

Oral Histories of the Pandemic: Food as Resistance

Interviewer: Keli Butame [KB]

Interviewee 1: Tiffany Goh [TG]

Interviewee 2: Ai-Ling Kuon [AK]

Date: February 28, 2021

[00:00]

KB: Hi, my name is Keli Butame. Would you mind stating your names for the video?

AK: Hi. My name is Ai-Ling.

TG: My name is Tiffany.

KB: Today is the twenty-eighth of February twenty twenty-one and I am recording Ai-Ling and Tiffany. Do you both consent to having a recording of yourself being made for this class?

TG: Yes

[00:26]

KB: Great! And so we're going to start making some delicious curry puffs and you guys take over -

TG: -

KB: -Do what you were going to do before I started this recording. [laughs]

TG: Let's hope they're actually delicious. We'll see.

KB: While we're getting through this prep work stuff, would you mind telling me a little bit about your cultural background Ai-Ling? Since you're mixing stuff? [laughs]

AK: I was born in the U.S. [United States], but my dad was actually a refugee from Cambodia. And my mom moved here for university but she was born and raised in Hong Kong. So I have that background but I have always lived in the U.S.

TG: My background? Cultural background?

KB: Mmhmm.

TG: So, I was born in the US also. And my mom, like Ai-Ling's dad, because they are siblings, came from Cambodia. But I think they're Chinese, ethnically, I'm going to say. But they lived in Cambodia. And then, my dad is from Singapore and I believe he is ethnically Chinese and Indonesian. Which I learned literally like a month ago. This is not the correct amount of flour.

[02:25]

KB: And what kinds of foods did you eat growing up? Was it more Cambodian food or as Tiffany says ethnically Chinese food? [laughs]

AK: I would say we ate a lot of South-East Asian food so not necessarily straight Chinese food. But a lot of the food that I grew up eating that my grandma would cook would be food from the certain region in China and then also had Vietnamese and Cambodian influence. But not straight Cambodian food. Would you agree with that Tiffany?

TG: Yeah. I think so. Yeah I think that the one that was the most Vietnamese was the *Bánh Xèo*, the egg thing, I'm not sure you could explain it better than that [laughs]. And then for me, because my dad was from Singapore he has a lot of Indonesian, Malay influence in the food that he makes. But I do think that it has the American-Chinese spin on it too.

[04:10]

KB: Since your parents are from different ethnic backgrounds, which of your parents cooked more growing up?

AK: Wait me or Tiffany?

KB: Well, I'll start with Tiffany this time.

TG: I think it was about equal. I don't know if this is about equal but my dad would cook for school and stuff a lot and sometimes dinner. But my mom would cook the rest of the time. I feel like I remember them cooking about the same amount. But as far as Asian-influenced food, my mom probably cooked more of that and my dad would cook more American food.

AK: For me, my mom cooked a lot more whenever I was younger. But after I turned about fourteen she actually passed away so my dad started cooking more. He never really cooked American foods, he tried to cook foods that was like how my grandma cooked it. And actually, he remarried so now my stepmom is Japanese so she actually cooks Japanese food sometimes. She's learned a few recipes from us so she'll kind of do a mix.

[06:01]

KB: That's interesting two very different family dynamics. In terms of bigger family wide-events was it more - Did you have those types of - Because I know you guys both grew up in Houston, did you have those general big family events? Would those be more at home or would you go out to restaurants for those types of big family get-togethers?

TG: I think mostly at home if I remember. Definitely Christmas we would always go to someone's home. And if family just wanted to get together and cook and eat, whoever was hosting would just cook at their home and everyone would gather there. I don't know if you want a more specific answer but Ai-Ling can supplement some if there she has anything.

AK: I remember for Christmas or Thanksgiving instead of doing a typical American meal, we would sometimes buy roast duck or *chasiu* which is Chinese barbecue pork and we would all sit on the floor together with a tablecloth or something, and then that was our holiday meal.

KB: Would you mind telling me your earliest food memory or a memory about food from your childhood that you remember very vividly? Ai-Ling?

AK: Sorry, one second.

KB: Nevermind [laughs]

[07:56]

AK: I'm back, okay. Let's see. I remember when I went to go visit my mom's side of the family in Hong Kong. My brother and I, we went with my grandmother to a local street food vendor where they were selling roast duck and barbecue pork. So we walked down from her flat and then we brought it back up. And I remember it was the best Chinese barbecue pork that I had ever had. Just because Hong Kong is known for their barbecue pork. And it was just really good [laughs].

KB: Tasty, ugh. Tiffany, how about you?

TG: Earliest food memory. That's hard. I think this was when I was six-ish. My family lived in Seattle for a while, and so we used to go to Vancouver a lot. I have no idea where this place is,

but somewhere in Vancouver there's a tiny, I want to say Cantonese restaurant, it honestly might have been a different type of restaurant I'm not sure. But they had this thing that I feel like I should Google the name of. But it's basically like fried dough. I mean it's these long sticks or fried dough. They're kind of what you would consider the Chinese form of a donut except that it's not circular and it's harder. And that was my favorite thing to eat growing up after going there with my parents. I still eat it whenever I go get *dim-sum* or whatever.

[10:16]

KB: Those are the ones that you dip in condensed milk?

TG: I want to say yes, except that I've never actually done that. [laughs] I could be a hundred percent wrong but I think it's called - well I want to look it up 'cause I don't wanna be wrong. Yeah it's called *Dâu Cháo Quây* [or *Youtiao*], or something like that. Okay, I was right -

KB: - Okay

TG: - That's what I called it. [unintelligible] When is this oil thing hot enough? If it is smoking does that mean it's hot enough? OK, I need to get water before I do that though.

KB: Okay, go get your water.

TG: How much water do I need?

KB: [laughs]

TG: Seventy milliliters, okay. That's definitely more than seventy milliliters. Put an ice cube in this. I don't know if you can see the chaos but there's a lot of it. Okay. Pour hot oil, mix well. We get to set aside after this. Good. Oh my gosh.

[12:32]

KB: Uh Tiffany?

TG: Yeah!

KB: Are you okay to talk now? [laughs]

TG: [laughing] I'm okay to talk now, sorry.

KB: Okay, no it's totally fine. Kind of continuing along the thread of identity, would you say that there are any parts of your identity that have been shaped by your connection to food? That's a vague question but - [laughs]

TG: I would say so. I think it's a little hard to define but there are definitely things. I think this experience is a lot different than a lot of Asian Americans growing up in the US, but my dad, he

would cook lunch for us every day. And one of the things that he used to cook was this variation on pan-fried noodles -

KB: Okay -

TG: And it was something that you could obviously get it if you just went to eat somewhere. But my friends always wanted it. So he used to cook extra for me so that my friends could have some. And I feel like, for me it helped me get more in touch with my appreciation of Asian food. And when I went to college and my friends introduced me to more of it and their types of Asian food. Because as a kid I was very very Americanized because my parents didn't really introduce us into Asian food until we got a little bit older, I think. So, all I ever wanted to eat was fast food - American fast food. As I got older there were a lot of things about my parents' food and my friends' food that reconnected me to my cultural identity, I would say. I don't know if I've steered far off your question but yeah. I can be more specific if you want, but that's I guess the general -
[15:21]

KB: That's okay. Only if you want to be more specific.

TG: Im'ma be honest, I don't remember where this question started

KB: [laughs] You started with your dad making pan-fried noodles for you that your friends would also like and -

TG: - Sorry, what? What were you saying?

KB: I was just summarizing your answer for you [laughs]

TG: Oh yeah. I'm trying to think of how to be more specific. I mean if you ask my mom she'll basically tell you that I hated Asian food until I went to college. I would eat it with my family and there are things that I definitely loved about it like *Dâu Cháo Quây*, the pan-fried noodles and having the Peking duck- this is really hot- and *cha siu* for Christmas. I loved a lot of that stuff and Hainan chicken rice and stuff like that. But the other stuff like *Bánh Xèo*, the thing that my grandma used to make all the time, I actually hated eating that. My mom would have to force me to try it all the time. I know, Ai-Ling is making a face at me. But I actually do like it now, I just didn't like it as a kid. And I don't actually know why. I think I just had this idea of being very American and wanting to be very American. And just that Chinese food just felt very separate from that. But then as I got older, I really wanted to recognize my parents' culture and where they came from, and stuff like that rather than ignore it. And it gave me the opportunity to learn more

about it but through my friends instead of my parents. Which I think it's sometimes an easier avenue.

[17:42]

KB: Sorry, this is going a little bit off track, but I knew a lot of this friends because we went to college together, undergrad together. Did you find yourself seeking out these kinds of friends when you went to college or was it something that just happened organically?

TG: I think it was organic. I actually think I sought people outside of my culture when I went to college but then I ended up making a lot of friends, who were from I mean not necessarily specifically my culture, but there were some people with Chinese backgrounds, or some people with Korean backgrounds, Taiwanese. It's a lot of different cultures but it's all the things that my parents wish I had accepted as a kid, basically.

KB: Thanks for that answer. I'm just going to wait for Ai-Ling to come back and then I'll ask her the same.

TG: I have to knead this.

[19:08]

KB: So I just asked Tiffany. Were there any parts of your identity that were shaped by your connection that you have with food?

AK: I think growing up food was always a really big part of our family. Every time we would spend time with my grandma, it was always revolved around food or any family gatherings always [inaudible] together. And I think especially in Asian culture, it's a little bit different for me specifically, but for my dad, I know that growing up my grandma didn't really show affection in the way that people in America show affection. You know whether that's just saying "I love you" or giving hugs and stuff and so the way that my grandma showed her love was by cooking or sometimes she'd cut fruit and bring it to us. And so I think being immersed into that and just experiencing that side of my culture whenever I would go over to my grandma's house I think it helped me to appreciate food more. Because it was their form of love and not just sustenance. If that makes sense. I don't know if that answers the question.

[21:10]

KB: It does [laughs]

TG: That was way more introspective [laughs]. But I also very much agree what she says about our grandmas' relationships with her kids was very much shown through food.

KB: Did that change through the generations? So your grandma was more affectionate, let me use that term, through her food and your parents are that intermediary between their home culture and American culture. Was that- Did you see a change through the time, through your parents? Were they more affectionate in other ways? I dunno- This is a weird question, I don't know how to phrase it but do you understand what I'm trying to ask?

TG: Yeah

AK: I think for my dad, he, at first, whenever I was little, he was kind of more like my grandma, in that perspective, I guess. But now, I guess it was like a gradual thing because I don't remember him specifically changing and all of a sudden being like "I love you" or whatever but it's normal for him to say it to me now or to give me a hug or something. I don't know I guess it was maybe a little bit awkward at first, but he kind of slowly started to change and my mom was always more affectionate too. But I think moms probably are more affectionate in general, I don't know. So maybe just from being surrounded by the American culture, it was probably what kind of encouraged that. [laughs] Yeah.

[23:23]

TG: I'll be back in one second, I need to find room in my fridge for this bowl. [clattering sounds]. Okay [inadible]. I mean I don't remember my parents when I was really young but I think my parents have always been pretty affectionate. I don't know if that's to counter their parents because I know their parents weren't so much. But my dad was always being that embarrassing dad that gives you kisses in front of your friends. And my mom always gave us hugs and would say I love you and stuff like that. And I would actually say, I know Ai-Ling was saying like that her dad kind of transitioned with time, I would honestly say that with her

grandkids our grandma also transitioned with time. The way that she interacts with us, I think because she knows that we're kind of from this different mix of cultures and the way that we respond to things is not the same as our parents. She will give us hugs she'll tell us that she loves us. She doesn't cook anymore but when we were younger I think it was a lot of just food and now it's maybe because she can't show it through cooking or maybe because she just knows we're different I think she's very like physically and verbally affectionate.

[25:08]

AK: I agree. I remember whenever I was younger and sometimes my dad would tell her "I love you" she just be like "okay" but now when he says it then she'll also say "oh I love you too." So I think she definitely has changed.

KB: I'm just going to check in with the cooking process also because I'm tending to forget that that's also going on. What stage of the process are you in Ai-Ling?

AK: I am currently cooking the filling. I'll show you.

KB: Oooh, yes please.

AK: Wait-

TG: I wanna see. Oooh Nice

AK: It's just potatoes, curry powder, and a few other spices. And the dough is in the fridge right it's chilling. What about you Tiffany?

TG: Naturally, one step behind her. Also don't know where I put my potatoes. Like zero idea [laughs]. Found them! They're behind the wet wipes, you know how people keep those on their kitchen counters. What am I supposed to do? Stir fry onion and minced garlic with oil until fragrant Half a tablespoon. Hold on. Okay. I feel like this recipe does so many different units of measurement.

[27:45]

KB: I guess I'll ask you, Tiffany. Is there a particular event that led to you to start cooking a life event or did you just-?

TG: Living on my own. I honestly- I don't think I showed any interest in cooking before I had to cook for myself. And just knowing that buying takeout or whatever, going to eat places is just so expensive. That is just that naturally smarter thing was just to cook for yourself. Yeah, but that's mainly it and I wouldn't call myself a good cook, but I can make things. Enough. Yeah, I would call her a pretty good cook. Definitely better than me.

KB: You don't agree Ai-Ling? That you're not a good cook or that you're a good cook?

AK: I'm okay. I think I started cooking- Well, I've always known how to cook a little bit because I would pack my own lunches since I was really little. But I didn't really [inadable] into cooking until actually last year whenever we were forced to quarantine, then I picked up a new hobby. And so I started learning a lot more and kind of experimenting and I think it's probably because of that that I've grown the most, or learned the most about cooking.

Can you ask me the question again?

[30:02]

[all laugh]

KB: So would you call cooking a quarantine hobby?

AK: Yeah, I think it's definitely something that I got into because of quarantine, but through it, I've learned and grown to love it and so I think that it will be something that I continue to do even after we get back to normal.

KB: How about you Tiffany? Is this a quarantine hobby for you?

TG: I actually think I cooked more interesting things before quarantine than I did during quarantine. So I'm hoping I'll get back to that after. I mean, I think Ai-Ling and I generally when we cook together, either in person or on Zoom since we can't see each other now. It's usually

baking rather than cooking, cooking because we're both very fond of it and it's an easy way to spend time together. So this is actually the first time I think we've cooked proper food together. What was I answering? I was answering an actual question. I used to try a lot more things before quarantine, so I'm hoping to slowly get back into experimenting when I don't have to adjust my life to being stuck at home all the time.

KB: So that actually takes my questioning down two different paths. I guess the first path is going to be the longer path, which is how long have you guys had this cooking dynamic where you would get together and make things?

TG: That's a good question. I feel like it's been since I graduated from college is what I want to say. But that might not be right, because I think it was once I started living on my own and I actually had a kitchen I could use instead of being in the dorms. And then Ai-Ling and I didn't see each other twice a year because I wasn't really going home as much. It was a easier way to keep in touch with each other.

[32:35]

AK: Did we ever bake together in person?

TG: I honestly don't think we have but I could be- We might have baked cookies once or something in your kitchen. But that's all I can maybe think of. Maybe when I was home for Christmas once I don't know, but I feel like you're [inadible your dad usually?] just cooked.

AK: Yeah, but I remember we made cheesecake together.

TG: Didn't we do that on Zoom though?

AK: We did. Yeah

TG: [laugh] My perception of time is off since 2020.-

KB: That's fair.

TG: If I had to guess that's what I would say. We used to just-

KB:-

TG: -Sorry, go ahead

KB: No, go ahead, no, no.

TG: Oh. I was gonna say before I don't think we cooked together as much, but a lot of us hanging out was going out to find food, or boba, or something like that.

KB: That makes sense. Um, and how often do you do this?

AK: Maybe once every few weeks.

TG: Yeah.

AK: We don't meet very frequently but-

TG: I feel like whenever we both can find free time, which is usually once every few weeks. We'll pick something to cook together and then just do it or sometimes make different things. Yeah.

KB: And what's your favorite thing that you've made together, Tiffany?

[34:32]

TG: Not cookies, because I messed those up. Goodness, we've made so much. Honestly, cheesecake was really fun because it was kind of hard. But it was very rewarding. Yeah, I'd say that one. I also really love cheesecake. But then we came in, or I had the issue of having too much cheesecake for two people.

KB: There is no such thing, as too much. Eh, there is a little bit, I think.

TG: The whole cake for two people is maybe too much.

[both laugh]

KB: How does this smell?

TG: Well, the recipe says to fry them until it's fragrant. I don't know what fragrant means. It smells. Like something.

KB: [laughs]

TG: I'mma give it a little bit more than-. It smells good. but, I'm gonna give it a bit more time. Cause I'm cooking it on pretty low heat for fear of screwing it up.

KB: How does this smell?

TG: Well, the recipe says just fry them until it's fragrant. I don't know what fragrant means. It smells like something.

KB: [laugh]

TG: Im'ma give it a little bit more. It smells good. but, I'm gonna give it a bit more time. Because I'm cooking it on pretty low heat for fear of screwing it up.

KB: Do you prefer cooking to baking, Tiffany?

TG: Baking. One hundred percent. Um. But mostly because it's more therapeutic. There's some new sort of like speed and attention that you have to give when you're cooking. You don't have to be precise or whatever, but things just move a lot faster and I feel like with baking, it's easier to just really plan things out and just take it piece by piece. I mean, there are some recipes that aren't like that, but for the most part, and especially if you do it a few times, it can be kind of a slower thing. You've been watching me just flail around my kitchen trying to figure out if I'm doing things right. And then, not being able to find space in my fridge. Yeah, I really like baking. I think I'm better at it too.

[37:03]

KB: Okay, Um, You have now implied several times that Ai-Ling is the better cook. [laughs]

TG: Yes

KB: Why would you say that Tiffany?

TG: Um I think she does it I don't wanna say like experimentally, but she tries new things more than I try new things. When I cook at home for myself, I tend to just repeat the same thing over and over. And here and there, I'll try something new. But for the most part, I'll just do rice and some kind of meat or vegetable or whatever and its there's not a lot of variation in it. Whereas I feel like Ai-Ling tests out different types of food and different recipes more than I do. And she experiments with it. Like she made egg tarts. [cutlery clatters] Sorry, sink. Um. She made egg tarts and was trying different flavors with it, just to see what worked and what didn't work. Just something that I'm way too scared to try. Maybe one day, but so far too scared.

KB: And Ai-Ling [laughs] Do you agree with that assessment Tiffany made of you? Of your cooking abilities?

AK: Yeah, I think so. I think I have more fun with cooking and so it makes it easier to just try new things and then also back whenever we were quarantined, my brother was living at home and he really likes food too. So, anything that I made he always just eat it. And so it was kind of like an extra boost of encouragement because I knew that food wasn't gonna go to waste. Like Tiffany mentioned with the egg tarts, I took a very classic like simple Hong Kong recipe, and then, I kind of experimented with different flavors and I just had fun with it. Um, yeah.

KB: So Ai-Ling, do you prefer baking or cooking?

[40:00]

AK: I think baking. I like to cook but baking [inadible] I dunno there's more precision, I guess. And it's easier to be more relaxed, I don't know less stressed. I don't know if Tiffany said this, but it's a lot more fast-paced like you have to do certain things at certain times. Whereas with baking I guess it can be like that, but for the majority of the time, it's more slow and methodical, I guess.

KB: And what has been your favorite thing that you've made together with Tiffany?

AK: I would also say the cheesecake. Because I think it was probably the hardest thing that we made together. I know we've done cookies before and stuff but I liked making cheesecake with her because we were constantly communicating with each other throughout and being like "does yours look like this?" Just trying to make sure that we were both on the same page. Whereas with cookies, we just did our own thing.

TG: I have a cooking question. How much water should I put on these potatoes? Does it need to cover it?

AK: Yes.

TG: Okay.

AK: It actually says an amount.

TG: Well it said an amount, but then it just said add enough water. So I was like I don't really know- I didn't measure, is the thing. [laughs]

[42:14]

KB: And kind of switching gears a little bit. How would you describe your cooking process? [laughs] Tiffany, you're smiling [laughs].

TG: Lacking. [laughs] I think this is probably the most prepared I've been and it's still pretty unprepared. I read through about half of the recipe and I was like I can figure this out. And then I got everything ready. But then, going through the rest feels like I have no idea what I'm doing. And usually, if I cook by myself, I'll just wing it and figure it out. But when I cook with Ai-Ling, I ask her questions all the time. Because I feel like, well, one, she's made this before and two, I feel like she has a clearer idea of where we're going than I do, at least. Which is like I don't know how much clearer idea her idea is, but it's clearer than mine. At the very least.

KB: Also where we going? We're going on a trip.

TG: Oh me,

KB: Yes [laughs]

TG: I'll be using my table while these potatoes simmer so I can weigh out the -

KB: Oh, the dough.

TG: Yeah.

TG: I don't have any counter space.

KB: Ai-Ling how would you describe your cooking process?

AK: I read through the recipe a bunch of times because I don't really like to not know what I'm doing. But I think once I've made the recipe before then I feel more comfortable with experimenting with it. But if it's the first time, I typically just stick to the recipe. I typically prep all of my ingredients beforehand, so I have everything ready to go before I turn on the fire. And I try to make things as stress-free as possible, I guess. [laughs]

[44:49]

KB: So we have a being of pure chaos and we have a more prepared person [laughs]

TG: I have been called chaotic neutral so I feel like that probably just applies here.

KB: What about in terms of having like people around? Do you enjoy- Obviously, right Ai-Ling you're sharing the same cooking space with somebody else, but I personally tend to get a little bit nervous with people around. Do you feel the same way?

AK: I prefer to cook by myself or if I'm making something I would rather be by myself. Not because I mind other peoples' presence, but I like to focus. So cooking with friends sometimes is not always my favorite thing to do. Because I like to really focus on what I'm making. But I think it also depends on what we're making, how complicated it is, and if I've made it before. But it's my first time making something, I would want to focus.

KB: Tiffany, do you like having other people around in your cooking space?

TG: Um, [sighs] I think it depends on the person. Like Ai-Ling, I think it depends on what I'm making and just what kind of mode I'm in and why I'm making it. I think for me if I'm trying to learn something, I don't like doing it with someone else because there's a lot of internal thinking and just I don't like putting the control into the other person's hands if they're helping me.

Because then they get frustrated if something goes wrong. And it's not really their fault. But I think there are certain scenarios. Like I really like doing stuff with Ai-Ling, obviously, because we do. But I think we like actively go out of our way to choose things that we want to make together so it's not something that doesn't work for either of us. I also cook with my boyfriend Elwyn a lot. We make dinner together every day, but it's usually not things that we haven't made before, it's usually the same kinds of things. Like I said earlier, we repeat meals. But we do every once in a while try something new together and that's kind of nice because I kind of have a fear of cooking meat [laughs] so I can make him do it all the time. But yeah, I think it really just depends on the person and if the person is kind of micromanag-y, I can't do it I need the space to make my own mistakes. And accept them and just move on and eat good enough food.

[48:40]

KB: And how do you choose which recipes you want to make? Just in general.

TG: Not with each other. Ju-

KB: Yeah, yeah. In general.

TG: [sighs] I feel like a lot of it is stuff that I've had experience with before, or tastes that I think are familiar at least. I have cooked cheesecake a few times now but in different forms with different recipes, but that started with "oh, I like cheesecake. I wonder how you make it that." Well, this was a recipe that let me think. I feel like that's pretty much it. I'm trying to think of other things that I've cooked. Like I made curry noodles and it's just the flavor of curry, the texture of noodles, stuff like that I know what that feels like and I can anticipate what's gonna taste like. And if I think I'm going to like something, I just want to learn how to do it. I also buy a lot of recipe books that I use like one-twentieth of the recipes. [laughs]

[50:06]

KB: Ai-Ling how do you choose what recipes you want to make?

AK: I really like trying out new recipes. So actually, I have a list of different recipes I want to try and I watch a lot of food shows or baking or cooking shows, so if I ever see something that catches my eye then I'll just add it to the list and then whenever there's like a right opportunity, then, I'll cook it.

KB: And since you live at home, is it more- do you make things more from written or what's the major source of your recipes? Is that online?

AK: Yeah, typically online. I have one recipe book or baking book that one of my friends gave to me. From my favorite pastry chef. But everything else I'll find online just because it's easier to keep track of everything.

KB: And who is your favorite pastry chef?

AK: It's Claire [inaudible].

KB: Sorry?

AK: Claire Saffitz. She worked at the Bon Appetit Test kitchen for a long time and now she has her own YouTube Channel. But she knows a lot and she went to a French pastry school after graduating from Harvard. She's a genius and I really like everything that she does.

[52:06]

KB: It sounds like you're generally the more food-y person? Again like technically.

AK: Yeah, I think so.

[both laugh]

KB: Do you ever find yourself kind of- because going back a little bit to your family background, like cooking with your parents like your dad or with your grandma? Have you ever cooked with your grandma?

AK: I've cooked with my grandma before. Um, most of the time when we go over to her house and we have dinner together, then dinner is never actually ready. So we always help out and kind of learn while we go. I still want to learn more, but I'm really thankful for the opportunity that I've had to experience that with her because I know that's a huge part of her life.

KB: Tiffany, have you cooked with your parents or your grandma before?

TG: I guess I have cooked with my grandma. But it was always doing the random side things like cutting beans and not like the proper cooking part, so I don't actually know how to make the things she used to make, which I kind of wish I did. I've learned some random things through my mom, I've cooked with her before. I mean, she has a lot of the knowledge that my grandma has. Probably not all of it, but definitely a lot of it is there. I keep trying to learn more. It's kind of hard because my parents are back in Houston and I'm in L.A. [Los Angeles] so the opportunities I get to cook with them, it's not that often. But my mom taught me how to make this dessert that I really liked growing up, which is basically tapioca, coconut milk, corn, and a bunch of sugar. And that was really fun. I had to learn that from her virtually, she sent me a recipe after complaining that she doesn't measure things, but she had to measure it out for me. And so I really like to make that. The only problem with that also being that it's too much food for two people. And then she came over, I wanna say 2019 Thanksgiving, and taught me how to steam fish and make some other stuff. Which I've kind of forgotten how to do, so I kind of need her to teach me again. But yeah, it's really nice learning those old recipes that you can keep passing down assuming my children want them.

KB: And how would you describe that process of cooking stuff with somebody more through an oral experience as opposed to a written experience.

TG: Like having her in person?

KB: Or even with Ai-Ling, having that sort of person by your side, helping you through the steps as opposed to reading a recipe straight from an online source and just doing that.

[56:06]

TG: I think it depends. I would say the experiences with my mom are very different than the experiences with Ai-Ling. I ask Ai-Ling a lot of questions and she just kind of answers them. I think my mom feels like I should be more [laughs] effective in cooking, but this time in my life so she gets a lot more frustrated when I am asking really dumb questions, like how much water to put on potatoes. Which I actually forgot we're cooking.[laughs] I mean, they're there, but they're simmering. Yeah, it is. It is really helpful but I think As long as you're comfortable with making mistakes, there's merit from learning from mistakes, from not having someone to guide you. So I do like that process too, which you can't really get if someone's watching you while you're doing it. Yeah. So for me it really just depends. I think the stuff that my mom has taught me in person, I would have been okay doing it through text if she had just sent me a text thing. And probably every recipe I've done with Ai-Ling, I could do by myself. But there's something nice even if it's a different experience with my mom and with Ai-Ling, there's something nice about cooking with someone sometimes and having that guidance and just enjoying the time together. And yeah. It's a nice way to build relationship. Lemme go check out my potatoes real quick.

[58:10]

KB: [laughs] So Ai-Ling kind of like a similar question to you. How would you describe that process of making things with somebody as opposed to just reading a recipe and doing that on your own? [laughs]

AK: I think there are pros and cons to both. If you're cooking with somebody who has made that recipe before several times, I think it's really beneficial to learn from them because you learn certain techniques and stuff that you, well, would not know right off the bat if you were to read it from a recipe. Maybe you would learn it eventually, but it helps to have somebody there to just give you cues on what to look for. But with cooking straight from a recipe, I think that's also a good way to learn too. Because you have more of a personal connection with the dish because everything is from scratch, so you're just learning just solely from what you read and through your own experimentation. And so, I think it also depends on the dish because some dishes are harder than others and some require more technique.

[1:00:00]

KB: And generally, who do you cook for? Do you only cook for yourself? I think you kind of answered this question a little bit, but and then do you like cooking for other people?

AK: Yeah I'll go, okay. I much rather prefer cooking for other people than myself or for myself, plus other people. Because of how much work goes into it, I think it is a great way to show somebody that you care about them. And also, Tiffany was talking about quantities earlier, some things just need to be shared. So, pre-Corona, whenever I would bake and stuff, some people from my church we meet weekly, and so I'd always bring goodies to share with them. And it was just like a really good way to show them that I care about them and then, they would, I don't know, enjoy the little like desserts and stuff that I brought, yeah.

KB: How about you, Tiffany? Do you enjoy sharing what you've made?

TG: Yeah, I'd say generally. Like I said before, most of my meals are just cooked for me and Elwyn. But when I bake, when I used to go into the office for work, I would always bring what I baked in. Because one, we couldn't eat it all here and two, it's just nice to have someone enjoy the effort that you put into something. And I like having friends over and cooking for them or cooking with them. I don't know, it's fun to have that time of coming together and enjoying one's hard work, enjoying each other's company. There's just something about food that I feel like brings people together.

[1:02:34]

KB: For sure. And actually, thank you for bringing in the idea of community, because that's where my next couple of questions are going. So have any parts of the food culture in, your ethnic community changed during your life? I know this is a very broad question and you may not know. But yeah, and if so, how? Or maybe even not taking it to broad SoutheastAsian community, but maybe even in your family. That might be a little bit easier.

TG/AK: [Both speak at once]

TG: Oh sorry, do you wanna go first?

AK: No, I was gonna ask you if you could answer first.

TG: Sure, I'll answer first. I'd say one big thing, especially within our family, is just, well, I guess a lot of us have grown up and moved away. So Ai-Ling still lives in Houston right now, and her brother just went off to college. I want to say you and one other cousin still live in Houston, that might be it. And there's the sense of we don't see each other at Christmas as often as we used to. They still have those big family get-togethers here and there but it's definitely not the same to not be at them as often and not to enjoy the company of relatives we don't see that often, to see each other. And having to find different ways to keep in touch which often I think are outside of that familial, getting together, cooking food, eating on the floor thing. Just like there's something very I don't know how to describe it, but there's just a different feeling of getting together that way than there is doing it virtually or even just like having these rushed visits to Houston when I can take time off work and trying to squeeze Ai-Ling into every free slot that I have. It's not the same as being able to just sit around for hours and hours and just do silly things and fall asleep at each other's homes and just be there the next day. I feel like there was just something very relaxed about it, like we had all the time in the world to spend together. And now it's just- I feel like this is kind of going away from food, but I mean part of it was that we were always just eating, you know. And now it's just like now everything is about finding time and organizing schedules and Zoom. Yeah, I don't know if that answered your question.

[1:05:56]

KB: I think it did in part, yeah. Kind of losing that sense of having an event to gather around. Not even an event, but having reason to gather around the food.

TG: Yeah.

KB: I understand that. Is this something you've also observed Ai-Ling?

AK: Yeah. I think I agree with everything that she said. Definitely, things have changed even within my own family dynamic. Because, my brother is no longer here, but whenever he was, eating together was always a very personal family thing, I guess. I've been to some friends' house who they eat their meals separately so they just get their food and go to their rooms or

something. But for our family for lunch and dinner always we would sit together at the table and just share that time. Even if I had school or my dad had work or anything, for dinner we would always have that time together. But things have changed in that my brother is no longer here. But I still have that time with my family. But then with my other cousins and the rest of my family, things are harder now. Especially with COVID, well, obviously, it's less like free than before. Things are just different. I was talking to Tiffany earlier and we were talking about how we haven't seen each other in a really long time, and I know that if COVID wasn't a thing we would have seen each other because she was planning on coming to Houston last March, I think. Right around when everything happened so that real in-person connection is something that I miss. But I don't know, I think it's cool that we found ways to connect. And through food even. Even though it's virtual. I hope that answers your question.

[1:09:06]

KB: Good, thank you. [laughs] I think even through COVID, I feel like over the past ten-ish years I feel like- Just a little bit of context, you know this that kind of through the two thousands, Asian food, especially Chinese food was growing in popularity, but I feel like in the last five-ish years more "obscure" Asian foods are becoming fads I think is gonna be a good word to use. How do you feel about that change in, the broader sense of community? I'm going to rephrase that question [laughs].

AK: Yeah sorry, I am trying to think.

KB: Yeah.

AK: Did you hear what she said, Tiffany?

TG: I was just two feet away. Um. That's a big question. You asked basically like how do we feel about Asian food becoming kind of fad-ish.

KB: Yeah yes, more or less. [laughs]

[1:10:46]

TG: I think there's something kind of nice about it. I think there's the good, and then there's the bad, right? It's good to have your culture feel like it's being appreciated. It makes you feel like. I don't know. I know, a lot of people that grew up with very- I'm trying to phrase this the right way. People that grew up eating Asian food probably more than I did and would bring that food to school and stuff. There's a lot of stories that you can find about people talking about how they felt very embarrassed to bring that to school because they would get made fun of and stuff like that. I think there's a sense that it's nice to have our food appreciated rather than looked down upon. But there's also that lack of recognition of the way that it was seen prior to this. And it's just like oh people think this is cool now. So we all think it's cool now. And it kind of neglects the feelings of you know, the people that were affected growing up. And yeah, I don't know, and I think there's too much just of a disconnect between Asian food and Asian people in the U.S. too. I think you definitely see that right now with things that are going on here, especially around COVID and the messaging around that. And how it has kind of casts this weird negative shadow on the Asian community and the way that people see us and feel like they can treat us, especially our elders. Which is a huge thing for us because one of the biggest thing in our family is just everything you do, you do in relation to your elders, right? Like when our grandma asks us to go out, we tell her whatever she wants to eat, you know? Whenever we go eat food, she gets to eat first. Whenever you are taking the last bit of food, you ask if they want it. That kind of thing. I think that it's just hard to- I think that it's great that people like Asian food now. And that they like the more unique side of Asian food more and more. But I think it should also always come back to where did that come from? And do we actually see those people or are we just kind of paying attention to their food and not paying attention to them?

[1:14:17]

AK: I agree with what Tiffany said. And especially when she's talking about the culture of respecting our elders. I think it's really, really prevalent in Chinese culture because I was always taught to serve my grandma first. And so typically we would have all the food, all the dishes on the table, and it was like a way to show honor or it is a way to show honor is if you serve the oldest person generally first and then you would serve the next oldest person and then the next and the next until you finally get to yourself or you wait for somebody to serve you. And so it's just little things like that, that they've become ingrained I guess into who I am. And so it's

sometimes just easy to forget that that's not how everyone views respect. And just I think it's easy now for people to- Once you experience Asian culture and- I even have some friends who, they don't mean any harm by it or anything, but, they just are really into Japanese culture, and so they're talking about anime and about these different Japanese dishes. I guess they don't really know anything else about the culture besides just anime and manga and whatever they see on TV. And, I'm not upset about it, it's just- And I do have some friends who they really do want to learn more about it. They're not just saying it just because it's a fad or whatever, but they are truly interested. And relating that to food too, especially in the US, there's Chinese food and then there's American Chinese food. Which, I'm not bashing American Chinese food because I think it's its own thing but it's not authentic Chinese food. And I think that's where a lot of the confusion is because people think of Chinese food and then they think of Orange Chicken or whatever typical food you get at Pei Wei or Panda Express. And then I remember in school, sometimes people would ask me if I ate Chinese food all the time or sometimes I'd tell them that I liked Chinese food and they're like "Oh my gosh I love Panda Express too" and I'm like "wait, no." And so. I just think that in the US there is kind of a disconnect between what people envision Chinese food to be and then what it actually is. And most of the time, it's just, I don't know, they're just ignorant, and I don't think that people generally do it with bad intentions, but I do think that people could make a bigger effort to learn about what genuine Chinese culture is. And not just go based off of what they just hear people say about Chinese culture, you know?

[1:19:31]

TG: Yeah. Actually, Ai-Ling reminded me of when I was in middle school, some point. I have this memory that I've never forgotten where I had a couple of friends who are really into anime. And I remember telling them "oh I don't like anime" because, I don't know, I just never really got into it. And they said something along the lines of "how can you even call yourself an Asian if you don't like anime" or something like that. I just remember- I mean I'm a pretty passive person so I don't think I said anything to them. But I remember thinking you don't understand what being an Asian or an American-Asian or whatever is. Because one, I'm not even Japanese. [laughs] And two, my parents immigrated here and so the way that I'm being raised is so different from the way that you're being raised. I still did absorb a lot of American values and things like that but there's also a lot of values that I got from my parents' pasts and what they

learned from their parents too. And I just feel like a lot of people like- I don't think they meant anything bad by it when they said it, right? But you know, those things still affect you when you're a kid. And I think people just don't understand that when you embrace part of a culture part of what you're embracing is the whole culture and you need to really understand that and you need to see the culture and you need to see the people that are a part of it. Like with Ai-Ling, I don't really fault people for it because I just think people aren't really taught that but would be nice.

[1:21:49]

KB: Thanks, those are really great answers. [laughs] I feel like I want to explore this a little bit more. This is not where the interview was supposed to go but I kind of want to hear more of your thoughts about this. So in-depth. How do you think of how that could change? If it c- If you wa- You definitely want that to change. But is there a way you see that changing in the future given the current situation? [laughs]

AK: I think that people are slowly becoming more aware, or at least I would like to think that people are becoming more aware. And especially now, I think that a lot of Asian Americans have found their voices on social media and stuff, and I think it's a really good platform that they have to be able to spread awareness about Injustice or just, even I guess what people may seem as more minimal- Like the thing that Tiffany said about anime because that has happened to me too. People would ask me oh do you watch anime? And I've gotten to a point where I have chosen not to because just because I'm Asian doesn't mean that I love anime. And like she said I'm not Japanese either, so that's not even yeah- Anyways, but I think if people continue to speak up, I think slowly change will happen. But I don't necessarily think that it will be something that's easy because people have to want to learn about it. But in order to have to want to learn about it, I think that there has to be some kind of, I don't want to say, awakening. But just that people in America especially need to become aware that the world is not just America. It's not just the little bubble that you grew up in. And that there are other cultures out there that- and not even just Chinese culture- but all over the world, and they have to realize that even though it's different from what they know, we still hold it with as much respect, and we still hold it as close to our heart as they may for their own culture. But it's just something that I think will take time. But hopefully, in the future, more things about culture and stuff will come to light and people will become more aware and they will want to become more aware. That's another thing too.

[1:26:18]

TG: Yeah, I don't know if I'm as hopeful as Ai-Ling is. But I want to be. I guess, going back to my childhood, I feel like there was a lot more hope about- I remember growing up and being told by so many people that like America's a melting pot, and it was built on immigrants, and its- The people that immigrated here, brought in a bunch of different cultures and now we're just a mix of all these cultures. As it's we were living peacefully together all the time or something like that. Which I think as you get older, you realize that there's a lot more division in the world than you realize as a kid. Mostly because I think you just get shielded from it. I mean, I don't think every kid has that luxury, but I feel like I got shielded from it at least. And now that I'm older I see the division, especially in the US. And it's something that I really do hope can be solved. And for me, I wouldn't even know how to begin to solve it. And I have a lot of mixed feelings about the different approaches people are taking to try and solve it. I think there is a lot of power in standing up and protesting and saying what you want from the country. But at the same time, I don't feel like people are responding to that either. Or the people that are responding positively to it, are the people that would have responded positively to it anyway. The thing that I think that does do though is it does make those people not be like "Oh yeah, I support you." It kind of forces them to be like "oh, I actually need to do something" rather than just sit here and not think about it and just have those beliefs but never do anything about it. So I think that is really good. But at the same time, I think there has to be a way to dialogue with the people who you feel like need an entire change in mindset, right? And part of that involves listening to them too. Which, I think even for me it would be really difficult to do that. But no one is going to listen to you if you're not willing to listen to them. I think that's just the reality. And some people are never going to change their minds, and I think you just have to accept that. But I think just the people that can share those ideas with others and the newer generations. And have those more active conversations that are like: "Okay, you've learned this so far in your life, but what do you think about this idea?" And finding places that you can connect with another person. And sometimes it's not even having those conversations. I've heard stories of people who literally, through food have realized that the way that they think is just wrong. Someone will be like "oh try this food for my culture" and they're like "wow! Why have I thought this about you?" Which sounds so silly and why is that like the turning thing? But you know whatever works, works right? If sharing something with someone who is against you makes them see you in a more human way

and then who's to bash it, right? Yeah, so I really do hope it happens I don't know I don't know how you start changing that many people's minds. And I also don't presume that I'm one hundred percent right about my opinion on it, you know? So it's just finding that place where we can all just have empathy for each other and care about and support each other. I think that's the only place I wanna reach, and I think even that's hard.

[1:31:20]

KB: That is a hard I don't know nut to crack. Building that sense of, I hesitate to use this term 'cause it's so cliché, but an actual Global Village. An actual- Because they say America's a melting pot but yes, everything melted together and created an America, that's a standard and then every other new thing cannot melt into the old melting pot. I hate that phrase a lot. So yeah, I understand where you're coming from. Thank you both for those very insightful thoughts.

[This comes in about an hour later than this earlier material. During this time, we just chatted casually while they finished their curry puffs]

KB: So, thank you both for doing this. This was so much fun. We've for a lot since we actually finished the interview. But is there anything else you'd kind of like to add? Kind of last thoughts before I switch off the recording?

TG: This was fun. I feel like it was nice talking about family stuff. Like how we used to come together as family around food. It's stuff I haven't really thought about in a long time. Especially since we've been quarantined. But yeah, it was a fun way to hang out together and not [laughs] successfully make curry puffs. They do taste good though. They're just not functional.

1:33:16

KB: Can I see? Can you bring the example you made closer [laughs]

TG: This sad spoon of fried dough that's falling apart. Hers are prettier.

KB: Is there anything you'd like to add, Ai-Ling?

AK: Yeah, this was definitely a pretty fun experience. I think it was kind of cool to think back to our family's culture and its relationship with food. Especially since even though Tiffy- Tiffany and I are cousins, we both have different backgrounds because our parents were from different countries. It was kind of cool to see that and then also how we connected through my grandma.

KB: Thank you both so much and Ai-Ling can we see your curry puffs? [laughs]

AK: I'm trying to hold them gingerly so they don't break

TG: Dude, that looks so good [laughs]. One day.

KB: [laughs] Thank you so much and I'm going to stop the re-