



Jiyeon Lee

Heirloom Market BBQ

Atlanta, GA

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World of Barbecue

0:00:00

Bailey Benson: My name is Bailey Benson and I'm conducting an interview with Chef Jiyeon Lee of Heirloom Market BBQ in Atlanta, Georgia. Today is September 16th, 2022, and the interview begins at 3:30. All right, Chef Lee, introduce yourself.

Jiyeon Lee: My name is Jiyeon Lee. I'm a chef and owner at Heirloom Market BBQ in Atlanta. I have been-- let's see, twelve years. It's gonna be thirteen years from November.

Bailey Benson: Congratulations.

Jiyeon Lee: Thank you. And I'm originally from South Korea.

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Bailey Benson: Cool! Tell me about your upbringing and adolescence. We're gonna start in the beginning. Who do you consider to be your family growing up and what are your fondest memories of growing up?

Jiyeon Lee: My grandmother, she's my inspiration for my life because she is a survivor from Korean War. But before that, her life through when Japan invaded Korea, so she had an experience with a lot of sad history with Korea and a rough time in Korea. So she was always my-- I mean, she's so little. She's tiny.

Bailey Benson: [Laughter]

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Jiyeon Lee: A very petite woman, but she was very strong but very kind and gentle soul. And when I grew up, how strong she is and she's an amazing cook, too. She was really amazing and

very [**dedicated** 0:02:21] whatever she cooked, even very humble food, but she made it really beautiful. She paid attention to detail. So she's my-- the most influenced my cooking, my philosophy on cooking. And also my mom. My grandmother is my dad's mom, and my mom is just a naturally talented woman. She's good at anything with hand.

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She's doing really good with crochet, she's a beautiful cook, and also she can sing. I got a lot of DNA from her, but it's just a different generation. I learn from my grandmother and my mother, and my generation is kind of between-- when I grew up it's kind of different world than South Korea right now. South Korea, they're leading a lot of movie culture, music culture. They are kind of new kids on the block [**this day** 0:03:42] but when I grew up back then Korea was still developing stage. So I see kind of both, very struggling to developing, so I'm kind of between generations.

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So I learned a lot and I'm grateful for those experiences in my life.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. You spoke a little bit about you learned your cooking philosophy from your grandmother.

Jiyeon Lee: Um-hm.

Bailey Benson: Could you explain what you mean by-- like, what is your cooking philosophy?

Jiyeon Lee: Well, it's very similar like southern cooking.

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: It's based on poverty. My grandmother, that Japanese invasion time, they weren't slavery but it really hard under control. They couldn't have really good quality food, and also after the Korea War, Korea was really, really destroyed so everybody through that poverty. And my grandmother's cooking is all about utilization. She doesn't waste anything.

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She used every-- root to top. And that kind of-- you care about your products, and you feed your family with your heart. I think it is different now, especially when I live in America when I see-- I understand the modern society and everybody's busy and you just feed whatever to your kids. But when I grew up my grandmother, my mom, they were poor, but they never really gave us whatever. Even just greens they cooked really, really well and fed us always thinking about the nutrition and things.

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So that philosophy is about dedication and love and respect for your loved ones. So when I'm cooking that's my root. Whatever I cook, I cook Korean food or barbecue or sometimes something else I don't really just do it careless. That's my philosophy.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. I think that's beautiful. Some people are passionate about food and cooking from a young age while others stumble into the food world. Where do you fall in the spectrum between being passionate about food and cooking from early childhood to that's something that you didn't know you loved until you were older? Where did you find your love for cooking?

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Jiyeon Lee: Well, from childhood food is always-- even visually the memories when I was little, even really vivid memories is always related with the food, I guess because my mom and grandmother is always cooking at home. And I'm an introverted person so I don't really go out much and always stay home and helping my grandmother and my mom cooking, watch them and then helping, whatever support, peeling potatoes or whatever. And I'm a very sensitive person so all those memories, the sound of cooking, smells and colors, everything, it was kind of really into me already.

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

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Jiyeon Lee: And I never really thought that cooking is going to be my job. I never really thought about it before. And I have a different career, too. But when I moved to America, I came with my ex-husband. He's Korean and we divorced. And then I started thinking, like, I need to start over, financially, too. What should I do? I was really thinking deeply at that time. And there's a few things I really like because I love art and I was thinking, should I go to art school? Because that's too expensive. I don't have money for that. [Laughter] And back then, around 2005, all the TV shows, Food Network kind of started being popular.

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I was always [inaudible 0:09:11] watching it's so fascinating. And I was, like, I think I can cook. I kinda want to cook. I was always cooking at home anyway 'cause my ex-husband, he wanted Korean food all the time. But I was a pretty good cook, but I wanted to challenge myself, so I went to Le Cordon Bleu Atlanta, so I was learning French cuisine. And from the start, the first

two classes was food science and nutrition, it threw me out because my English was very poor back then. I was so scared.

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But after those classes and started hands-on cooking class I was kind of like-- how do I express myself? All my [cells 0:10:11] kind of like bubbly, I was, like, okay, this is it! [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: I loved that. I loved it. Not just the cooking, just the cooking environment with-- I'm very introverted so I'd never really hang out with the people too much, especially Americans. And in school I met my classmates, and I started to hang out with them and cooking together. And the cooking, it's a completely different-- Korean cuisine and French cuisine is totally different so it was really challenging me and it was fascinating me.

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That was really-- I knew it. When I started I knew it, I'm gonna love this and I'm gonna do this for a long time.

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: And I'm still cooking. [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: Yeah. So leading into the next question, along the lines of your childhood, as well, and I feel like you have a really great answer for this one so I'm excited to ask.

Jiyeon Lee: Okay. [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: Describe the moment you realized you loved food and describe the moment you realized you loved cooking and barbecuing, and were those the same moment or were those different moments for you?

Jiyeon Lee: Could you tell me one more time the first question?

Bailey Benson: Yeah. Describe the moment that you realized you loved food and describe the moment that you realized that you loved cooking for others.

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Jiyeon Lee: Well, I think cooking is another form of the artistic expression, so I think I was born with that. I love painting, I love music. I consider myself [a natural 0:12:23] artist. So the cooking is just-- to me it's an art. So maybe that's why when I was little I always loved the ingredients, colors, smells, and all that. So the cooking is just-- the food is just me.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: If somebody asks me to describe myself there's the food. [Laughter]

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But cooking for other people it's a lot of pressure, though, especially cooking for a restaurant. You need to be very consistent. The consistency is the most important for the restaurant. If I cook something just for family or friends that's a different story but having a restaurant there's an audience there and so there's a responsibility there, too. So it's exciting, it's fun, but also at the same time it's stressful for cooking as a restaurant owner. It's really different. I think I enjoyed cooking more before I owned the restaurant. You know what I mean?

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: When I started cooking as a business it's different.

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It's a lot of pressure. But when I see people, especially at the Heirloom Market-- when we started Heirloom Market we have a special board outside and on the special board we have, like, spicy curry and pork sandwich, crispy tofu, kimchi coleslaw. And sometimes I look at it, customers outside-- like, kinda a little older couple, they were just staring at the menu and then they just walked out. Maybe they're just, like, is this a barbecue place or what is this?

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But people start loving it and mouth to mouth and more people coming in. Now when they're getting-- we have a lot of side items like outside of the box, stuff that normally you don't get from a barbecue restaurant.

Bailey Benson: Yes.

Jiyeon Lee: And when people figure it out and they find out, like, when I'm having a pork sandwich and I have a cucumber relish salad, so when they taste it it just makes sense. You're eating heavy, the meat, smoky, and you get some crunchy, refreshing [digestive 0:15:51] vegetable together, pickled kinda, then they feel like, okay, this makes sense, and they start buying jars and stuff and take home.

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And they told me that, oh, when I'm eating a steak at home and I'm eating with this it makes me so happy. That's the joy of cooking, especially when people embrace my culture in a good way. I'm not just putting things-- just mix it up, oh, this is fusion. I never do that. It's gotta make sense. Not just only my knowledge, it's my partner, Cody Taylor, he's pitmaster, and we've been a couple for a long time and recently we separated but we are best friends and still business partners. He's a southern boy and I'm a really old-school Korean woman, very traditional.

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So when we cook together we create something just naturally melded into the food. An example, like, our collard greens. Our collard greens are really popular and at the beginning people couldn't believe I cooked the collard greens. [Laughter] They looked at me, like, you're a Asian woman. [Laughter] That kind of expression. But when I started to cook collard greens at Heirloom I never cooked collard greens before, but I had collard greens so much because my favorite American cuisine is meat and three and barbecue, so I've been many, many places looking for southern food.

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And especially I love collard greens because when my grandmother's cooking greens-- we don't have collard greens in Korea, but we have-- it's called [inaudible 0:18:13]. What is it? Korean radishes are huge. It's big. We make kimchi with that. And the tops is a big green. It's very similar like a mustard green.

Bailey Benson: Yeah, um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: And we sauté it or we just blanch it in seasoning but wintertime the old school, old people they dehydrate them, just hanging on what they call the laundry string thing. They hang the Korean-- all the greens and dehydrate them.

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And then during winter it's rehydrated and braise the greens. It's very similar like collard greens. They taste like it. It's once been dehydrated so once it cooks and it's a color, like a dark green like collard greens, and every time I ate collard greens somewhere there's a little pungent flavor from the ham hock.

Bailey Benson: Yes.

Jiyeon Lee: The people who really cook-- who regionally cook and not adding some beef base or chicken base, somebody who really cooks well, and they start with the ham hocks and everything. But the pungentness that hit me like Korean doenjang. Doenjang is just fermented soybean paste.

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I guess the American people are maybe more familiar with the Japanese miso.

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: So that's the pungent ingredients in our collard greens. I use the doenjang. So when people taste it people really don't know that flavor is from Korean pantry.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: So the example was when I'm cooking collard greens I use my memories with my grandmother. That's the connection between the southern food and my Korean food, those two connections. When I found it I'm thrilled. And when I cook, and it come out a different version of original. You know what I mean?

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Bailey Benson: Yes. Yeah. And you just touched on this a little bit already but what does the word "fusion" mean to you? And would you describe what you do at Heirloom Market BBQ as fusion or is there another word that you would rather describe it as?

Jiyeon Lee: Just like I describe it as-- fusion is not a bad word if somebody did it right. But somebody just throw things like, oh, let's mix this, mix this, and then create something just for making something it can be confusing.

Bailey Benson: Yes.

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Jiyeon Lee: But if you understand the culture, if you mix with Korean and American, if you understand both cultures very well and then you create something, especially found some connection, it creates another version of something I call Heirloom Market.

Bailey Benson: Yes.

Jiyeon Lee: To us Heirloom Market is original because Cody, he's southern culture-- his mom is amazing. She passed away but his mom was a really, really good cook. And his mom is his

inspiration and my mom and grandmother is my inspiration. So when we cook together it created Heirloom. So Heirloom is our original. It's not fusion for us. [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: Yes.

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So moving more into your career as we're transitioning, what is your favorite part about owning or working at Heirloom Market and what is your least favorite part? And then, what attracted you to opening a barbecue joint?

Jiyeon Lee: The exciting part is watching people enjoying our food. That's the biggest-- like I said earlier, at the beginning some people were, like, oh, what is this? And now people are enjoying the [line 0:23:34] and they understand why these components are mixed. They understand that, but that's the biggest joy. And also our staff, such amazing people. I have from start of working-- our pitmaster is almost twelve years with us and many people work over eight years, some ten years.

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Bailey Benson: Wow.

Jiyeon Lee: Youngest probably, like, four, five years. So I'm kinda like a mama when I go to the restaurant. Everybody's, like, oh, they're happy. And we just play music and we're just dancing. The people, the element always makes me happy, always makes me smile. And they are so good. They're amazing. And even, like they say, I'm taking care of my dog and they're taking care of my business, so happy and grateful for them. And also the diversity of Heirloom from the staff to the customer.

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Probably the most diversity, the restaurant, I've ever seen. We have all colors, people there, customers, too. We have all colors. [Laughter] That's pretty amazing, actually. Really amazing.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: And we really respect each other. Some people say, like, oh, my staff are my family. I don't say that. They're not my family but I respect them as a human being. Each individual, they are a human and I respect them as a human being, not like as my employee. And they respect me. We respect each other. So it's really, really unique and very lovely.

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Only one thing I ask when my manager interviews the new people, I say, I don't care the resume, to be honest with you. I don't care. If you talk to them you think this person's gonna get along with the rest of people and then you're hired. That's it. The personality is the most important. Anyone can learn. There's some people learning slow, some people learning fast, but they will eventually learn.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: The personality, you can't change that. So that's how much I care about the people. So we have a good group of people working together and that creates very good vibe, very good energy. And the customers really enjoy that, too, 'cause they feel it.

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And it really affects the food, too, 'cause I always believe that. You know, old school kitchen the chef's yelling at the cooks and cussing and very disrespect. And I saw some. This is very different but when I start at beginning cooking that was kinda like that's part of the culinary scene. But I really disagree with that because if you feel so awful and miserable and you're touching food and all that toxic goes to the food. That's what I believe. So the working environment is very important to me. I want everybody happy. I don't want anybody burnt out. Just make a very happy and easy workplace. So that's the energy of Heirloom and what I enjoy with Heirloom.

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Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: The least thing is something always breaks.

Bailey Benson: [Laughter] Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: Always breaks. It's really unbelievable. Like, every day something breaks. And it's expensive to repair, especially these days. Labor costs expensive, all the parts and things, it's so expensive. That really stresses me out sometimes. So that's the least thing. Probably you could find that same answer from other restaurateurs, too. Why everything breaks every day?

[Laughter]

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: That's one huge expense for the restaurant, something people don't see. They're, oh, good, this is the cost and labor cost and food cost, but they don't see that hidden cost is a huge part of the cost.

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So that's the stressing part. And what was the last question? I forgot.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. The last part of the question is what attracted you to opening a barbecue restaurant? Of all types of restaurants what was it about barbecue specifically?

Jiyeon Lee: To be honest with you, it wasn't my passion at the beginning. It was my partner, Cody's, passion. He wanted to open a small barbecue joint or burger joint, like a shack type of restaurant he wanted to open. His background is fine dining, too. He went to Art Institute Culinary, and he worked for Ritz-Carlton. He was the saucier. He was training people.

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And his background is fine dining, but he always told me that about diners, meat and threes, barbecue. He had a passion, and I didn't have that passion. When I worked at culinary school I saw that French cuisine and I always wanted to do Asian, European style food. And fine dining restaurant, that was my passion. And to be honest with you, at the beginning, before I know the barbecue, I kinda like looked down on it.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: And I will always look for something very artistic and fine dining, and that type of person I was before.

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And when we started Heirloom I still feel the same. This is the most difficult cooking technique ever, barbecue is, 'cause every day it depends on-- [dog barking] Oh, my doggy. May I have a second?

Bailey Benson: Go ahead.

Jiyeon Lee: [Speaks to dog] I can't even go to the bathroom. She barks, like, Mommy, where are you? [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: Yeah, my dog does the same.

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Jiyeon Lee: But the wood really affects, too. And weather, the humidity, temperature, everything affects the cooking of barbecue, so it's hard to make it consistently every single day. It's very, very hard. I wish every day is the best day but sometimes we have a bad day, too, but still decent. But we'll try to make it best as we can. 'Cause we don't use any electrical or gas. It's a wood burning so it's hard.

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[Speaking to dog in background, steps away to take dog out.]

0:34:00

[Returns, speaking to dog in background.]

0:35:00

Sorry about that.



Bailey Benson: Don't even worry about it.

Jiyeon Lee: She can't walk anymore and she's the last days. She's been emptying her bowel so it's pretty difficult. Actually, we decided to let her go next week so it's very hard.

Bailey Benson: I'm sorry to hear that.

Jiyeon Lee: Okay.

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So ever since, I respect the pitmasters. It is such hard work, too. You inhale the smoke all the time and deal with the heat and smell all the time. [Laughter] It's a really, really, really hard job. And it's hard to make it consistently.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: So I hate myself, like, why I look down at barbecue before? I know nothing. I didn't know anything before. Yeah, barbecue is amazing food. It's my favorite, barbecue and meat and three, such a soul food and I love it.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. And like you just said, being a pitmaster is hard and it takes long hours, and it's hard on you mentally and physically, and striving for consistency is even harder.

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Jiyeon Lee: Oh, yeah. It's hard, um-hm.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. What keeps you going in the restaurant?

Jiyeon Lee: Yeah, our pitmaster goes to the restaurant at 4:00 a.m. and some other guy puts in the meat, like, 5:00 p.m. for the next day. And then towards the end they have to check, too. And then the pitmaster comes early morning. And sometime the fire has died. It very rarely happens but sometimes it happens. And as we know all things can happen, but thankfully it's been twelve years and we had, like, twice fire and things.

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To me, anything fixable with the money that's not a big problem. What you can't fix with the money, that's a real problem.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. So what keeps you going in the restaurant business when it's so difficult? Like, when it gets really hard what is your reason for keeping the restaurant open and stuff like that? What is it--

Jiyeon Lee: What is the most difficult?

Bailey Benson: Or what motivates you in your restaurant?

Jiyeon Lee: Oh, motivated to keep opening restaurant?

Bailey Benson: Yeah, to keep it open. Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: I mean, the Heirloom is our legacy now. It's more than just a business now. People ask us from the beginning, like, why don't you guys open another one? Why don't you franchise this? That question I always get but I wanted Heirloom just one of a kind.

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And I keep this restaurant as a legacy. One day I won't be here. I'm not living forever but I wish pass down to someone and somebody keep doing it. If I do something like franchise I probably create something else to make it franchise, but for Heirloom-- from the beginning the Heirloom was-- we didn't have money. We really didn't have money. I was broke after divorce, and I had a bankrupt and Cody was broke, too. So my brother gave me \$25,000 and that's how we started.

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So we hired one carpenter to just fix a little cosmetic things, and me and Cody painted the whole restaurant. Anything we can do ourselves we did it. And we didn't expect that business get this big back then. I thought if we sell just maybe one-thousand dollar a day it would be amazing. So something that I didn't expect, something that I didn't know from the beginning, I didn't expect anything like what we are now.

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: And I have so much interviews and people have interest to listen to our story behind Heirloom.

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I realize that we built a history, you know. This is history.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: So now that's my motivation. We established something very meaningful. It's not just a business. I make good money, yeah, but that's it. If I want to make more money I'd maybe

expand the business and sell the alcohol and stuff. And we're only open five days. We don't even have beer. That's not the point now. If I want to make money I can do million other things.

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From the Heirloom what my expectation is how to keep this legacy a long time, for longevity and it becomes my motivation, how to make it consistently good. And how to consistently have **[these five in the 0:42:29]** restaurant, keeping good people.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: Yeah, that's it.

Bailey Benson: That's great. Describe the moment you first opened your restaurant. Take me through that day. What were you feeling--

Jiyeon Lee: You're breaking a little bit.

Bailey Benson: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Describe the moment you first opened the restaurant and take me through your first day. Do you want me to go one more time?

Jiyeon Lee: Heirloom?

Bailey Benson: Yeah, Heirloom.

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Jiyeon Lee: [Laughter] It was really cute. We didn't have money and I was working at The Hotel St. Regis in Buckhead, Atlanta back then. So Cody was himself beginning first month with him and we had one dishwasher and one part-time guy from the pizza place near Heirloom and one cashier who never worked before. [Laughter] So running like that. First day we sold \$240, and

we had an old cash register, handwriting, and it was really, really cute, though. It was really retro.

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Back then me and Cody we were both so tired because we didn't have enough staff. Early morning we had to go do shopping. Now we get ingredients from the purveyors but back then we-- it's more expensive having stuff from the purveyors so we'd go shopping and then prep everything and cooking.

Bailey Benson: Wow.

Jiyeon Lee: And towards the end cleaning and everything. So sleeping, like, three, four hours a day. So we were just tired. It wasn't happy. [Laughter] Oh, this is my restaurant and I'm the owner. It's nothing like that because we were just, like, bad people. We were so tired! And then business started picking up and media started to give us a lot of attention and people started to line up.

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So first few years we just keep adding more people, more equipment, just keep improving 'cause we started only \$25,000. With \$25,000 you can fix a bathroom, but with that cost we started the business, so we immediately, as soon as we're making money, that money we buy ingredients for the next day kind of situation. And we needed a new cooler, we needed a new smoker, we needed this and this. It's been probably like five, six years we keep adding butcher cooler, new smokehouse, and concrete back there, and change the patio, build the breakroom.

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It's all like a Lego. We just keep adding things on top of each other. It's a little village now.

That's why, like I said, this is history because we didn't start with something accomplished and then something established and then we just go in and start like that. We were the builder. We built the restaurant for years with the investment, too, so now Cody and I are always thinking, like, isn't it time to redo the floor of the kitchen? We're always thinking, like, how are we gonna make it better and cleaner? Always thinking like that. Always growing.

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So yeah, it wasn't really excitement at the beginning, it's just tired. [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: I was just tired. Especially I had two jobs and also at the same time something very-- you're doing something not see much bright future. You know what I mean?

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: That small shack was very, like, hidden location and tiny. We were only 760 square foot.

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So it didn't really look promising, but we had to put everything in there, like, 200 percent our body and soul were there. It was more scared than excitement then.

Bailey Benson: I see.

Jiyeon Lee: But time goes, and we see growing, slowly growing, never stopped. It was growing and growing and growing. Now, like, okay, we did something. We've done something. It's a great, great feeling when you start from really, really bottom.

Bailey Benson: Yeah, I bet. So you talk about Heirloom Market creating this original flavor, this original output in the food world. What style of barbecue would you say you practice within Heirloom Barbecue if you had to assign it to any type of concentration? And then-- actually, let's start with that. How would you describe the barbecue and the flavor of Heirloom Market barbecue?

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Jiyeon Lee: Cody was born in Texas and grew up in Tennessee and Georgia, so he's very, like, Texan style food. He's good at it. And also he traveled a lot, St. Louis, Kansas City, and he took me many places, too. Before we started, actually, I had a TV show in Korea back then before I was working at the hotel and people was just curious about-- 'cause I was a popstar before and I became a chef, and they always wonder what's going on.

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So we had, like, a little TV show, road trip visiting, making Korean pepper paste and soybean paste in the villages and [inaudible 0:50:18] village and things. And Cody see that when all the bases, like seasoning and stuff, he kind of see, like, this is very-- the barbecue rubs. So he really inspired that. So when we start cooking we didn't really set, like, hey, let's do this style of barbecue. We were just, let's just do our style. Let's just make it good.

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So we start using gochujang, which is red chili pepper paste, Korean pantry. It's perfect for chicken and pork. You can rub it and then dry seasoning so that sticky-- the paste is like a glue so all the seasonings sort of stick there. And then that's what gives them sweetness and caramelization. So it just became that heirloom-style barbecue. [Laughter] I call it "heirloom style." It's hard to fit any category, actually. But the influence, of course, is Texas and Korea.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. And you mentioned heirloom-style barbecue. I really like that. And you talked about gochujang. What other ingredients do you think are core to heirloom-style barbecue?

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Jiyeon Lee: Korean pantry is very simple. Korean pantry is we have that doenjang, I said earlier, for collard greens, the fermented soybean paste. And gochujang is a red chili pepper paste that's fermented, too. And the gochugaru, which is chili powder. And really good salt, sea salt, and pepper and soy sauce and sugar. That's the Korean pantry basically. Some vinegar, too. So very, very simple. But those ingredients we are using at Heirloom. Even mac and cheese we put some Korean chili powder. [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: That sounds amazing!

Jiyeon Lee: People don't really recognize it. They say, "Some sort of kick to it. What is it?"

[Laughter]

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Bailey Benson: Sounds amazing. What is your favorite style of barbecue and why?



Jiyeon Lee: The favorite barbecue style you mean in nation?

Bailey Benson: In nation, anywhere. If there's a type of barbecue that you really love.

Jiyeon Lee: Anywhere?

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: He took me a lot of places in Texas. I really like brisket there. They have amazing briskets. And our ribs. I like Heirloom ribs. [Laughter] I like St. Louis style a lot, too. Yeah, that's pretty much-- and the meat and three. I love meat and three.

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Have you tried Busy Bee's in Atlanta?

Bailey Benson: Yes. Yes. I love it!

Jiyeon Lee: Isn't it awesome? I love it.

Bailey Benson: Amazing.

Jiyeon Lee: And Arnold-- where is it? Nashville.

Bailey Benson: No, I haven't.

Jiyeon Lee: They have a meat and three. Oh, my God. They're so amazing, too. Yeah. Barbecue and meat and three. And it's just surprising me I don't see many southern food in the South. That's really depressing to me. It should have more. It should have really, really more but there's a lot of contemporary style but not real grandma cooking places.

Bailey Benson: I see.

0:55:01

Jiyeon Lee: Isn't African American culture is like women's cooking the most kinda? I see a lot of places-- females are in the kitchen. That's the culture?

Bailey Benson: Typically what I see a lot of oftentimes and historically is that men tend to cook the meat and women tend to make the side. And that's changing now, which is great to see.

Jiyeon Lee: Oh!

Bailey Benson: Historically speaking that's what it's been for a very long time.

Jiyeon Lee: Okay. There's one, the female chef, the old black lady, she had a barbecue restaurant. She's a pitmaster. I forgot her name. Cody knows. I'm very bad with the names, but she's really amazing. Her ribs were amazing, too. I love ribs!

Bailey Benson: I also love ribs.

Jiyeon Lee: I like the chewy texture.

Bailey Benson: Yep. You talk about meat and three.

0:56:02

What are your three sides? If you took me through your ideal meat and three plate what would it be?

Jiyeon Lee: The three sides?

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: Collard greens, of course. I like baked beans. I always order baked beans. And I love coleslaw but there's not many places that have really good coleslaw 'cause I think most people buy the sauces. They don't make the sauces, so it tastes like Kentucky Fried Chicken coleslaw. But I like coleslaw. I like Brunswick stew.

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: But always I order-- if I see some yams I order yams. Sweet potato casserole. Oh! What they call, like, sweet potato souffle or casserole, I love it!

Bailey Benson: Yep.

Jiyeon Lee: For mac and cheese [just 0:56:56] mac and cheese.

0:57:00

And when I see-- what is it? Not many places sell that. It's very similar like a radish texture. Really not many places does, but I love that, too. Yeah, I like vegetables a lot. That's what I grew up a lot so when I see vegetables I always choose the vegetables.

Bailey Benson: Um-hm. And then, looking forward into the future, what do you want to see in the world of barbecue as time pushes on? What do you want to see come out of the world of barbecue?

Jiyeon Lee: In the future?

Bailey Benson: Um-hm.

Jiyeon Lee: Staying originality. Keep originality.

0:58:00

Whoever cooks-- to us, Cody and me, we are the root, so we stay in our style. And if somebody is cooking, like [**Bee's crackling** 0:58:19], I love his food, just stay in his style and try to create new-- barbecue is such a unique southern food. I want to see more really authentic barbecue, more in the city, and meat and three.

Bailey Benson: Um-hm. [Laughter]

Jiyeon Lee: Simple. That's pretty much my very important philosophy on my cooking, too, keep it simple. Keep it simple and the originality. That is not easy to duplicate.

0:59:00

Bailey Benson: Um-hm. Let's see. Oh, here's my last question. So I'm working on this project to document the voices of women, especially women of color, in the barbecue world. However, women of color go largely unrecognized in the barbecue world. Is there anyone that you feel needs to have more recognition in your field and if you're comfortable would you feel free sharing who that is so I could also go talk to them?

Jiyeon Lee: Hmm. Who's here? It doesn't really come up, like, immediate, though.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. [Laughter]

Jiyeon Lee: It's really good timing right now. There's a lot of opportunity to the woman of color in not just the barbecue world, it's in the food industry.

1:00:00

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: Big example, my best friend, she's from Kenya and she's a banquet chef. She's amazing, amazing chef, but she's been pretty much hidden for a long time. The company doesn't use her as a representative, and now it's more exposed. And it's just amazing to see. And times kind of changing, movement is changing. The brave people get it. Hardworking and brave people get the opportunity. So I don't want to take any advantage either. If somebody, woman of color but lazy, I don't think they deserve it. You know what I mean?

1:01:00

Bailey Benson: Yeah.

Jiyeon Lee: And men and white men or if somebody brilliant and hardworking person should be recognized. That's my thing. It shouldn't be because of this, because of this. If you're a hard worker and if you really keep working hard and you have so much passion you should be recognized. But I have a lot of female chefs in my life, as a life friend. They're really amazing. And they're still in the industry and they're still working hard, and they see opportunity now. So some people will be recognized. Some people don't have much passion and it is what it is. It's all you.

1:02:02

If you want it you work hard with a humble manner and be honest and you will get it.

Bailey Benson: Absolutely.

Jiyeon Lee: God will help you. Just don't take advantage is what I want to tell people.

Bailey Benson: Yeah. Well, that brings us to the end of the interview. Is there anything else that you would like to add? It's been wonderful talking to you. You have so many--

Jiyeon Lee: I think I talked too much. [Laughter]

Bailey Benson: I think you said a perfect amount. I think you have so many valuable insights that this has been wonderful.

Jiyeon Lee: Oh, thank you. I wish I can express better. English is my second language, but there's some limited vocabulary and stuff but I've been very honest, that's for sure.

Bailey Benson: Well, I think you did an amazing job. I think you did wonderfully.

Jiyeon Lee: Oh, thank you.

1:03:01

Bailey Benson: Yeah. So if you don't have anything else to add I'm going to go ahead and stop the recording if that's okay.

Jiyeon Lee: I think that's it. That's pretty much-- you had great questions and, yeah, it was amazing. You bring me a lot of details out of it, so that's good. Good interviewer. [Laughter]

[End]