brooklyn, New York uh-around the Midwood and Bensonhurst area

JL: Describe your favorite meal growing up?

AR: Um my Favorite meal, it was uh *torta de camarones*. It's basically a shrimp patty with a little bit of sauce on top.

JL: Did that meal have any significance to you?

AR: Uh, my grandma used to (clears throat) 'excuse me' my grandma used to make it a lot in my childhood. Uh, it was- she knows it as my- She knew it as one of my favorite meals, so whenever I used to come by she knew to cook that cause she knew I would enjoy the meal.

JL: Does a certain food remind you of loved one?

AR: Certain food? Hmm well it's always been that one cause whenever my grandma cooks t-hat meal in particular it's made with a lot of love, a lot of care and a lot of handcraft so yeah.

JL: Do you have any memories in regards to preparing meals with an elder?

AR: Uh, the only one being with my grandma uh, the- the one thing she used to only let me do was uh, kind of make the tortillas, which is like corn uh, thing uh, but yeah uh she used to like let me pat down the duo and kind of press down on it so that way it could form the shape of whatever it was and yeah that was the only thing. That was the- that was the one memory I usually had.

JL: What is currently your favorite meal to eat?

AR: Favorite meal? well- it's still the same one from my childhood honestly like I can't resist it. It's too- very good.

JL: What about um- to make? What is your favorite meal to make?

AR: To make? Uh let's see- Well honestly my cooking skills are very limited so-

JL: [Laughs]

AR: The only thing I can really make is uh eggs! so- we- we'll just leave it at that.

JL: [Laughing]

JL: Um (pauses) Does it carry any significance beyond the food itself?[laughing]

AR: Uh, I mean it was the only first thing I learned how to make so uh, the only significance i- it carries is that- the first thing I learned to do on my own so yeah I- I guess you could say that.

JL: Have you tried to make any other foods?

AR: Not in particular- unless you're including foods like ramen but-

JL: If you could pick anyone in the world, who would you eat your favorite meal with?

AR: Hm- let's see honestly it's a tough choice it's between my best friend, my mom a lot of people actually- well actually no just those two.

JL: mm- Why? And what would you eat?

AR: What would we eat- well I want to share that plate with her like it's very delicious, she needs to understand how good this tastes (pauses) and yeah

JL: But what would you eat?

AR: What would we eat- oh!-*tortas de cam*- uh the shrimp patties I was talking about earlier.

JL: Um is there any food you would not eat?

AR: Let's see- hm it's a very tough question I like all types of food most- so uh, n- I don't think so.

JL: Do you abide by any dietary restrictions because of your culture or religion?

AR: Uh, not in particular but I do have some relatives that try to enforce uh good Friday. Which is like when you're not allowed to eat uh certain meats or yeah uh meat on Fridays during a certain time period in the year I don know when, but yeah.

JL: Are there certain foods you only eat on certain occasions?

AR: Let's see special foods? Uh, there's usually uh this food um sometimes I get it for my birthday uh like my mom likes to make this meal called *arroz con mole*, which is like uh rice with uh chicken and like this little spicy chocolate sauce as its commonly referred to and usually! I get it on my birthday so I guess you can call it a special occasion meal but you know sometimes I get and sometimes I don't but it's a very delicious meal.

JL: Who in your life cooks the best meal?

AR: My grandma hundred percent best cook.

(Claps)

JL: What do they cook?

AR: Uh well the shrimp patties as I was talking about the *arroz con mole* uh to uh let's see what else sometimes it's not ev- well the *tortillas* she always makes it homemade, uh there's some families that uh they buy little packets of the *tortillas* but my grandma she makes them homemade and it's really delicious and there is a difference within it so yeah

JL: What does eating well mean to you

AR: Eating well? Um well eating till you stuff and eating like food you find delicious in particular.

JL: Do you have a favorite restaurant?

AR: Restaurant lets see um well *La Cemita* which is a- well Mexican restaurant. I usually like to order one of their Mexican sandwiches from there, it's really good.

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

AR: Uh, well I do come from uh Hispanic background Mexican in particular. I-I enjoy a lot of the Mexican cuisine and ..well I grew up only with it so it's part of my life and it's part of who I am.

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

AR: Let's see home (pauses) honestly it's almost everything.[laughs]

JL: Why

AR: Why? Um cause like anytime I eat it's just like home, you know this is where I'm supposed to be.

JL: [laughs] Do you observe certain rules or traditions in regards to(pauses)food?

AR: Observe? not in particular.

JL: If you could go anywhere in the world to try new foods, where would you go and why?

AR: Let's see uh I was thinking about going to places like japan to try um well their roman their homemade roman. I wanted to try their noodles and how that differs from like you know those kind of store bought packets.

JL: How did you get interested in that food?

AR: Uh through watching series of shows

JL: [Laughs]

AR:-in regards or regards to Japanese cultures and you know jus-just those shows the way they depict the food uh it makes it look very delicious but I'm just interested in all types of foods

JL: What is a meal or snack um that you can eat all the time and not get tired of?

AR: Hm a meal all the time? Well going back to the shrimp patties, *Tortas de camarones* always a go to.

JL: Um what is the most important meal of the day to you?

AR: The day? Let's see I usually skip breakfast most of the time even though people usually say it's breakfast I go with lunch.

JL: Has there been a time in your life when food served as a comfort?

AR: Uh served as a comfort? Uh there have been times where (pauses) well I guess you could say annoyed or also kind of known as hangry. Uh well you know like sometimes your just kind of like to that point where I think kind of food can kind of aid you to just calming down so I guess yeah to calm me down when I'm a little annoyed it kind of helps.

JL: Do you have a specific situation where that happened?

AR: A specific situation? Um not in particular.

JL: Um how do you feel when people appropriate your food?

AR: Uh appropriate? Let's see so um I mean an example I guess would be Taco Bell oh no not Taco Bell I guess Chipotle um like it kind of like industries this fast food type thing b-but it doesn't have that same taste nor does it really give the- I guess the recognition so when I guess when they appropriate I really don't like it, especially since it doesn't have that similar taste I expect.

JL: How would you feel if you couldn't eat your cultural food?

AR: How would I feel? I be kind of devastated considering like kind of makes up most of the meals I eat actually uh I mean there are some I guess well not American but like just foods that like that are kind of standard for me to eat as an American, but most of the foods I eat are from my Mexican culture so if I couldn't do that, that be kind of devastating for me.

JL: Um lastly is there anything I didn't ask that you think I should've asked?

AR: Um no I think you were fine.

JL: Ok that will be all.

AR: It's been a pleasure. Thank you for having me as a guest or interviewee.

JL: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.