

Oral History Collection

Max Marquez

Interviewer: Morgan Koiner

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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Morgan Koiner: Good evening to anyone who is listening. My name is Morgan Koiner, and it is currently 6pm in Denton, Texas on May 1, 2024, I am excited to introduce you to Max Marquez. Max has been working in the food industry for around four years now. And he has a passion for not only cooking but serving delicious food to friends, family and customers. Max, thank you for being here today with me. The first question I want to ask you is where are you from?

Max Marquez: Thanks for having me. I'm from Dallas, Texas. I was born in Abilene, but I was raised in Dallas. It's a great city. Great culture, awesome. Food. It's deeply influenced me for my love for food and cooking.

Morgan Koiner: When did you become passionate about food? And did anyone in particular teach you how to cook?

Max Marquez: I've been passionate about food, cooking for as long as I can remember. My grandmother played a significant role in sparking that passion. From a young age, I'd watch her effortlessly create

awesome food. She had her own recipes. They were passed down from her grandparents and their grandparents. She always invited me to watch her cook and learn and always offered to teach me traditional Mexican dishes and techniques. And she kind of instilled that love for cooking in me.

Koiner: And what was your childhood like growing up?

Marquez: My childhood in Dallas was very vibrant. I grew up in a close knit family. We had a pretty true, I wouldn't say traditional Mexican heritage. My dad was Mexican; my mom was white. And my grandmother, who's my dad's father, was the heart of our home, she was always around. She took care of me for months when my mom couldn't afford daycare. And her kitchen was always busy. I have a lot of memories of going over and staying weekends with her and just eating awesome food, watching her cook. My parents would always leave me with her because they were working hard to provide, and they would save money on just leaving me with her. My grandmother kind of instilled a deep appreciation for our culture in me and tradition. We had tons

of family gatherings with so many people. Too many people remember too many cousins' stuff like that. I really enjoyed my childhood.

Koiner: And I want to ask you something about that. You mentioned that your mom is white on your mom's side of the family. Right? Um, did she also do you know if she also learned any dishes? A part of your Mexican heritage on your dad's side? Or do you know anything about that? No, definitely not. No. Okay. Um, what about your community? What was your community and neighborhood like outside of your family?

Marquez: Outside my family community Dallas was a mix of different cultures and backgrounds, a lot of diversity. I grew up in a neighborhood that had tons of people from different parts of the world and different cultures. It was very different, I guess. Everyone was different. So, there was a lot of, just -- it's kind of just a melting pot. I really enjoyed being a part of such a diverse community where everyone brought something unique to the table.

Koiner: Um, did you know any of your neighbors that you lived by or anything where you close with them like any friends, families that you learned from?

Marquez: My childhood friend Jason, I grew up from him across the street, and he has a very traditional Mexican household. Both of his parents are immigrants. So, it was just whenever I went over there, it was constant Spanish being spoken. Always Mexican food, nothing anything, nothing else. But he was really the only person I was close with in my neighborhood.

Koiner: Okay, um, you mentioned your grandmother and her family being from Mexico. Does anyone in your family make any traditional dishes or special dishes for holidays, birthdays, anything like that? That, you know of --?

Marquez: Um not on my mom's side. But on my dad's side, it's my grandma. She would always make traditional Mexican dishes for family gatherings, celebrations birthdays. Like I said, the recipes were passed

down from generations. Like for holidays and birthdays, we prepare stuff like tamales, guacamole, pozole, enchiladas. It was a very easy way to kind of connect with my family. But yeah, when I was with her, or whenever we were over there, Mexican food was very, that's all we would eat.

Koiner: Okay, and I wanted to ask you what was the first job that you had?

Marquez: I got my first job at 17 working at a local Tex Mex restaurant in Dallas. I started out washing dishes, food prep. But I really enjoyed the fast-paced environment quickly. And then I took the opportunity to learn from experienced chefs, and it was the perfect introduction to the culinary world.

Koiner: How did your career or job skills change over the years?

Marquez: Let me think. I mean, they've changed quite a bit starting out as just as kind of a kitchen assistant

doing a lot of the grunt work. Like washing dishes and food prep, once I gain more experience and confidence, so I took on more responsibility, heavy roles, like line cooks. But along the way, I honed my culinary skills. I learned a bunch of new techniques and kind of develop a strong sixth sense in the kitchen.

Koiner: First of all, I wanted to ask you, do you know what sustainability is? Yeah. Okay. Um, in any of the jobs, food jobs that you worked at, did you or the company practice any sustainable ways of living? I guess I wanted to ask that because I feel like it's pretty relevant in the 21st century, you know, a lot of people are starting to be sustainable in like, for example, less plastic, like paper straws, things like that. So yeah. Did you or your company practice anything to be more sustainable? Or do you know anything about that?

Marquez: Absolutely. Sustainability is really important in the culinary world, and the restaurant where I work, we take it seriously. We focus on reducing food waste, managing inventory, utilizing all the

ingredients we have we sourced locally whenever possible, just kind of help local suppliers and stuff like that and reduce our carbon footprint. We also try to use sustainable practices like energy efficient equipment, ecofriendly packaging. It's all about just doing what we can to do reduce the waste and make the planet greener.

Koiner: Yeah, I like that. That's great. Um, and speaking of waste food waste in particular, what are your thoughts on all the food waste that we see from, you know, like, fast food chains or restaurants? What do you what are your thoughts on that is specifically about the food waste in America?

Marquez: I think food waste in America is pretty, it's a pretty significant issue and needs to be addressed. It's sad to see just a bunch of food go to waste when there are people in our community and where we live that don't have access to food and stuff, just good food, clean food or just food at all. Let me think. We just try to have a creative menu that can use all the ingredients we have that way we don't waste anything. And we partner with local

organizations to donate the food that we don't use to those in need.

Koiner: And something else I'm curious about is have you ever witnessed yourself seeing food waste, whether it was like someone at a place of work that you were in or someone else? Like have you ever seen food waste, like witnessed that before?

Marquez: For sure. I feel like that goes for anyone working in a kitchen. It's just there's always waste in general. But it's all about mitigating how much waste there is.

Koiner: Right, okay, so I have kind of a fun question. I was wondering if you could work at any restaurant in the world? Where would that be? And why?

Marquez: Let me think. If I could work in any restaurant world, it would probably be a Pujol in Mexican a Mexico City. Chef, Chef Enrique Olvera. I don't know if you know him or not. He has a pretty innovative approach to the Mexican palette and Mexican cuisine. Not to mention, I just love the

opportunity to learn from him and his team and just kind of immerse myself in the culinary scene of Mexico City.

Koiner: Okay, and are there any chefs in the industry that you look up to? And if so, why?

Marquez: Let me think for a sec. I'm trying to wrack my brain here.

Koiner: That's okay.

Marquez: One chef I have in mind is Jose Andres. He has a pretty strong commitment to using food as a force for good I guess. He does a lot of humanitarian efforts. He has a really innovative approach to cooking. He's not afraid to push boundaries in the culinary world. And I admire his passion for making a positive impact in the world through food. Plus, he has a really diverse culinary background and a really significant creative flair. That makes me kind of drawn to, to him.

Koiner: Okay, um, what would you say are the greatest challenges you've faced in your life so far?

Marquez: Let me think, I think one of the greatest challenges I've faced in my life is kind of finding my identity and having a balance like two different cultures or just being biracial. Being Mexican and white and kind of balancing being having family from Mexico and me also being born in America. Growing up, I kind of felt torn between two cultures and just had to kind of figure out where I fit in. It took a lot of time and soul searching, to embrace and kind of accept both aspects of my identity. Also, just pursuing a career in the culinary industry has had its challenges from long hours in the kitchen to just how fast paced and competitive it can be. But I feel like these challenges, challenges have also been an opportunity for growth and learning.

Koiner: Right. What do you envision for the future of the food industry? And how do you see yourself fitting into that?

Marquez: Um I can't I guess I dream of a future where the food industry completely embraces sustainability. There's also an aspect of just inclusivity and diversity. Because I mean, with a lot of Mexican restaurants, the kitchens there are typically also just Mexicans like myself. I feel like there's room for people of other colors to kind of come in and give their own take on it because it makes it more unique and just kind of rounds it all out. Not to mention where we're not only getting our food supplies or just ingredients we have or all that stuff from these big companies that are all over United States that are kind of just like the Target or Walmart of food supply and kind of have a more a bigger focus on buying locally. Because it opens the door for these local places to kind of compete with these big national food supply chains like Cisco. I guess I see myself fitting in with just sharing my passion for cooking and having other people be inspired by me to make a positive change. Just in the way we eat and just interact with food and promoting sustainability and all the important stuff like that.

Koiner: And I have one more fun question for you. If you had to only eat one dish for the rest of your life, what would that be? And why?

Marquez: I guess just like steak, street tacos. I don't know, hard choice to make.

Koiner: That's a good answer. Well, Max, I want to say thank you so much for taking the time to speak to me today. It was a pleasure to get to know you and learn more about your life and your passion for food.

Marquez: Thank you

[End of Interview]