

Yvonne Perez interviewed by Yesenia Ortiz

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My name is Yesenia Ortiz do you give me permission to record this oral history?

Yvonne Perez: Yes

YO: I'm going to start off with, where did you grow up with?

YP: I grew up in the Bronx, New York

YO: Describe your favorite meal growing up.

YP: My favorite meal...growing up has changed. When I was a little girl I think my favorite meal was always breakfast because I felt the need to gain energy. I always wanted a full stomach to be able to experience and enjoy my day. At the moment it's just a simple coffee can do for me now.

YO: Is there is any specific reason why you only stick to coffee for now?

YP: Yes! Because of energy...I don't know if I might be addicted to caffeine but coffee really gives me that boost in the morning to be able to get through the day. I also think coffee is such a trade mark for the morning. Also, I've noticed that if I eat healthy in the morning it makes me feel to warned out at the beginning of the day. I usually lunch now has become more of a the larger course throughout the day.

YO: Does a food that remind you of a loved one.

YP: That's interesting maybe two things I think coffee. I know it's not a food but I remember drinking my first experience with coffee was through my dad, my dad is an insane coffee drinker and I remember always every morning sitting down having my coffee with him. So, that is significant for me. My favorite cuisine is Mexican I'm Mexican decent and my mom makes killing Mexican food growing up to that really hold in to me growing up.

YO: So, beside your both parents have you anytime prepared a meal with them, or someone elderly?

YP: Beside my parents. . .yea I mean their all family related my mom the women in my family don't really cook it's more of their partners. I've had many meals where my sisters partner cook and I enjoy that. Not so much in college I would cook for myself that to the extent of it.

YO: Are there any foods that have scared you in a good way or a bad way? What food was it?

YP: I think it's not the specific that has scared me but I think eating in buffets that overwhelms my stomach. I think I love eating I love food and so when I'm in a place setting like a buffet there so many options that I just want to grab anything. I think mixing the different foods is what really bother and makes me feel sick but other than that I am a big , big fan of food and I'm okay with trying different things.

YO: What is currently your favorite food to eat or to make?

YP: So within I love, love, love Mexican food, I think specifically Mexican food I would love or just anything. Going from simple as simple as a taco just the sauces and the salsa the citrusy taste of it for me It's the best thing I could ever eat. I could eat that for days but I mean it also varies. I think I love the cuisine itself there's more elaborate dishes then take or more its vary specific or complicated I could always get myself to eat those multiple times.

YO: So, beside your heritage or nationality does it carry any significant? Does it carry any significance beyond the food itself?

PY: Oh absolutely. I think in every way the language the religiose affiliation the spiritual that is. The culture and tradition just the emblem of, colorful like I don't know, the colorful designs and decoration all around. I think it's a huge, huge problem the greatest influence of my person.

YO: If you could pick anyone in the world who would you eat your favorite meal with and why and what would you eat?

YP: The moment I'm pretty sure there is many people, but at the moment the first to comes to mind and I think I always live and stand by her is Frida Kahlo. Just I think what would I think we would have some tamales it's simple and tasty. Why just I think I would love to eat in her home in her native home her art just like her way of celebrating her culture. It's just ethnic and traditional, that would be an experience for me.

YO: I know you said very open to eat any type of food, is there any food you would not eat could be maybe an allergic reaction, could be something that a family member just maybe don't cook it right so it made you kind of to keep away from it?

YP: Yes, I think there is a specific item. Liver, I cannot get myself to eat that.

YO: Like a chicken liver?

YP: YEA, like huh it's just not good for me I can't do that. There is a specific dish, Mexican dish that I'm just not a fan of it. I think my family is from Puebla, the state of Puebla and it's a very typical in Puebla and it's called chile Relleno. I disagree large

green pepper stuffed with cheese and like other ingredients as desired but I can't get myself to eating that. I don't think I am a fan of the actually green pepper that's something I can't eat at all.

YO: I don't eat it myself but I think they do it with fried egg.

YP: Yes

YO: But they have the cheese inside it.

YP: Yes

YO: So, I like opening it up and eating the cheese or eggs on the side but I don't really like the chille.

YP: The pepper yea.

YO: Because it could be sweet but then sour at the same time but then soggy.

YP: Yes, it's messy.

YO: I think I can share that with your mom.

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

YP: No I could eat anything. I don't think it would be culture or religion I think it's health wise. I try not to eat so heavy food or late throughout my day because I try to eat more in the middle of the day where I'm most active just so that I can burn off some calories. This is something I have been practicing as I get older and my body is changing. I just need to be mindful of certain things. Also, just so you know in my family, diabetes runs heavily so I try to keep away from sweets. I am actually trying to eat no more sweets than as much just so that I can grow, and maintain a relatively healthy life as long as possible.

YO: Are there certain food you only eat on special occasions and what are those occasions?

YP: Oh absolutely! Food in the holidays, the holidays are big either it's Christmas or new year. In my family it varies typical to eat Pozole with tostadas, that's very typical thing that we eat. Día de Los Muertos coming up there's a specific pan that de Muertos that is very common that I tend to always have. Those are the ones that come to mind because of the time and the seasons coming up so, I can immediately think of those giving the upcoming of it.

YO: I know Día de Los Muertos tends to remind us of our family members who have passed. Is there any specific person that pops up into your head?

YP: Yea! Actually two days ago my mother was talking to my elder sister about creating an alter very typical, Día de Los Muertos for her parents or my grandmother and grandfather. They were specifically talking about what would go on it and I think they're going out shopping for that today. That includes for my grandpa his chocolate, he was a chocolate lover. For my grandma, she loved mangos so that's a little issue on where they will find mangos at this time of year, pero (But) it's something they keep in mind and they're very, very big on making sure they find items of food that each individually liked while they were with us, and of course the flowers of course with their candles.

YP: Candles, typical, bread [Pan de Muerto], they do it all out, all out.

YO: Oh ok, and who in your life cooks the best meal?

YP: The best?

YO: Yes!

YP: I would have to give it to my mom, she doesn't cook as much anymore because she's getting older but wow when she was in her peak and she would cook. I think her cooking made me love the cuisine so much because she can kill I don't know she was blessed with that skill of cooking I wish I could cook as well as she can.

YO: Is there any specific type of plate she cooks that you might want, that you might like?

YP: She can make some amazing, caldo de pollo which is a chicken soup. It's delicious and I love it. I can eat cabbage when it's cooked but the way she cooks it is amazing. Also, her gorditas nobody can make it like her. It's just very typical, it's laborite but she can make it so well and also, the specific octopus salad. I don't know how she dresses the salad it's amazing that I can eat it with a white rice and to all those three things that I mentioned.

YO: Any of those things, made on any special occasions?

YP: No not really, I think those are the commoners of course when one of us gets sick, Caldo de Pollo is more common. Octopus salad only on special occasion I guess because of the cost you can't always cook it all the time. I remember when I was younger, she would ask me what I would want to eat for my birthday? Octopus salad would always be one of the things, and also some holidays when I was younger.

YO: Any of these traditions or family members that have passed on that type of plate?

YP: I'm pretty sure yes, my mom have a lot of her cooking from her mother. Absolutely I think it's also very ingrained in the culture I'm pretty sure more than other people in Mexican decent can relate.

YO: So you would say it's more of a typical type of plate

YP: Yeah

YO: That any type of Mexican, any culture can say that they've had that type of food when they were sick.

YP: Exactly exactly!

YO: What does eating well mean to you?

YP: Eating well is more of having available what you think or what you want. I think it's having the availability being able to afford it having that as an option. I think that now as I am getting older, I also consider the notion whether it's healthy if it includes a balance of some of what is good for you. I think feeling satisfied after the meal.

YO: Do you have a favorite restaurant?

YP: It's Kind of hard to say I think, favorite restaurant for me would be maybe some place you visited more than others.

YO: Maybe somewhere you go for special occasions with someone.

YP: For special occasions, I think it varies at least if we are sticking to the Mexican cuisines there's like little local stand like fonditas or taquerias which is cheaper. But, there are so yummy in fact one that is coming to mind specifically I've been going more now than ever. It's like a bakery but, when you walk into the extent of it, they actually make food and they sell where they can sit down.

YO: Like in the back of the restaurant?

YP: I think there are many places like that. They might show up as just being a simple store a convenient store or like a baker but, they can have a sit-down service for you. So, I think those conditions is what I enjoy the most now.

YO: When you visited that place what would you tend to order and why?

YP: Definitely the posole it's really delicious and it comes closest to what I experienced with my mom and if I want some cheap food that's the place I go to.

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

YP: My mom always jokes that I've always been a person of good appetite, of a large appetite. I just like food and I like exploring it. I guess although my favorite cuisine happens to be the same, of the same culture I grew up with I don't shy away from other cuisines. So, that's one extant that speaks to my opening with whoever and whenever. I think it might also speaks to my celebration of culture diversity. I'm Willing to go anywhere.

YO: Is there any type of food or plate that you've eaten from other countries or other ethnicities?

YP: Yes! Let's see I like Indian food, a specific masala sauce, lamb or chicken in masala sauce. Tikka masala. I specifically enjoy pasta like gnocchi and any like tomato sauce. I love sushi. Something that has been growing is ramen not the cup of noodles but the Japanese style which is amazing.

YO: Is there any, one of those plates that might slightly remind you of someone, someone special or maybe from home?

YP: Yes, I think the ramen definitely because when I was younger my dad used to eat Chinese food and he would always put me out on to that. That spot until this day I still always go or if any one I know wants to go there, that's where I usually go. So, I think that's a very influence of him.

YO: Do you observe certain rules or traditions in regards to food or drinks why or why not?

YP: No, I love my pork. Maybe just food and drinks if I drink a soda it has to be diet just no sugar given because of my family grew up drinking all diet stuff since everyone in my family was diabetic.

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

YP: India oh my jeez, definitely India. I love their food absolutely, and it's amazing and the culture.

YO: What is a meal or snack you can eat all the time and not get rid of?

YP: Meal, snack? I like chips, I usually like the regular chips like the plain ones because I grew up eating it with hot sauce on it and squeezing some lime.

YO: What is the most important meal of the day?

YP: At the moment it's lunch. A food that it can get me through the day and give me energy because I am most active in the middle of the day.

YO: What do you think about fast food and how often do you eat it?

YP: Oh my God I know I should not eat it but, I just like the taste. I think one specific I've been eating more now than ever is [laughs] a McDonalds recently opened by my house where it's right there right by the train station and so, whenever I am craving something and whenever I want to get something quick those fries I just go for it.

YO: Have you kept any traditions?

YP: From what I grew up with?

YO: You could say from what you grew up with, with the persons you grew up with maybe by your ethnicity.

YP: Absolutely, I think I'm a huge. I am a social worker so in my training is been taught that individuals often influenced by their environment. I think everything that I come across with or experienced or have witnessed has remanence of in the person I am who I've become or who I want to be. Just going from the Bronx being the poorest count in the country it's something that pushes me to improve myself and excel. But, I still love it regardless of its statues or how it express.

YO: How do you feel when people appropriate your food? Meaning like taco bell?

YP: Oh my God it's the worst. I never, I hate tex-mex food I hate it, I hate it, I hate it. I will not enter these on quote on quote Mexican restaurants and if it's not, I don't find it to be authentic or have some sort of means. I definitely support those who are Mexican owned locations, because not to say people out of the ethnicity cannot replicate Mexican dishes. But, I think there is a level of authenticity and love and passion for it because that comes from someone who grew up in that group and in that culture to be able to share that and plus I just enjoy supporting that community and invest in spending money in their business that is something true to me.

YO: Alright thank you very much for yout time.

YP: It was a pleasure.