

Audio file

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Transcript

Speaker 1

All right. Hello and good morning. It is currently 10:13 AM Central Center time in Garland, Texas, and in Denton, Texas. My name is Basma Arshad, and today I am here on a Zoom call with Yayoi Takeuchi. I'm speaking with Yayoi today as part of the Milpa Agricultural Placemaking Project's efforts to collect food and agricultural related oral histories from North Texas. Yoyo, thank you for being here today.

Speaker 2

Thank you for having me. I'm glad to talk to you today.

Speaker 1

Of course. So I want to start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

Speaker 2

I was born in Japan in 1960, so I'm pretty grown up.

Speaker 1

That's beautiful.

Speaker 2

Where in Japan were you born? I was born in a small town called Yokosuka, but there's another city of Yokosuka near Tokyo, but that's not the same. But it's like 20 minutes south of Nagoya, which is Nagoya is the third largest city area in Japan. So I grew up in a small town, but kind of like a commuter town now. And so I kind of like during a week, I'm like countryside girl. And then in the weekend, I go to Nagoya with my mom for like ballet lessons and things like that, and kind of experience a little bit of city. So it was very interesting in my childhood. Nagoya only existed on Sunday. And then somehow when I was in Nagoya with family, sometime during a week, like Tuesday or Wednesday something, I was so shocked. Now I exist on Sunday. It was a huge shock. I don't know

what I was thinking about in my brain. It was just something exists on Sunday. That was a very interesting revelation. And then I realized that, I think I was talking to, you know, communicating with my classmates in ballet lessons. mostly girls from Nagoya, and then I guess that my talk kind of influenced by them. And then when I'm back in small town on weekdays, and my classmates say like, I speak weird. So I think it's just one, like a few hours on Sunday, my speech was kind of... influenced by the city girls. And that was my experience. But if you'd like to something talk about related to food or anything, I can ask some my experience too.

Speaker 1

Stage is yours. We can talk about whatever you want, but I am curious about what you ate there in your drawing.

Speaker 2

So the staple food in Japan is basically rice and then miso soup based on, you know, cooked vegetables and tofu and miso paste, which is fermented paste from soybeans. And then Miso has different flavors or way it's made and taste and texture from regions. Different region has different kind of color, different taste, different strength kind of things. And Nagoya is famous for dark red miso. It's almost to the point where kind of similar to like Mexican what is like a chocolate kind of, I forgot the name of it, but Mexican has some kind of chocolatey kind of a paste thing to use as part of their cuisine. But miso is not that kind of flair, but does not have that kind of flair, but everyday thing. It's used for soup, it's used for dressing, it's used for these days, like cake, cookies, and all kinds of things. Yeah, and it's good for you because it's, fermented food. So my diet is that, like that rice and basically miso. And then, although cheese is not Japanese traditional diet, but I like cheese from my childhood, so I like to eat cheese and then veggies, all kinds of veggies. I eat some fish, not so much of variety, but some fish. Meat, as far as meat goes, mostly chicken or pork, but beef sometimes, but only once in a while. So I'm not vegetarian or vegan, but I could go close to vegetarian basically. And yeah, so miso and tofu is big too. Tofu can be the alternative of like meat. So it can be like fried as like steak kind of little chunk. And tofu has different varieties as well, just a soft one or it's almost like a flan, like a very soft or firm. And then fried and very light fried version with some kind of pouch. So you can use that fried tofu pouch, you know, stuffed with something else, like either veggies or some ground meat or tofu, you know, paste or something. And then, or cook that pouch itself and stuff with sushi rice. And then that's part of that kind of a sushi. And speaking of sushi, yeah, I like sushi too, as you can imagine. What kind of diet or things do you like to eat?

Speaker 1

Well, it's not my interview, but I do eat something very similar. It is very rice-based.

Speaker 2

Oh, okay. Yeah, that's great.

Speaker 1

I'm curious, how did you end up here in Denton?

Speaker 2

Oh, yeah. I was a study abroad student in Portland, Oregon. And I met my husband there. And then we were kind of go back to Japan here and there. My husband's from Phoenix. So he doesn't have any relatives other than me and my family. But yeah, we got married and then we ended up going to different graduate school. But I got a job after my master's in Ohio, so I landed in Texas that I've never been to. And so I thought, maybe it's going to be only one year. Maybe I wouldn't survive more than that, I don't know. But it's been almost 20 years, so time flies.

Speaker 1

Congratulations.

Speaker 2

Thank you. It's been a very interesting experience. I appreciate all the things that I can do. through the job and then challenges.

Speaker 1

What kind of foods do you eat now? Or I guess, like, what new foods have you discovered living here in Texas?

Speaker 2

Living in Texas, not necessarily new, new, but Mexican food, of course, in living in the States. When I was in Portland, Mexican food was new. And then Thai food was new. Vietnamese food was new. Japanese have a lot of Chinese food influence already. So in home cooking too, there are dishes that's popular, like based on Chinese food. But Thai food, Vietnamese food, kind of similar, but a little different. And so those are new. And then Mexican food was pretty much new. I never had it in Japan, of course. And I enjoyed it in a variety. But what I had in Portland, Oregon is pretty, I don't know, like urban version of like Mexican food, not real kind of type of, that's what I realized. But being in, well, Phoenix too, when I visit my husband's family, you know, they, we go to some Mexican restaurant

sometimes and then, yeah, that's kind of like, wow, this is kind of different, I thought. And when I came to Texas, there are some, like something called Tex-Mex, which I don't quite grasp what it is 100%, but there are some restaurants run by people from Mexico in Denton. So I appreciate that they're kind of, of course, they probably modify it for American people too, but there are a lot of seemingly Mexican native customers there in a small restaurant. So I feel that I was kind of having a taste of authentic Mexican food. And so I can make a little fake Mexican food myself. I don't know, just a simple one. And a lot of times, okay, I like curry too. And then curry I grew up is like Japanese instant, like a cube-made curry cube that we just kind of throw in after cooking the ingredients. So that's very popular. There are so many varieties of curry, spicy one, dark one, light one, sweet one, or hot. And can be cube, can be powder, can be like a crumbly thing that you can add to. And so Japanese love curry. And it's, I heard that's not directly from India, but through British Navy in the history of, I don't know, turn of the end of 19th century history when Japan was kind of becoming westernized after giving up the feudal bush samurai era. So the development of curry and instant curry is pretty long, has a long history in Japan. And I grew up in a kind of a popular curry culture through my home cooking, my family cooking, and restaurants. And then I think after the '80s hit, the reel-- I don't know if I should reel, but Indian restaurants run by Indian people. were popping up and became really popular in the city. And now it's everywhere in Japan, like Gambi, India, Nepalese, I think, too, these days. I haven't really tried Nepalese curry too much, but I should say, India is a huge country and, you know, a long culture there. And I know things we have in Japan is not really real Indian curry, probably. provided by people from India, but probably modified for Japanese too. But I had very, very super nice food at the meditation preceptor's house. I've been practicing meditation and my friend introduced me to. And there was a preceptor, kind of my instructor, mediator in Nagoya. And then I went to her place and she had a group meditation on every Sunday. And during the weekend week, like individual meditation session. But after Sunday's group meditation, she was so nice that she prepared, not always, but oftentimes prepared some dish from, and the ingredients are wonderful. she managed to have all the ingredients online and then her mom's from South India, but her dad's from Gujarat. And so she said she had, kind of northern or southern type of cooking together. But oh my God, I can't describe in too detail, but the sensation I had is something that I cannot forget. Like, I felt, oh my god, this is like so holy food. It's like mesmerizing. Like good and then good for you, good for your body. And then it's, I just can't believe. And then my husband asked her, you know, What restaurant does she want to go to, that she'd like to go to? I mean, meaning Indian restaurant. Well, she doesn't go out to eat Indian restaurant food because she can eat best at home. That's what she said. And that's true. It's just like totally different league. I just don't know. I mean, I'm so blessed to have that experience of receiving humbly, that I wasn't too humble, but now I think of it back in those

days that it was just amazing experience. And yeah, I don't know. They're all, of course, vegetarian. I think she used some, maybe milk, maybe, but some kind of cottage cheese. So it's not 100% vegan type, but probably it's good. Vegetarian and amazingly, oh my God. So sometimes I remember that sensation and oh my God, it's like try to be humble. So part of it, that The preceptor, she invited me to go to a big function of the organization hub for meditation, celebration of the, you know, like the leader, the master, and then I thought, well, that was maybe too early to go to India, I thought. I did decided to take the opportunity and then that was wonderful. And the food there was amazing too. I just can't describe all those things, but Very, very rich culture. I'm sure Pakistan has own, you know, everything. But it's something that I really pay respect to, the culture related to food. Here in Texas, the barbecue culture is pretty big. And I like it once in a while, but I guess maybe not all the time. But it's it's good. You try to. You can continue to. simplify my diet or try to be careful my diet because I'm kind of not diabetic, but kind of like a beginning of the pre-group kind of. So I try, cut down eating sweets, at least a portion. And then I found my cholesterol is pretty high as well for not the good ones and bad ones are higher. So I'm trying to, I don't know, pay attention to cholesterol things.

Speaker 1

Oh, beautiful. You didn't mention visiting any Japanese restaurants here. Do you do so?

Speaker 2

I haven't been to recently, but there are some Japanese restaurants, mostly American-style sushi restaurants, which is I think colorful and good, and I like them. On the other hand, there's a high-end Japanese restaurant. It's a small one. On the corner of. I always get confused which goes to north and south, but and. Park Avenue, I believe. There's a small exclusive restaurant called Keiji. And Keiji is the owner, chef, that restaurant. And I haven't been there for a while, but it was very hard to get a reservation. Even months away, still, it's filled up. And it's a small restaurant. Possibly no more than 12 people can fit, maybe 10 or even several, and then mostly counter bar. So you can see him making food too in front of you. I heard there's a, it's almost like a cult, like people from Dallas or different states even coming to visit the restaurant. And he's a Japanese restaurant food chef, but he's trained in an Italian restaurant, too. So he can make a good pasta, and then he can make a good tiramisu in case some people cannot eat sushi. They can serve really tasty pasta, too, somehow. So that's very interesting high-end, you know, place. I'd like to go back, actually, now I think of it. In fact, probably UNT hospitality has to contact him and then get some kind of a, I don't know, spotlight. It seems like he doesn't really want that kind of things. He's just busy enough for his, own, things that he's doing, but it was good to have, to find that a place like that is here. And he's getting all the fresh ingredients from kind of a special

sauce, like, shipped from Japan through, I don't know, Seattle, through some kind of special way to get the very best ingredients. So the price just kind of reflects that and then and I stand and I'd like to go back there now. I think of it once in a while. I hope you do. Yeah, but I think like things in Texas, especially around Dallas. I heard around Houston, there's so many variety of restaurants. Of course, Austin, very good. And also like innovative fusion types and creative new type of restaurant, not just traditional types. And I think Denton is kind of running up to, you know, that kind of genre or league a little bit. It's nice to see all kinds of restaurants around downtown. Not that I go there all the time or every place, but it seems very nice, and I enjoy going to places sometimes with my colleague or my husband or friends.

Speaker 1

I really enjoyed talking to you, but unfortunately we only have 5 min. So I did want to ask, I know there are a lot of things you want to talk about. Is there anything you want to talk about in the last few minutes of this?

Speaker 2

Not just-- I can't think of something right off my bat, but is there something that you would like to hear?

Speaker 1

So personally, I'm curious if you've been to the Mitsuwa grocery stores.

Speaker 2

Which one?

Speaker 1

The Mitsuwa.

Speaker 2

Oh, Mitsuwa? Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I have. Yeah.

Speaker 1

What was your experience?

Speaker 2

It's good. I wish they have another shop close to them. To get certain ingredients that I want, I go to either H Mart in Carrollton And then for Mitsuwa, when I go there, I always

have some sushi grade sashimi, like a fresh fish that I can kind of cut and make sushi at home. And so I like to get certain things from Mitsuwa. It's small, but they have quite a bit of variety, kind of packed and yeah. Do you go there sometimes?

Speaker 1

Yeah, it's very delightful. My sister and I like to get sushi from there.

Speaker 2

Oh, nice. Me too. So when I go there, it's kind of a treat.

Speaker 1

Yeah, same for us.

Speaker 2

Right. But I hope I can... explore different kinds of food, like Middle Eastern food, too. Yeah. Yeah, I'd like to try to make some kind of a, you know, like a feasible dish that I can manage to make. The.

Speaker 1

Food journey is only beginning.

Speaker 2

It's true. Yeah. Um, So I miss certain things in Texas, living in Texas, but I hope I can find alternative to kind of make up what I want to have and then kind of enjoy sharing with friends maybe.

Speaker 1

I'm going to end us on that note because the Zoom is telling me it's going to close down soon.

Speaker 2

Okay.

Speaker 1

Thank you, Yayoi. This was so much fun.

Speaker 2

You're very welcome. I'm glad that I get to talk to you, but I feel that I just kind of mumble, mumble away, not having much point, but I'm sorry for that.

Speaker 1

No, no, no, this is great.