

Oral History Collection

Alejandra Ortero

Interviewer: Ava Ramos

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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Ava Ramos: Okay, today is Tuesday, May 7th at 6:30 p.m. My name is Ava Ramos and I'm interviewing my friend and my roommate, Alejandra, if you want to go ahead and introduce yourself.

Alejandra Ortero: Hi my name is Alejandra Ortero, I am 22 years old and I go to UNT, currently living in Denton, Texas.

Ava Ramos: All right, yep that's where we live [laughs]. So Ale, tell me about -- who are you and where are you from?

Alejandra Ortero: Yeah, so, I am a senior now after these finals now I'm a senior now in college. And I am from Garland, Texas which I've lived almost my whole life. Garland is just very diverse, within minority culture. I know in high school like I would go to like, or like the minority was white people. And there was a lot of Asians, a lot of Mexicans, a lot of Black people and then I also lived a little bit in Pleasant Grove till I was about 4 or so. Which is also very predominantly Mexican and Black. And then I also spent a lot of time in East Dallas which also felt very, very Mexican, a lot of Hispanic culture was there too.

Ramos: Okay, yeah I knew you're from Garland. I knew that cause you went to the high school there, so can you tell me about your parents and then where are they from?

Ortero: Yeah! So my mom, my parents are both from Mexico, my mom is from San Luis Ciudad Valles, San Luis, which is in Mexico obviously. And then [coughs] sorry, my dad is from Zimapán Hidalgo, which is just about 6 hours, so it's about a 6 hour drive for both of those places. And yeah, it's, Valles -- Ciudad Valles is very hot, and it's funny because Zimapán is very cold, so whenever we drive up there it's, we always get it, allergies because it feels like the seasons are always changing for us so yeah.

Ramos: Yeah that's real, so how does food differ from your mom's culture -- and does she live in the hotter or the colder area?

Ortero: So my mom was in the hotter area.

Ramos: The hotter area.

Ortero: Yeah.

Ramos: So yeah, how does that differ from like your mom in the hotter areas and then your dad in the colder area?

Ortero: Yeah so it's, it's funny because in the mornings and at night with my dad's hometown it's very cold, but during the afternoon it's very hot. Surprisingly, they both kind of lived the same way. And by that I mean by acquiring their food, but they both lived in this little part of Mexico which is called la Huasteca and it consists of three states which is San Luis, Hidalgo, and Veracruz. And obviously we all have every region has their own different taste, and food and stuff but what's, what was different I guess, what I noticed is like with Zimapán there was a lot of heavy foods containing a lot of flour, containing a lot of I don't know what, maybe dough, yeah I was gonna say like masa.

Ramos: Like heavy.

Ortero: Yeah it's very very heavy with dough and flour. Well as with my mom's side in Ciudad Valles in San Luis it's very light. It's more so stuffed with more meat rather than it being stuffed with dough.

Ramos: Okay I see. So how does their food differ in Mexico that they had versus here in the United States?

Ortero: It actually differs a lot. Over there everything tastes very authentic [laughs].

Ramos: [laughs]

Ortero: Not to, not to --

Ramos: Not to trash, but [laughs].

Ortero: But it just, it feels very fresh, and that's something that my dad will literally lay his life down on. Everything is just very fresh, everything is very locally sourced.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And it's also very, in the United States is very greasy.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: While as in Mexico it's very, it's greasy but it's like a natural grease in a way.

Ramos: Yeah, it's a little bit easier to digest.

Ortero: Yeah, exactly so, so yeah that's like the big difference between Mexico and the United States. As well as just like the quality of the food is just also very different.

Ramos: Mmhm, yeah. So do you have any examples of dishes that you've had, like, dishes that were, like, in Mexico

and then also the United States that you've noticed
a difference in?

Ortero: Mmhm, so there's this very popular dish in Ciudad Valles, which is called zacahuil. I actually have it in the freezer right now [laughs].

Ramos: [laughs]

Ortero: And it's basically like -- what is it? It's kind of like garbanzo beans almost. Or just like, it's not garbanzo beans but it's the ones you use for pozole.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And it's like a lot of meat, and it's very spicy. And I've tried it both here and over there.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And obviously, thankfully there's like, there's very hardworking people who try to bring a, you know a taste from home to the United States.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: It just differs a lot because, just like, the amount of seasoning is sometimes not right.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: It's just like very little touches, that make it very different from --

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: From what I'm used to at least. And then also another example, at least from my dad's side is barbacoa. And, what's it called, it's -- I don't know what it's called, I'll just stick with barbacoa for now. And it's basically, like over here it feels very heavy with grease, and it also feels like a little bit overcooked in a way. While as over there it's very, it's homemade it's like, it's, a lot of the things that people say is that they, they kill the animal the day of.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And so that's what, I'm very used to the taste of that. So, yeah.

Ramos: Yeah, I do notice the taste difference when I have food that's like homemade, versus --

Ortero: Yes.

Ramos: From a restaurant or something. And so how, does the way that your family acquire food, how does that differ from when they were younger, when they were in Mexico, versus now like with them in the United States?

Ortero: It's very different because both of my parents got their food from basically from their backyard or from their neighbors backyard. Starting with my dad, like my dad had a, had like his dad was a gardener slash farmer in a way. Growing up he, like, they had the stand where they sold elotes and that's a very popular snack yes within Mexican culture as you know.

Ramos: Yes.

Ortero: So they grew the corn from their own backyard, and also a lot of vegetables a lot of that. And then the meat would come from their neighbors.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: Their neighbors had like a barn, and they would raise and obviously kill like piggies and cows and stuff like that. And also, whenever he came over here to the United States he worked at a milk, milking farm

--

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: I remember --

Ramos: Oh, I didn't know that.

Ortero: So yeah. So it was just all very local and stuff. And same for my mom, my mom, she, growing up, had, like, a farm.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And it was, we call it a guerta. Which is it's kind of like a farm --

Ramos: Yeah, mmhm.

Ortero: But it's like, it's very green. And then with -- they raised like cattle, they raised a lot of sheep and stuff, and they -- and my grandma she would, she would sell the cattle for money.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And then my mom she always told me growing up how she would just, she's very into fruits.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: So she told me the reason why is because growing up she would climb the trees, and the trees would provide a lot of mangoes, and a lot of oranges, and a lot of fruit. So it's funny because my dad was more so with vegetables, and my mom was more so with fruit. So, it differs now with them being here because it's all from a grocery store.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: You have to go into this air-conditioned place, and over there it's, there's also -- What's very famous there's, yes there's grocery stores, but there's also a lot of meat markets which are out in the open. And every time we go out there it's, you know where it's coming from, you know the person selling it is, it's coming from their backyard.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: Or it's coming from their neighbor's backyard, or their grandma's farm of whatever.

Ramos: Yeah, yeah.

Ortero: So, it's very, like locally sourced. And I guess what Americans would call, what is it, farm to table?

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: Produce, I guess. That's very common over there, and obviously was a lot more common when they were growing up. Rather than now which is you know everything comes from Walmart everything comes from California basically.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: So, yeah, that's how it differs, I guess.

Ramos: So since family was like a big, not family, food was a big part of your family, how did cooking, what

world of cooking play into your family when you were younger?

Ortero: Yeah, so it's like obviously in Hispanic culture the woman always cooks and the man is always outside [laughs]. And, but it's obviously cooking came from a necessity as it always does. You have to feed yourself, you have to feed your kids, and you have to like feed your husband or whatever. So it came from a -- it started from a place of necessity but, it also came from a place of care, and love. My mom, she, she -- I remember every time she would put the food down and she would make, she would start serving food for herself and my dad would always be like "All right guys 1, 2, 3," and we would all chant "Thank you Mom!" For the food because we just wanted to be very helpful, or not helpful, but like very validating.

Ramos: Sweet.

Ortero: Yeah, very sweet with her, just very thankful that she made us this food. And that, recently we had a talk and she told me that, like, that was what really kept her going, whenever she was struggling at least. Because, yeah! And it's just, she, like

I always say, comes from a place of deep, deep care because she's a teacher, she works very long hours, so for her to just come home and not be able to rest cause she has hungry kids, and she has a hungry husband. It's, it's, I feel like that's a very caring language for her because it takes a lot for someone to do something like that for her family. And, yeah it's just it's it comes from a place of love, necessity, and care as well.

Ramos: That's so sweet, that was actually so cute. Okay, well I was just about to also ask, what are some of your earliest memories that show your love of cooking?

Ortero: So, before I decided I guess my path of life being media arts. My, my path of life that I chose when I was at least like 12 or so was cooking. I wanted to be a chef, and um, and so I don't know where I was going with that. Could you, sorry, could you ask the question again? [laughs]

Ramos: Yes, okay you're good, what are some of your earliest memories that show your love of cooking?

Ortero: Oh earliest memories yes.

Ramos: Thats okay! Thats okay.

Ortero: [laughs] So um, yeah like I said I was a culinary major before this. And this was, now I know, this was because, I because I always saw my mom giving us this food out of a place of love. I wanted to take that like, take that weight off her shoulders in a way. Even if it was something super small, even if it was something super minor I wanted to help her out. And I think when I was like around 8 or 10, I didn't really know how to cook. But! I wanted it -- in the way I wanted to be thankful to my parents and with that I make them breakfast in the morning. Without knowing how to cook I just put like little cookies, and like little coffee. And I would, like, surprise them while they were in bed, and I was like, "I made breakfast!" And I would always wake up because we always had breakfast at like 9:00 in the morning. I would always wake up at like 7:30 in the morning, start making my quote unquote 'breakfast' for them. And then put like a little flower because my dad always got my mom --

Ramos: Oh my go -- [gasp].

Ortero: [laughs] Yeah my dad always bought flowers for my mom, so like, I would just put like a little flower in there. And, and be like "Hi, like, I wanted to give y'all --" like you know "You don't have to get up because I made breakfast already." And then also whenever she would make lunch, or I guess brunch in a way. I would always just be with her, and look at her, and talk to her obviously. But it was always to see what she was doing, and I'm a very visual learner, so it was also a way to learn. And I didn't really want to tell her about that, so I was just trying to like, catch everything she was doing. And that way I can surprise her, and be like "Look I did this, I did this myself." So, yeah and also whenever I was younger one of my favorite dishes as a kid, as it is for a lot of kids, was hot dogs.

Ramos: Yeah, oh, I love this.

Ortero: Yeah [laughs]. So, I would buy a composition book during school. And I did that for my mom to teach me how to make recipes and I wrote them down. And I had like this existential crisis as a kid where I realized my grandma's going to die, my mom's

going to die, everyone's going to die [laughs] and, and, and. So I need to preserve these like recipes of love --

Ramos: Oh my gosh.

Ortero: And of you know like the culture. And obviously I started with the most American thing ever, which is hot dogs. But that was like the very first dish I learned. And that's probably why I will always like be, very endeared towards hotdogs [giggles]. Because it was the first dish I learned how to make, and it was the first thing that I, um -- It was basically like one of the first things I learned how to do dinner wise.

Ramos: Like independently too --

Ortero: Yeah!

Ramos: Like that's a big moment.

Ortero: Exactly yeah, I just wanted to show my mom like "Hey, I can do this myself. And I can do this to help you out. And even as I grew older --

Ramos: [coughs]

Ortero: Um, I, I was always the one who would make dinner for the family to help my mom out because I knew she was tired. And since I'm older and I know how to

make more food than I wanted to help her out, so yeah.

Ramos: That's such a beautiful answer, that was so sweet.

Ortero: You -- [laughs]

Ramos: So -- what about your anything that has to do with food and the holidays? What was food like in the holidays for you? Or where did food come up?

Ortero: Oof, it always came up [laughs].

Ramos: [laughs]

Ortero: We don't really celebrate Thanksgiving the way Americans do. But we like, we always try to have people over. With people over this is what my mom always taught me, if you have people over, you have to have food. And so she would spend hours cooking and she would never ever ever make turkey because she said it was too dry and I thought it was dry too. So we would make rotisserie chicken [laughs].

Ramos: Real.

Ortero: It was the next best thing. And she would always make different recipes and try to learn different recipes. Not only to impress the family but also to be like "I made this, this is what I bring to the table." Literally.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And then, the most predominant thing that I remember in the holidays is Christmas. Christmas is my mom's birthday, the 25th. So we would always go to Mexico, and my godmother she would make a big big like food for us for the whole family. And, and it was just she loves cooking. She would never made it like a career though, but she loves cooking and that was in a way it was her way of also saying "I love you guys, here's some food." Like "Here's what you can stuff yourself with." So, and that was just always like a thing, however, around like 2008 or so, 2010. The Narcos came, really, really bad. There was a lot of slaughtering's, a lot of beheadings. And my family didn't, because they had like an 8 and a 10-year-old kid, they didn't want to risk their lives so um -- So instead, we had Christmas in my grandma's house. All of the, my mom's relatives that lived in the Us, we all got together, and we made tamales from scratch. And that is just something I will never, ever, ever forget because we made so many that it lasted us until like February. And, which is great! Because

we celebrate a holiday called dia de la Candelaria.
While basically the story behind it is if you get
the baby Jesus from the rosca de las reyes --

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: Then you have, you have to make the tamales, and you have to make a party. So what would good is we didn't have to make them from scratch because we already had them from scratch [laughs].

Ramos: [laughs]

Ortero: From Christmas. So yeah, but it was just a, it was just. We all pitched in like all the aunts, all the uncles, and my dad as well. Um, the husbands and the wives. They all pitched in and we all just had like this massive feast, and it was just like, I was there with my cousins, and my sister. And it was, it's just such a fond memory for me because it's like it's a place of unity. It's a holiday for the family, and they've always been for the family in my case and so having this first Christmas not being in Mexico is like. Was very special because it was just, I truly felt connected with the family. Like no one -- like people got mad, obviously, but no crazy family drama was

happening. And it was, it was just really nice it just felt like really nice to be there with all of them.

Ramos: That's so sweet. Ok that was a perfect ending, we can do part two in a few.

Ortero: Yay!

Ramos: Yay!

Ortero: Sounds good.

Ramos: Let me -- [recording stops].

[recording starts]

Ramos: Ok, so going back to your parents, and your grandparents. Could you tell me about how your parents' childhood was when they were younger, and they were in Mexico?

Ortero: Yeah. So my, I'm going to start with my mom. My mom's dad, so my grandpa, he came to the US in the 20's maybe like, no sorry like the 30s I'll say, 1930. So man's lived, man saw the Great Depression. And so he would always send money, always, it was always \$20 back to Mexico. Which is a lot of money back in the day, but that's what he would send to the family and then -- but my grandma, she realized

it wasn't enough. So she got herself to work, and that's how she acquired the farm, and she was also a seamstress. So my mom always talks very fondly about her childhood, because she said in the earlier days before the the farm and before the other jobs. Sometimes they would have just like a little bit of meat, to like my grandma will have just a little bit of meat to like put in the food and she had six kids to feed. So she would make, she would always talk about this like potato soup where she would chop up a bunch of potatoes, because they were very fulfilling. And she would put very little meat, the very like leftover meat that they had. And that was like, they're, like that was their way of eating. And it was, they were poor but my mom said that she didn't feel poor because of how much she ate, and obviously potatoes were locally sourced from outside. And so, it was very, it was very like, how do you say it? What's the word? It's -- it was very fulfilling in her eyes. And my dad he grew up a lot more poorer than she did. So there were times that he would say that like he wouldn't eat, and there was times where

like they couldn't afford to eat. So that was very unfortunate obviously, but when they did eat he would always say that like my grandma would make the best of it. She would always say, she would always say "We don't have food today but we will have food tomorrow." And so it was just a way to look forward to the next day because yeah being poor is not easy, and I learned that a lot through my dad. And so it's very hard obviously hearing your parents say that, but seeing how much they overcame because of it's, it's very motivational too. And then also because once he left to work here in the US he obviously he was illegal, so a lot of the jobs were very under the table. He's a citizen now, so --

Ramos: Disclaimer! [giggles]

Ortero: Disclaimer! [laughs] He's a citizen now, but a lot of his earlier jobs when he was here was very under the table. And he was like "I starved, but at least my family didn't." Because he would send that money to his family in Mexico. So it was, food played in a way where it was surviving, but it was also like "Hey I'd rather sacrifice myself because I'm young,

and I can live, but you're older and your kids are younger so let me help you out." So yeah.

Ramos: That was so sweet. What about for -- so your grandma had a farm when your mom was younger, yes? So what was your grandma's childhood like before she had her farm?

Ortero: Yeah, she actually lived, the way San Luis is, is made is like, there were obviously before the roads , and before the railroads happen the -- There was a lot of like mountains, and a lot of like, we call them Cerros. Which is just basically like, bigger than a hilltop, smaller than a mountain. And so my grandma she used to live at a lake on top of the Cerro, and this was before she met my grandpa because when she met my grandpa they moved over to Cuidad Valles. [coughs] And so, she grew up very, very, very poor, she was 18 in the 30s so that gives her what, like -- she was born, like, the 20s or the 10s, 1910s. So yeah, the woman has lived a lot of years. But she lived during the time when family was made, like people would make kids to have employees. So she had like five brothers and sisters, and every single one of them was in charge

of something, like something to do around the house. Her thing was to do the dishes, and, and to also feed the chickens. So she did have a farm growing up too.

Ramos: Oh, okay.

Ortero: So the reason why she like bought the farm was because she was like "Well I know how to --"

Ramos: You know how to do it.

Ortero: Yeah, so she was like "I got this, I got this in the bag." And then her sister was in charge of making the clothes. And so it, it just she came from a place of poverty, but it's kind of like how my dad lived where it was like "We don't have food today but we'll have food tomorrow." And sometimes they would even kill the livestock beforehand just to have some food. So it was very tough, very tough for my grandma. But, but! She learned that to not make the same mistake, or not live that same way with her kids. Cause she grew up thinking, were poor, we're da da da da da. Whereas, she made her kids grow up with "Were okay, were fine, were not poor. We're not rich though! But were not poor." So yeah.

Ramos: That's perfect --! [audio cuts off] Okay. [claps] Part 2. Okay, okay so the next question is what is cooking for you?

Ortero: Cooking for me. Well as always it's a necessity [chuckles]. It's, I have to feed myself, one way or another. However, for me it's, I guess it's like the way I interpret it with my mom was the way I interpret it with myself. I know when we first moved in, I would always ask you "Hey do you want some food? Hey, do you want this?"

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: And that's like my way of saving like hey, let's bond, let's get closer.

Ramos: Yeah.

Ortero: So it's like a love language for me for sure. Because acts of service of course. And it's just, it's a way for me to say, at least in my opinion, it's a way for people to say, "I love you, I'm sorry" it's a way for people to communicate.

Ramos: Yeah, yep. Because we Mexicans are not good at communicating [laughs].

Ortero: Mmhm, no. Like me and my mom would always get in a fight, and then she would just like make me food and I knew everything was okay.

Ramos: Yep.

Ortero: Yeah and especially if it was my favorite food, oh I knew everything was definitely okay. So it was, it's just that, it's for me cooking is a way to express myself without using words. And it's the easiest way to express myself without using words. So yeah, it's, it's love it's care it's a love language.

Ramos: That's so sweet. So you wanted to attend culinary school, so what led you to that conclusion?

Ortero: Yeah, I as a very, very, young kid I -- I was always job hopping, career hopping in a way I was young I didn't really know what to do. At one point I wanted to be a masseuse, at first I wanted to be like a mermaid, and then I realized that wasn't possible [chuckles] So yeah, but I fixated on cooking because, of how much like, it brought, or how much joy it brought to my life. I would like come to visit my family in Mexico and, and my aunt would always be there with tacos on hand. She --

they would like stay up because we would get there very late, because we drove, and, and they would stay up very late and make food for us whenever we were like "Hey we're like an hour away, we're like 30 minutes away." And they would always do that for us, so I was like I want to give this piece of myself and my family to the world. And then, and that's how it led me to doing that in, in the end. And then, I guess in a way it's, I realized how much safety went to it, the whole like food handlers and stuff, and I was just like you know what, maybe it's not for me. So, but I did I did take some classes for it and it was I that's whenever I learned about the whole food safety and stuff. And, but it was it was just very fun to learn about cooking, and myself and I wanted to do it more so that's, that was the main interest of why I wanted to join.

Ramos: So, what are the elements that led you away from culinary school?

Ortero: It was the, obviously the whole safety stuff, and when you're cooking at home you're not very sanitary, because you're cooking for yourself, or

you're cooking for three other people. So, it was that, but it was also just, you can feel the divide with people. There was a lot, obviously you have your very like rich kids who, you know they've, this has been like their whole thing and, and all this and that, and you can just feel that. And I didn't really, I didn't really like that, and I also I took a class in in high school too and a lot of people just didn't really care about it. And I was just like I don't want to do this if nobody cares about what they're doing. Obviously, culinary majors do care about -- this is just a high school class, so culinary majors do care about it but they're very, perfectionist. They're very, very like keep an eye out for detail which I am very much about that, but I also, because I do so much food at home I'm used to not having everything perfect. Because if it looks like, if it looks perfect you know that's just for, money. While as if it looks full and you have your whole plate being full, that means it's good. So, that's also another reason why I just it I felt like it didn't resonate with how I saw food. And I was just like

I don't want to hate this in the long run, so it unfortunately did drew me away, but I still love doing it so in a way it kind of didn't, so yeah.

Ramos: Yeah, so in that divide you said that you felt that with a lot of the rich kids, did you feel a divide coming from like a different culture into American culinary school? What did that feel like?

Ortero: Yes, yes, God I think any minority can really like relate to that, just like feeling some sort of disconnect, with like American Anglo white kids. They have this sort of Americanized way of cooking, and it's very gourmet. It's very like, you know, it's very fancy schmancy while as with like Mexican people or Hispanic kids, excuse me, it's, it's very. I wouldn't say sloppy because we're not sloppy at all, but it's more so about the quality, or not the quality. The like, the end taste of the food, rather than the presentation of the food. And then just like, I mean also just like growing up in Pleasant Grove, and then going on to like Garland like it just you could really feel that shift, because I went from a Dallas Elementary School to Garland Middle School and it was just it

the divide is just there, like it's just even though, yes I was with other minorities not being in ESL not being in you know like all these Hispanic groups I felt like I was too. Like too disconnected from the Mexican groups, and too Mexican for the other groups, so I think that's, and that's a feeling something a lot of people can like relate to. Because, yeah like the way you grow up is not -- is very different from American Kids.

Ramos: Yeah, I understand that difference, like definitely in the way that food is made. Because authentic food has like, there's a vibe to authentic food like that feeling it's filling. You know?

Ortero: Yeah, yes while like other food is just like, it's just there really.

Ramos: So as you said you've come you lived in Pleasant Grove in Garland, did you see any difference between like the commercial restaurants versus the small family business restaurants that are in those areas?

Ortero: Yes very much so, growing up the most fanciest restaurant that I knew of was Olive Garden [laughs]. We never set foot in Downtown Dallas

ever, so like it was going to like a Tex-Mex Restaurant like on the border or like Phoenix, Phoenix's or Felix's or whatever it's just felt very like plastic. It didn't feel authentic, and it felt just like another order, just like another thing to do. While I was what I would go eat with the mom-and-pop shops at least, at least in East Dallas. It was, it was very you could tell that they had cooked it the day of, if not the day prior. Everything wasn't frozen, everything was very fresh, everything was just, everything was also very handled with love and care. And like, like we said like Hispanic food is very filling it's very like, you know, and so with like the tacos, the taco shops that I would go to they would always stuff it a lot. And to me that is a secret way of saying "I know you're hungry let me feed you" or "Let me give you your money's worth", so, so yeah so I just I feel like with commercial restaurants it just feels very like plasticky, and very like rubbery, and just like very tossed aside while as with mom-and-pop shops because, because their whole business is on the line their whole

finances are on the line, it's just it feels more authentic, it feels more caring and loving.

Ramos: So, what do you believe are some of the reasons that people do enjoy cooking? Like especially for those mom-and-pop shops, because like yes that's how they make money, but why would anyone else who doesn't need that money want to cook?

Ortero: It's just a way to like broaden your, your horizons too. It's just like my best friend Zoe, she has a boyfriend, her boyfriend's from Louisiana and she's been learning a lot of Cajun food to like cook. And she, every time we get together she like always tells me how she's like she's never tasted food like this before, like this is good like white people food, she loves to say. And it, it just expanded her, her like flavor palette. And for me too just like learning another, like cultures way of cooking, and somehow also making it my own is just a way of, of just like expanding my horizons. And even like, like traveling with my eyes closed like I make some pasta and I close my eyes and I feel like I'm in Italy. So it's just a way to like, to just escape really, to, to feel like you know

if you're having a bad day or whatever you can just, you know you can just make something that feels like home in your home. So yeah.

Ramos: Yeah, that's so sweet. So what would you say to people who really don't enjoy cooking like what advice would you give them?

Ortero: I would say you haven't tried enough of it really. Because starting out is never easy, starting out is probably the hardest part of cooking. But once you learn your groove, that's probably what I would say, learn your groove, learn your, your own flavor palette, like what you like. And then just go from there, I like for example for personal example I like a lot of garlic and so I tend to put a lot of garlic powder in my food, or like a little garlic tooth in my food. So, and that's how I've learned to like make my own food, or like let's say you don't like salt. You know? Not everything has to have salt, not everything has to have you know certain ingredient to it to make it worthwhile for your taste buds. So I would say to like learn what you like and learn how you enjoy making it. Sometimes I remember starting out, I would just, I

would need like some kind of entertainment to be there so I was just watch like YouTube videos while I cooked. Or I would like listen to music to get myself in the rhythm of cooking, it's just all about motivation really so like motivate yourself, and just really like try. Because if you're not, if you just try once and then you give up it's like okay, so why are you doing this? Yeah, so yeah.

Ramos: That was such a good answer. Okay, so why if I could have interviewed someone who actually worked at like a Mexican restaurant or some other farmer or whatever why why was it a good idea for me to interview you?

Ortero: Um, I guess like I don't see food in a money-making way. I grew up seeing food as like a very, a center of unity, center of love, a center of language too. It's so, it's, it's like not to brag, not to, like, talk too much about myself. But like it's, it's different when you make something and get money out of it, rather than make something because you love it. And, and I can definitely say this as a server, because I could tell you all about how great serving is and whatever. But I've lived my

bad experiences, I've lived a lot of bad experiences serving, so if you had like let's say you interview like a cook or something. A lot of them would have a lot more bad stories to tell. While I have only messed up in the kitchen like, you know, not very few times, but like if I've messed up I still learn how to fix it and eat it, because I'm the one eating it. So in a way that's, that's like, that's the difference between just like a regular civilian who eats versus a cook, a line cook, a sous chef, someone who actually went to school for that because they see it more in a logical way rather than a passionate like, like yeah passion, like centered way. So, yeah I think that's like the difference between the two.

Ramos: That was so good too, that was so good. Okay, and then lastly, this will be the last question. Why do you think food, why do you think food has remained so culturally sacred especially in Mexican culture for so long?

Ortero: Because it's a way to keep connected to your roots. Every single time I cook I think of my mom, every single time my mom cooks she thinks of her mom,

every time my grandma cooks she thinks of her mom. It's just, it's a way to pass down something without having it be physical. It's something you keep in your heart, it's something you keep in your mind, and it's something that, like, you think of fondly, you know? Like you, like I think, I think of my mom and I think of all those times she was really tired, and I think of all those times that she didn't want to cook so we had like we had a fast food Fridays. And she was like "Every Friday we're going to eat some pizza, we're going to make something super American." And it was because she was tired, she was tired from the week, she was tired from school, she was tired from life. So it's, it's a generational thing to pass down, and it's also just like something that, it's like it's unspoken of but everyone does it. Like everyone knows how to cook because of someone, and without cooking I mean how are you going to really live? Like how are you going to feed yourself? How are you going to survive? It's a way of making survival a lot more emotional, and a lot more gratifying sort of. Because everything just comes from like,

from someone else and you know because it comes from someone else it comes from someone before then, and it comes from someone before them. So I think that's why it makes it so special and it's so sacred within especially Mexican culture, because a lot of Mexicans will always brag about how good the food is, about how great the culture is. And really it also speaks about the culture. Without Mexican food you wouldn't know why we do what we do. Or you wouldn't know why your grandma does what she does, so it's just like an unspoken language of like what each of us -- it yeah it's an unspoken way to talk about your story about your history. About like anything it actually, because it dates back to like the Aztecs, to the Mayans, to the Incas to whatever. So yeah, I think that's what food represents within the culture. And I think that's how it's going to keep representing the culture.

Ramos: Okay, that was so good, thank you for your time, Ale.

Ortero: Thank you.

Ramos: And I will talk to you after this.

Ortero: Awesome sounds good, thank you.

Ramos: Thank you.

[End of Interview]