



Corie and Michael Ramirez

Royse City, TX

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Cynthia Torres: Okay. My name is Cynthia Torres. The date is June 4th, 2022. We're in Brownsville, Texas, and today I'm speaking with . . . ?

Corie Ramirez: Corie Ramirez.

Michael Ramirez: And Michael Ramirez.

Cynthia Torres: And how are we related?

Corie Ramirez: So Cindy, your grandmother and my grandmother were sisters. And then, our fathers, your father and my father, were first cousins. So I guess that makes us second cousins, right? Is that how it works?

Michael Ramirez: And she and I are married.

Corie Ramirez: [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: I'm not sure how I— yeah.

Corie Ramirez: I think we're second cousins. I never felt that you were a— I don't know. I mean, we're cousins.

Cynthia Torres: Well, if they were first cousins . . .

Corie Ramirez: Then I think that makes us second cousins. Isn't that how it works? Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: Yes.

Cynthia Torres: Okay. Awesome.

Corie Ramirez: [Laughter] Our grandmothers were sisters, and our dads were first cousins.

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Cousin, okay.

Cynthia Torres: So as the generations go on, it's, like, second cousin.

Corie Ramirez: And then, I think the next generation you're able to marry each other legally.

[Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: Something like that. [Laughter]

Corie Ramirez: I don't know. It gets watered down.

Cynthia Torres: But your kids are my . . .

Corie Ramirez: Well, the way that it is—

Michael Ramirez: Your cousins.

Corie Ramirez: — because of the way that the Mexican American culture is, it's more about age, I think. And so they would call you tía. You would be their aunt. And that's just the way that we . . . But then, some people say well, they're cousins.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah, it's still cousins.

Corie Ramirez: Somehow you guys are cousins. I don't know.

Michael Ramirez: We also have the third cousin twice removed so there's a lot there.

Corie Ramirez: All that nonsense, it's just in literature. But for us it's more about that respect that you give someone that's older so they would be your tía or your tío, considered your uncle and aunt, so that's what my kids would refer to you as.

Cynthia Torres: Okay.

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Michael Ramirez: And how I'm related, I'm married to Corie. [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: Awesome.

Michael Ramirez: And I'm the lucky one here, so it's good.

Cynthia Torres: Very nice.

Michael Ramirez: Yes.

Cynthia Torres: Well, you're an awesome guy. We're all lucky.

Michael Ramirez: [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: So I was wondering— we're going to talk about food and family traditions and everything and all about how food kinda brings the family together and what does that mean to you and everything and is it important, that kind of thing. And how you've passed along these traditions. So very first off, could you maybe one at a time just talk about what kinds of family food traditions you remember when you were young? Like, your earliest memories.

Corie Ramirez: For me, when we were very, very young— so my father worked as an elementary school teacher and so he was on our same schedule.

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So when we were home from school he was home from school at the end of the school day and also during the summer. My mother was an accountant and then a banker, so she worked very, very, very long hours. So as far as the regular, everyday meals, let's say Monday through Friday, it would be about him getting us home, we'd have a little snack and then kind of wait, and then he'd kinda start to prep dinner. But it didn't matter because my mom, when she came home later, it was, like, okay, now it's the time to prepare dinner. And so she would always prepare dinner. And we'd all kind of pitch in. My brother and I would do some of the prep, but I remember us for sure setting the table.

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We'd always set the table. And even to this day with the kids it's not like it's a super formal table but it's kind of like the thing that we're going to set the table, we're going to put the fork where it belongs and that kind of thing. And then we would all eat dinner together every night during the week, and then that would be like a recap for sure. The sitting around at dinner, there would be a recap of everybody's day. And since there were only four of us it wasn't like a loud thing. I've been in other families where they're bigger families and everybody is talking at once and it kind of like confuses my brain because I'm, like, that's now how it works. [Laughter.] You speak and then I speak and then you speak and then we all listen and that kind of thing. So it was like that. On the weekends is when we would do more social stuff as far as that's when we would grill and that's when we would barbecue.

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And it seemed like every— especially during football season would seem like as a child looking back, it seemed like every Sunday was football Sunday in Texas. And then, we would always get together and barbecue. Or we'd call it barbecuing. I guess it's grilling. And so we'd barbecue, but we would do that with our cousins, or we'd go over to my dad's brother's house. That was a big deal to go over there on a Sunday and he would barbecue for us and grill, and we'd all eat together. So on the weekends I guess when we had more time— 'cause it was not a just show up at this time. We're gonna all sit down and eat at this time. It was kinda like come over and then it was a long— it might be an hour, two hours before we even started to eat. And then you'd sit at the table, then you'd just sit and talk for a long time. It was a big four-, five-, six-hour visit that included dinner.

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And that would be sometimes at our house, sometimes at our uncles' homes. But it always included more people than just the four of us, and I remember that happening. Now looking back, it seemed like every weekend it was like that for us. What about you?

Michael Ramirez: We would grill quite a bit, I guess. I'd watch whether it was my grandparents on either side or at home also, and so most of the grilling was always revolving around some kind of get-together where everybody was happy to see each other, and you get to have the conversations with each other. And you would kind of fly around from one conversation to another just to check in, to see how everybody's doing, that kind of thing.

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And so when I was very young I was always a watcher, very quiet, didn't say much, always just watching. And my parents' relationship was not a good one, so they ended up getting divorced eventually. And so the one thing that did stay behind was his little old barbecue pit. They still sell these things, about nineteen dollars at Walmart, I think, or twenty-nine, I don't know, something like that. And it opens up, the little lid, and you had a simple little grill. I've seen people that would take them out to the beach or that kind of thing. So that stayed behind and somehow I convinced my mom to have charcoal there. Because on top of that, there was this little iron with a handle and you plug it into an outlet and that was the charcoal fire starter. You wouldn't use matches. You would put that underneath and then put your little—

Corie Ramirez: Coals.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah, your coals stacked up on top of that.

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And you'd just wait and watch. And once everything caught and they were white you'd spread it out. And I would grill like that. I guess that was for me like a "man moment" when I felt like I could do this.

Cynthia Torres: How old were you?

Michael Ramirez: Elementary— I don't remember if I'm being honest. Maybe third grade, fourth grade, something like that. That was probably like a cling back to days of when my father was there, when he would barbecue, and he was the man of the house and doing stuff like that. And so very impressionistic when I was younger. There's even a picture that I took— I have no idea how I did it— back way before selfies I took a selfie in a mirror. And I was wearing— he was in

the National Guard—I was wearing his Army helmet and his boots and I took a picture and there I was.

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So it was very interesting, and so clinging probably back to those days is a memory that I have. But because things were so challenging growing up between my parents, anytime there was a barbecue it was always a good time because nobody argued. Nobody was in a bad mood. It was always nice. And so that was very big in my life to cling to those moments because there was a lot of turmoil growing up. It was not fun. And so it is what it is. And then, on my father's side, he also would do stuff, but he had a pit that was made out of bricks, and he would do rotisserie chickens in there and all kinds of stuff way back before rotisserie chicken was a thing.

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We're talking, like, early [19]70s, mid [19]70s I guess. And I would just be there watching them turn on the spit there. Pretty fun to watch all of that. So the grilling and all that was really cool. Of course we had ranches, so we had cattle. And once a year at least we'd take one cow to the slaughter. We'd take it over to a company and they would do everything for us and then fill the freezers up. And so that would be our meat for the year. So we had ribs, we had—you name it. But it came from our cows that we took care of. So when we wanted a hamburger, that hamburger, you raised it. You knew what it ate. And so it was a really neat thing also.

Corie Ramirez: You may remember something. I've just been thinking about this. 'Cause you were saying about when you would grill when you were young.

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So I just remember— a big part of grilling was getting together with other people and doing that, but I just remembered now at my parents' backyard when they would grill at home and it was just us or maybe a couple of our cousins would be there, but my parents were big gardeners and so they had— when we were real young there was a shovel that my dad had had and he broke the stick part, the pole, so it was just a little piece of the handle, but mostly it was the large metal scoop, whatever, part of the actual shovel. And so he gave us this, me and my brother, and every time he would grill and start his fire we could start our own fire! And we were young, we were really little.

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And so it was funny 'cause the house had been sectioned off when we first bought it because the people that lived there before had big dogs that they kept and so there was a piece of a chain-link fence there. So we would kind of prop up— I still remember the handle part and the shovel part would lay in a safe way, and we would go around then and gather sticks and leaves and things and start our own fire. And we were young. We were probably, like you said, in third, fourth grade or something or maybe younger. And we just felt so— I don't know, like, really empowered. Of course, I'm sure my dad was watching us and making sure we were safe, but it just felt like something we were doing. And then it was just a matter of, okay, what can we burn? And we'd get straws, and you'd see how that would burn. And I'm not talking about burning big things. We'd just, like, oh, let's go through the trash and see what it would be like if you get a piece of whatever, a paper plate or a just silly, stupid stuff.

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But I remember thinking, like, I could do this! I could start a fire and I could do whatever.

[Laughter] And we could do it safely. But also when we went to college I used to grill. I don't know how many people had grills in college, or how many girls, because it seems like it's supposedly a boy thing, but I would grill, Marie and I, my college roommate. We always made sure we had a grill when we were in college, and we would barbecue and grill all the time. Anyway, I just remember thinking about that fire that we got to . . . I felt so empowered.

[Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: I can burn my house down.

Corie Ramirez: No. We were a safe distance from the house and from the wood fence, but I just felt like, wow, I'm so important. I'm in charge of fire. I can do that. I don't know. It was silly, but I remember that.

Michael Ramirez: For me, ranch work was very tough, especially these summer months.

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We were out there all day long and so it would get pretty warm. But there would be one night—it usually was going to be Saturday night because Sunday [inaudible 0:14:14]. And so one of my jobs was to help dig the hole, the pozo, 'cause we had to cut down a lot of mesquite and stuff like that. So we would take the stuff that was ready, throw it in the pit, start the fire, and then we'd take what we called lámina. It's the corrugated metal that you use on roofs. Back then it was just used for our sheds for the hay for the cows and whatnot. So we would cover that up and then foil wrap all the heads and then put the heads in and then cover everything so a cow wouldn't walk over and fall in, of course. And then cover that up. So we were literally doing barbacoa the old-

fashioned way in the ground in a pozo there. So that was another fun— ‘cause we would stay there all night long.

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Corie Ramirez: I was gonna say, you started on Saturday, no? And then it was ready Sunday morning?

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. And then Sunday morning we’d eat. And we stayed up pretty much all night. Sometimes we would come home, but I think my dad was probably just worried that if a cow walked over or something like that. So we were always kind of out there.

Corie Ramirez: But the corrugated metal was on top of the cow heads and then the coals on top of that?

Michael Ramirez: So it’s the bottom, the coal bed, then on top of that you put the corrugated metal.

Corie Ramirez: Oh, okay. Okay.

Michael Ramirez: The foil wrapped heads on top of that. And then, up above at the ground level where you’re standing we put more corrugated metal over it with dirt. We’d put dirt over that.

Corie Ramirez: Okay.

Cynthia Torres: So the cows wouldn’t fall into the pit [inaudible 0:15:51].

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. And then, also just the insulation to keep the heat going all night long. And you didn't have to do anything after that. You didn't want it to burn up, you're just creating that oven, so to speak.

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Cynthia Torres: Nice.

Michael Ramirez: And so that was fun. That was my first foray into actual barbecuing versus the grilling part of it.

Corie Ramirez: How deep was that hole?

Michael Ramirez: Well, when you're that age it seemed like twenty feet.

Corie Ramirez: [Laughter] When you had to dig it and you're eight years old.

Michael Ramirez: But now, see, I don't know.

Cynthia Torres: Twenty feet [**really** 0:16:25]?

Michael Ramirez: [Laughter] Yeah. It seemed like twenty feet. But yeah, that was the barbecuing side of my life part of it. Everything else was more of a quicker— the grilling kind of thing, whether it was we went fishing and then we wrapped it with bacon and threw it on the grill and had that or whatever it was.

Cynthia Torres: What was all on the menu that you remember? When you went fishing what kind of fish were you catching? Was it from the gulf?

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. Essentially anything we caught. With my dad we'd actually go to the port.

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Back before they closed it all up you could go actually to the port where they would dock there.

Corie Ramirez: Um-hm. To the channel, right?

Michael Ramirez: And there was a big ol' huge ship coming by, and you're just there on the dock fishing. And we'd catch fish there. Later on over time they would close that off and then you had to go further down. We all had to go further down to the actual channel, then you could access it there.

Corie Ramirez: We'd go to the channel with my dad. I remember fishing, yeah.

Michael Ramirez: But yeah, you could literally— all the places that you're not able to access, that ship right now is going to be pulled apart, that naval ship, that's where I would go fishing when I was very young.

Corie Ramirez: To the ship channel.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Cynthia Torres: Okay.

Michael Ramirez: And so there was that, and then we would go to Boca Chica Beach. You might catch sand trout, or it might be—

Corie Ramirez: It was very different if you went surf fishing on the beach. I didn't care for that.

Michael Ramirez: The drum.

Corie Ramirez: I didn't like that because the wind and the breeze and the movement of the waves is so much that it's harder to tell when you catch something.

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You have to be really good at that. But when you're at the ship channel then the water's much more still so you can definitely feel the tug of the . . .

Michael Ramirez: So yeah, we did stuff from drum to snapper to redfish to—

Corie Ramirez: A lot of redfish.

Michael Ramirez: A lot of sand trout. Sand trout is not the favorite thing for most people. That's why you use lemon and tartar sauce to kind of—

Cynthia Torres: Mask it? [Laughter]

Corie Ramirez: Mask.

Michael Ramirez: — mask the fishiness of the taste.

Corie Ramirez: My dad used to go gigging at night for flounder.

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm.

Cynthia Torres: What's that?

Corie Ramirez: They would go at night, and they would go— it's not fishing it's gigging. So it's like a big— again, kind of like a shovel, stick thing, handle, but it's got a little—

Michael Ramirez: Barb.

Corie Ramirez: — like a triton, almost. [Laughter] Yeah. It was like a mini little pitchfork type thing.

Michael Ramirez: It's a spear.

Corie Ramirez: But you'd go— I don't know why they would go at night, I guess.

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Michael Ramirez: They need light to see.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, and you'd have a light on shining down into the water. And they would walk in the water I think shuffling their feet for sure because there were also— what do you call them?

Michael Ramirez: Stingray.

Corie Ramirez: Stingray. But then when they would see the flounder then you just, like, stab it.

Michael Ramirez: And hopefully not your foot. [Laughter]

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. [Laughter] Seemed kind of bloody. But I remember he would go with a few of his friends, and they would go at night, and they would call it they would go giggin'.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. Flounder's a very good, very mild-tasting fish. Very good, yeah.

Corie Ramirez: And they would catch flounder.

Michael Ramirez: But catching it on a hook like a regular hook, it's very uncommon, which I did. There's even a picture of me standing there and I caught a flounder on a fish line. I went fishing by myself.

Corie Ramirez: You could everywhere very rarely. Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: But yeah, that's mostly how everybody caught flounder back then.

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Corie Ramirez: The rest of the menu, whenever we would grill or barbecue, was prepared by the women.

Michael Ramirez: The grilling part?

Corie Ramirez: No. Everything else, like the sides and the whatever and all of that.

Michael Ramirez: Oh, the sides, yeah.

Corie Ramirez: And it was funny because the men would be outside grilling and the women would be inside prepping rice. And I remember my aunt would make potato salad all the time, and she would never go outside. My aunts were older. My dad was one of the younger ones so my mom, his wife, was younger. So she wanted to go outside and hang out with the men also and chitchat and not just be sitting there peeling potatoes or whatnot. But I remember the ladies would prepare rice and potato salad. And there was always rice and beans, always rice and beans. But beans a la charra, which were, like, that soup bean.

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And I don't remember very many vegetables. [Laughter] We didn't even really grow corn back then. That's more new now for us anyway. We didn't have a vegetable—

Michael Ramirez: Well, this was more Tex-Mex grilling.

Corie Ramirez: Right, so it was rice and beans all the time.

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm, yeah.

Corie Ramirez: And potato salad.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. Chicken [inaudible 0:21:26] or fajitas and stuff like that.

Corie Ramirez: And meat.

Michael Ramirez: Or hotel cut ribs and stuff like that.

Corie Ramirez: And corn tortillas. Always corn tortillas. Not flour back then. It was always corn tortillas. And sometimes they would put the corn tortillas on the grill, and they would get kind of a little toasty and kind of charred. And that was a thing that you couldn't do during the week when you weren't grilling. But the women mostly were inside. Every so often they'd come . . .

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Michael Ramirez: As far as what went on the grill, at this point now I've done pretty much the entire cow, the mollejas, the sweetbreads. I've done everything. Back in the day when you could do the whole cow head you could have the brains or the eye, the ojo.

Cynthia Torres: You can't do them anymore?

Michael Ramirez: I've seen where they pull the brains out now and so they don't allow you to have that. But recently I saw somebody that was selling them. I was, like, that's interesting. But I like them. 'Cause I asked do they— no, they don't have it. It's missing.

Corie Ramirez: So there's that place here in town—

Michael Ramirez: Mad cow.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, because of mad cow that's when everything stopped. That's when everything stopped. But there's a place here in town that is the only one that's allowed I think in the United States to still do that where they barbecue in the ground.

Michael Ramirez: Oh, yeah. But he has a concrete building, though.

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Corie Ramirez: Yeah, it's not, like, a dirt— but it's a pit. But we've gone there, Valle's, and every so often he'll have a sign up that says, "Sí eye ojos" or "No eye ojos," or whatever, which means that they have eyeballs that are, like, of the cow eyeballs. And so they're really popular around the people that— so people will ask and so he has a specific sign to denote whether he has them or not. But if you want 'em you have to get there earlier kind thing. And I've never eaten one. [Laughter] I just don't think I could do that. Anyway, but I don't think there's a piece of a cow that isn't cooked by people down here.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. At this point [inaudible 0:23:53].

Corie Ramirez: And then, there used to be the cabrita which was a whole goat and that was . . .

Michael Ramirez: I've done pieces of that. Not the entire one, like, how they butterfly it and open it up, but I've done pieces of it.

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I got most excited, though, when I started discovering, like, the whole hog. We used to do that. And so we'd go to a rancher that had pigs they'd slaughter for me, skin it, do the whole thing— or not skin it but shave it down— and then I'd throw it in my ice chest and come on over. And then throw it on a— it would take a lot of hours, about sixteen, eighteen hours, at least, to do it. That was fun, though, for me. I loved it.

Corie Ramirez: That's what's funny, when you see things, like, in movies or television or commercials or whatever, it's, like, oh, it's Memorial Day or whatever and we're gonna grill. And it's always hot dogs and hamburgers.

Michael Ramirez: But, yeah, getting back to the community part of it, I would do that because I just took it upon myself because I was very adventurous.

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It was always my traditional thing of this is what I'm doing for New Year's Eve. So this is how we bring in New Year's, and so I'm gonna start on the 29th and on the 30th it goes in the pit. The 31st it's ready to eat for everybody that night.

Corie Ramirez: So it's where things would take a long time. It's not like just grilling a hot dog.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: Which is fine, but then that's something we would do. And my dad would grill whatever meat. He threw on a few hot dogs and that's just really good. But it was never a quick thing, and it was not gas grill. It was never gas. It was always some sort of charcoal or wood that was burnt. And it was a long— even today, Michael was, like, “Oh, do you want me to grill today?” And I was, like— then I feel bad because right now, this time of year, it's so hot outside and I know he has to be out there for so many hours, but he loves it. And we love it. [Laughter]

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And he makes a big deal about it. When he'll grill on the weekend he'll grill a lot of food, like, a lot of meat, so then we'll have meat that's prepared for a few days.

Michael Ramirez: For the week. That's my version of meal prepping. That's how I do it.

Corie Ramirez: [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: That's nice. Corie, do you remember when— like, were you invited into the kitchen to start preparing meals at a certain age or something or start grilling or anything? How did you start learning how to cook?

Corie Ramirez: When it came to grilling or the barbecue type of thing, I'd rather be outside, and I was always just with my dad. And so it was a big deal as a child to— when you get to start the fire that was a big deal where you're, like, ooh! Which means you just get to be the person that throws the match on there. But it was a big deal to be old enough to strike the match and start it.

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So I was outside. Now my mom will prep all the side stuff. She still does that, but she'll do it ahead of time so that she can sit outside and enjoy all of that. I didn't do a whole lot of the— when it came to the grilling stuff I wasn't indoors or prepping the side stuff. As far as meals meals, I was always, as a child, cooking. Whatever my mom was cooking I would want to help. Now, my mom— which is interesting because I didn't think about it at the time but now looking back when people ask us about our bakery and our baking company that we have, it didn't occur to me, but I remember when my mother would work at the bank, she worked so many hours and she would work so late. And on Sunday afternoons she would be, like, “Let's bake something.”

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And if it was, like, oh, the bananas are ripe, let's go make banana bread or let's make a cake or let's make whatever it was, but we were always baking something. And that was her relaxing; okay, now I'm not having to work. On Saturdays she was always catching up on laundry and things like that, so Sunday afternoons we would bake together. And I didn't think about it until recently that she would say, “Gosh, if I could just bake all day long I'd be so happy.” And I didn't remember that until not too long ago. Did I mention it to you?

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. And I was, like, wait a minute. I remember this now. And my mom would say, “God, if I could just bake all day that would be so much fun.” And so I didn't think about it and then I'm, like, okay, that's now what I do all day long. And I love it and I enjoy it. And so I think it goes back to that.

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I like cooking. I do like cooking, but I like the chemistry of baking. I like the rules. When it's cooking cooking food then I don't follow recipes, right, babe?

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm.

Corie Ramirez: We just kind of like throw stuff in there and hope for the best, which usually it's okay. We still sit around the table a lot with the kids. Try to. And the kids set the table all the time. And now they're washing dishes. But I always enjoyed— okay, get this. So my mom did like cooking a lot and so where my dad would prep little things and then we would cook. So there was a trip we took one time to New Orleans with my parents when we were young. And so we didn't know a lot about Cajun food growing up here in South Texas. And so when we went to New Orleans and we had jambalaya and we had gumbo and we had— it was still a lot of the seafood that we were used to, just prepped differently— it was the best!

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It was a little bit spicier for my dad or whatever, but it was really good. And I remember we really, really liked it a lot. So then my mom got on this kick when we came back, she's, like, I gotta get the spices and I gotta get the whatever. And so she was adventurous in that. And she'd be, like, I'm gonna make gumbo and I'm gonna make blah, blah, blah. So she bought all these spices. And by that time we were already in high school and so that's when I would be, like, okay, I'm gonna prepare dinner more. Because my mom, like I said, she worked late, and I just liked doing it and liked learning. So I remember that I would make different things and I loved making lasagna and I loved this, but there was this one time that I was gonna make some sort of— I think they were like hamburger patties, like, meat little things, and I thought, oh, I'm

gonna use these Cajun spices my mom had. And I threw them on there and whatever, and it was the worst tasting meal I ever made in my whole life!

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And I remember sitting there and being all, like, oh, look, I made this thing! And we sat down, and my dad ate it. And I was, like, “Dad, you don’t have to eat it.” It was really bad. Nobody could eat it. [Laughter] But I thought, I’m gonna use these Cajun spices, and it was in a way they weren’t meant to be, ‘cause I can be fancy. I don’t know what I was trying.

Michael Ramirez: I got to have one of those moments also. This semester they made pork chops, and I ate, and it was, like, oh, gosh. It was like eating shoe leather.

Corie Ramirez: Oh, when the kids cooked for us?

Michael Ramirez: And so when I took them to work the next day, as a good dad, and I ate and ate. And my assistant was looking at me. It was, like, okay, I’ve had all I can. I’m full. I’m good. Nobody can accuse me of not being a good dad.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, ‘cause the kids did that. They made dinner for us not too long ago and the same thing happened. Yeah, and I remember thinking, you don’t have to eat that.

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It’s really bad. But he was like a good dad, like, no, you made it so I’m gonna eat it.

Michael Ramirez: But for the record, the last time they made it it was perfection.

Corie Ramirez: The last time they made dinner for us it was really good. So the kids like to cook. ‘Cause of our three kids— ‘cause all three of them cook. They’ll all feed themselves around here, and sometimes they feed us every so often.

Michael Ramirez: Yes.

Corie Ramirez: But they do enjoy that. But now when Michael will grill, yeah, I’ll prep sides and stuff.

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm, sometimes.

Corie Ramirez: But now we like to grill vegetables.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: Anything that can go on the grill we’ll prefer to put on the grill.

Michael Ramirez: Well, I’m more adventurous than that. I’ve grilled pickles.

Corie Ramirez: Oh, yes, we did. They were so good!

Michael Ramirez: Cauliflower, pickles, you name it, I’ll try anything, everything. It turned out really good.

Corie Ramirez: So the cauliflower we did. I think the pickles were my idea.

Michael Ramirez: No, they weren’t. It’s okay.

Corie Ramirez: [Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: I let you cut them, but they were my idea.

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Corie Ramirez: We got the whole big giant dill pickles, like the big, big ones that you would get—

Cynthia Torres: Like the Vlastic or something?

Corie Ramirez: Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: The ones that you'll sell, like, at a football game. The really long ones.

Corie Ramirez: In Texas you get them in movie theaters. Those really ginormous pickles.

Michael Ramirez: And you quartered them.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, we quartered them. We did them in long spears.

Michael Ramirez: I got a wild hair one day. It was, like, you know what? I want to grill anything and everything, like vegetables. So I made cauliflower steaks, put that on there.

Corie Ramirez: Squash we do. We've done, of course, corn, white and yellow. And we did some really good onions.

Michael Ramirez: That would be my dream job, for the record.

Corie Ramirez: Oh, yeah.

Michael Ramirez: If I could just barbecue or grill all day long and night, I'm good.

Cynthia Torres: Awesome.

Corie Ramirez: And now we make it a point whenever we go travel we just do some barbecue—

Michael Ramirez: Barbecues and bakeries.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah.

0:34:01

Barbecues and bakeries. That's all we do. We should have a show called Barbecues and Bakeries one day. But yeah, when we travel throughout Texas especially then we try to hit as many barbecue places. But that's mostly brisket, sausage, ribs, things like that, and then bakeries that we can find. But we like to do the old, old bakeries where you can find something cool, like near New Braunfels where it's more of a German kind of flavor to the food and families that were there so you get a lot of the kolache and different sausages and things like that. But anyway, we like to travel and everything's about food. But then, that's another thing so funny 'cause where our family's always talking about food and then when we're eating we're talking about the next meal.

0:35:04

We're talking about what we're eating but mostly we always talk about the next meal.

Michael Ramirez: Well, it's a little bit of both. It's reflective and then it's also like forecast. It's, like, what are we gonna eat next? [Laughter] What are we gonna grow next or what are we gonna have next?

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, for sure.

Michael Ramirez: It's fun. You're eating food but you're talking about food. [Laughter]

Corie Ramirez: But now pretty much every Saturday— well, my parents grill— they're very healthy.

Michael Ramirez: Almost nightly.

Corie Ramirez: They're in their eighties and they're very, very healthy, but we think it's a lot of that where they don't eat things that are fried, they don't eat things that are— they grill for themselves, just the two of them, probably— what did they tell you, like, four times a week or something? If they could grill every night they would. My mom still likes to go out to dinner. They still go do that a couple days a week.

0:35:59

But even when we grill they come over to our house but if they're alone they'll grill. Or if the kids are, like, oh, we feel like grilling something— if we have meat they know we can take it to their house 'cause they're probably grilling just for the two of them. The fire's on over there. But they do a lot of that, a lot of grilling, and they're outside a lot, so I think that attributes a lot to their health. We really, really do, 'cause they don't deep fry anything or fry stuff.

Michael Ramirez: The only fried thing they're gonna have is rice and stuff like that, but for the most part I don't think they do the rice thing that often.

Corie Ramirez: No. Mom doesn't make rice very much.

Michael Ramirez: I think it's only when there's a lot of people that show up.

Corie Ramirez: Then she'll go out and make Mexican rice and stuff.

Michael Ramirez: Or Elva [sp].

Corie Ramirez: Elva makes rice.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. Her rice is also good.

Corie Ramirez: But that's what's fun is usually when it's like that, the gathering of and other people coming in, everybody brings something.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. Sort of potluck.

Corie Ramirez: And so my Aunt Elva's the rice person, so she'll bring rice and so it's always really good.

0:37:00

Michael Ramirez: And it's a very southern thing, in southern states, Mississippi and the Carolinas and all that, everybody would bring their—

Corie Ramirez: You don't show up empty handed, that's for sure. Unh-uh.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah, never. So it's the same kind of concept. We carry on the same traditions and roots. It's just our versions of what we would bring in the potluck so to speak.

Cynthia Torres: The meal's not complete unless somebody shows up with the next piece of it.

Michael Ramirez: Exactly. And that is the cool part, it's the puzzle that's being made in different homes that all of the sudden descends that evening and then everybody just gets to enjoy the fruit of everybody's labor that day.

Cynthia Torres: When you're sitting down at the table or out in the backyard, aside from thinking about food and the next meal and everything, what other kinds of conversations go on? Is it checking in, like you had talked about, or are life lessons being talked about at the table?

0:38:00

How are you getting to know each other as families, or how did you not get to know each other as families?

Michael Ramirez: That happens before the table. What I always wanted and what we always did was you get there before the coals are put out so you're there for the entire process. It's not just show up and eat, 'cause you can do that at a restaurant. You get to go with family, so let's make it an evening, an afternoon with everybody. So you show up there, you start the fire, and kids are playing and having their fun, the adults are talking. And you might talk about, you know, I'm going through this at work, or it could be dealing with kids, this is what's going on. And so everybody kind of paired off a little bit and talked with each other.

Corie Ramirez: That's what I was thinking. I was thinking, like, 'cause the women would be in one side and then the men would be on this side. And so I'd be inside with, let's say, Michael's family, the aunts and the mom, and then I'd go outside to him, I'm, like, "Did you know this is happening?" [Laughter]

0:39:03

And he'd be, like, "Well so and so told me this is happening in his family." And we are just, like, okay. And you're just, okay, go back out and get the [inaudible 0:39:11] from everybody. But as

far as when we have dinner here at home, let's say just on a regular Wednesday night with the kids, what we do.

Michael Ramirez: When I grill?

Corie Ramirez: No. Just when we have dinner. We sit, we talk, we catch up with the kids.

Michael Ramirez: Oh, no. That's different. My question always was, what was your highlight of the day?

Corie Ramirez: What was your highlight of the day.

Michael Ramirez: And go around the room and everybody talks about what that highlight was.

And it can't be, like, coming home. It couldn't be simple like that. It's, like, what was the highlight of the day? Or what'd you learn today? Something where we could all learn from your day, 'cause we all want to be around each other but we spend so many hours apart, and so how can we tie in?

0:40:02

And it's going back to that— I guess it's the wholesome thing, but it's just going back to that, like, hey, let's connect for a little bit before we go back to our devices and all that stuff. And let's have a meal and let's talk about real things today, what happened.

Corie Ramirez: For sure that's the only time that we unplug from social media, from devices, from any of that stuff.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. Sabrina will say, "Sal's on his phone."

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. Or now it's "Nana's on her phone!" [Laughter] When we're over at my parents' house and she's the one.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah, exactly.

Corie Ramirez: The kids will say, "Nana's on her phone! Nana's on her phone." And she's, like, "I'm just checking Facebook." And you're, like, "You're eighty-three years old. What's happening on Facebook? We're all here." [Laughter] It's funny. So they'll say that now because when we sit at dinner, yeah, that's not a thing. Every so often the treat will be, like, yeah, let's watch a movie while we're having dinner, but that's really rare.

0:41:03

That might happen once every couple of weeks or something where it's, like, we all have a few hours that we can sit and watch this movie, and let's just fix something quick and sit and watch something. But really most of the time— I don't think we go out very much to eat at restaurants a whole lot. But we will sit and for sure catch up with the kids or with their day, or you'll tell us about what's going on sometimes.

Michael Ramirez: Well, like I said, we go around the room. Everybody gets their platform, and we could ask questions based on that, and it just becomes conversation. And then it changes focus to the next person.

Corie Ramirez: Like [inaudible 0:41:57].

Michael Ramirez: But it's different than the way you were talking when you grew up, because it's more I'm used to a conversation.

0:42:04

Corie Ramirez: Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: I'm not used to, you be quiet, I'm going to speak. When I'm done you can speak.

Corie Ramirez: [Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: And so for me that was very interesting to come into that. And I was, like, okay, no, we're changing that. Sorry, not sorry, because I like to talk to you, and I really and truly want to connect because I was so quiet young. And so just watching I longed for *The Wonder Years*, the *Leave It to Beaver* family idea and stuff like that. Didn't have that so that's why I was, like, no, I want to connect to you, I want to know who you are as close to cellular level as I can. So I really want to understand you. So when you're talking I might interrupt you 'cause I have questions. Oh, really? Wow! Why did you do that, or how did you do that? That's amazing!

0:43:00

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. Michael sparks debates sometimes and stuff like that at the dinner table. It's fun, too.

Michael Ramirez: And it's also kind of fun to be the guy that everybody allows to do that. [Laughter] Because nobody else is allowed to interject or ask the questions so I can derail the conversation completely by asking a question, but nobody complains or says anything.

Corie Ramirez: No. It's not, like, there's, oh, we're all gonna debate a thing.

Michael Ramirez: No. It's not a debate.

Corie Ramirez: It's never like that. And we've never gotten heated or in arguments. We just kind of figure out what's going on.

Michael Ramirez: No, no, no. It's okay. It's a conversation. And that was the biggest change in the whole getting together when we would grill and stuff like that, we're talking, you ask questions. That's just how I am because I'm so curious. And that's why I push the envelope.

0:44:01

Okay. I've never done a whole hog and I don't know anybody in my life that ever did one. I'm gonna do it.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: Or I'm gonna grill pickles. I've never seen anybody grill pickles. It's kind of a weird thing to do but I felt like doing it. So I'm very inquisitive.

Corie Ramirez: And it's like for me I feel it a little more [inaudible 0:44:20] than Michael does because he really wants to— if he wants to grill a whole hog or let's say a brisket like you did that time and it takes hours, and hours, and hours, my thing is, like, "Well, who are you gonna invite to come over and hang out with you while you do this or watch you do this because that's kinda cool?" And he's, like, "Nobody." He would rather just do it and be by yourself.

Michael Ramirez: I mean, if there's somebody that wants to do it I'm not gonna tell them not to come, but for the most part you have to really love to do that if you want to be involved with that. Because the pit that I have, you're on your knees.

0:45:00

I have a dustpan to flame the fire to get it going again and watching the smoke. Okay. This is blue smoke; no, it's white smoke again, and I'm choking it off. So it's constantly going. A lot of learning fire management and all that.

Corie Ramirez: I think a majority of our meals— and I guess maybe this is true, the way that we grew up— everything takes way longer to prepare than it does to actually eat it.

Michael Ramirez: Oh, yeah, for sure.

Corie Ramirez: It's funny 'cause I one time went to one of these big box stores and I was, like, God, they have a lot of frozen stuff, things that you can just throw in the oven. And I was, like, that looks easy! [Laughter] These lasagnas and stuff, I'm like, you just buy lasagna in a tin pan and throw it in the oven and come back and your— 'cause we never did that. And it wasn't, like, oh, we can't afford it, it was just not the way we did it.

0:46:00

And now we even make pasta from scratch with the kids and that's fun. So the bulk of the experience, I guess, is before you sit at the table for us.

Michael Ramirez: Right. And so this is what for me and my brain it boils down to. We are in such a technological time. Look at the mic we're using now. It completely does everything for you and then you can just connect it to your computer, download it, and now you've got it and you can send it out however you want, email and stuff like that.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: And you can completely unplug from all that technology, grab some wood, set it on fire, throw some meat in there, and you can have a meal. Now, how long has that been going on? Since almost the beginning of time, right? So literally if there was a “back to the future” type of moment you could still feed yourself because you know how to barbecue or grill type of thing.

0:47:07

And then, it’s rolling that family back into that, us. We get to unplug from all that stuff and take it back to before there was cell phones and emails and all that other stuff. There’s always been stress and work and all that stuff, but you get to at least unplug from that for just a small time of your day. And like I say, for me the most important times of grilling, whether it’s beforehand, in the middle, and during or after, were all of the connections you got to make with the people, the conversations.

Corie Ramirez: Right. So sometimes when Michael’s grilling or barbecuing, rather, and it takes longer, if I’m in here, inside preparing something, whatever, a side that it might take longer— let’s say I’m gonna make potato salad and I started too late— he’s, like, well, you were inside.

0:48:07

He’s kind of like, why aren’t you out here with me? ‘Cause we’d rather have easier sides so that I can be out there with you.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: Because it's not about him doing that and me doing this and us bringing it together, it's the time that we spend while we're doing it. So I'll try to do something— if I know we're gonna grill I'll try to get stuff, whatever sides, get 'em prepped really, really early if we can. Or things that we're gonna grill like the vegetables that we can grill outside so that I can spend that time with him. It's not a matter of him being out there and then coming and presenting the meat to the family. The idea is to be sitting out there. So when we invite my parents over if we're gonna grill, we always say, hey, we're gonna grill, whatever.

0:48:59

And so there's two things, almost three. It's, like, what time do we come over? What time are you gonna start the fire? And then, what time are you gonna eat? So there's always those three things. And most people want to arrive when you're gonna start the fire or right after you start the fire because if you say, hey, come over around six, don't expect we're gonna eat at 6:00. That's when we're starting the fire. So we're probably gonna eat around 7:30 at the earliest. Unless it's something that you've been barbecuing like a brisket all— you've been outside for sixteen hours all overnight, which you've done in the past, then you'll tell them, all right, we're gonna eat around 2:00 or whatever. It's gonna be ready at this time because it's one of those multi-hour things that he's doing. Then still people come over a little earlier to kind of do this.

Michael Ramirez: Right.

Corie Ramirez: But you don't show up and dinner is served to you.

0:50:01

Michael Ramirez: And it's a neat way to look at also eating, because the menu has to be planned out way ahead. I have to make sure I have enough fuel for that fire, so I have to have enough wood. What kind of wood am I using? What am I grilling or barbecuing that day? If I'm grilling I like to use coals for the heat and I use mesquite is what I usually like to use if I can get it for the actual flavor. But if I'm barbecuing then I'll use post oak. That's my favorite. I've used pecan, I've used other kinds, but the post oak burns really well. And so you have to have that. And then you need your spices, and so, checklist, do I have everything? Oh, I'm missing this. So it's not just like a, oh, I'm just gonna throw this together. So it's very thought through when it comes to barbecuing, even if you're gonna grill chicken or fajitas or something you need to have all your ingredients and you have to marinate them for however long you want so they come out tender.

0:51:02

You don't want people, like, uh, it's great. [Laughter]

Corie Ramirez: I remember when Z was young, our oldest, went over to a friend's house. The friend said, "Hey, come over. We're gonna have barbecued chicken." So then Z went over to have dinner and came home—he was really young—and said, "They give me chicken with barbecue sauce on it." [Laughter] It was chicken that had, like, a bottled barbecue sauce on it, which, to that family, was barbecued chicken or whatever. And he's, like, "It had all this sauce all over it." So that's not barbecue what we—ours is a chicken that's grilled with a dry rub.

Michael Ramirez: It's always dry down here, yeah.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. It's not wet at all. [Laughter] And so it was really funny.

0:51:59

Cynthia Torres: What do you think that you learned growing up, either directly or indirectly, by having these family gatherings around food? Not just learning how to barbecue and learning how to make a fire and set things on fire, not that you set things— you made a fire.

Corie Ramirez: [Laughter]

Cynthia Torres: But what is your takeaway, your values that might've developed?

Michael Ramirez: Family.

Corie Ramirez: Um-hm.

Michael Ramirez: I mean, just one word. And it didn't necessarily mean blood. So my grilling experiences have went very much like Corie's. The only difference was I got into doing it myself at a very, very young age, but going to college I was the guy that would grill. I had a grill there at my apartment. I'd say, "You bring the meat, I'll barbecue it," so I didn't have to buy any food.

[Laughter]

0:53:03

So that was my cheap way of doing it. All the way to becoming a professional, and then I would continue doing it with other professionals, with other directors. Because I was a band director, and so when we'd get together on a Saturday we'd all bring our recordings of our groups, but before we would do that we would go out to the pit, I would turn the meat. Sometimes other people would jump in there, too. Everybody brought their own, and you eat your barbecue and then you sit down and listen to each other's recordings to give commentary. "Okay, this is what

I'm hearing." So there was that professional life also that was also revolving around barbecuing also for me in my life.

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So the barbecuing thing for me I guess is family but just connecting. It's just, like, I want to know more about what you know, and that feeling of empathy. It's just, like, I want to feel what you feel. Please tell me what's going on in your life. Teach me.

Corie Ramirez: I think you're right. It's about that time that we connect with other people, because there's no other time that we all stop at the same time and just say, okay, we're going to connect into each other and catch up with each other, whether it's daily with the kids to say what's going on, or whether it's after a week or months or even longer when you catch up with family. But it's usually around food for us. But also when you get to invite people in, or being invited to someone's barbecue or someone's thing, you feel so included.

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Because it seems like a familial party but it's not like, oh, this is birthday party where everybody gets to come. This is like an "us" thing where we get to connect with each other on a genuine level, so it's kind of fun. It's a more genuine way of connecting.

Michael Ramirez: I think tongues become a little looser also because you're also—

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, there's always cocktails.

Michael Ramirez: — your fair share of alcohol, too. There's beer or whatever.

Corie Ramirez: There's never not beer with all of these barbecues.

Michael Ramirez: But the biggest thing for me, that was my time to network and ask questions. Again, going back to my being curious, this is what's going on in my life, this is where I'm struggling. What do you suggest? Cool. Thank you. That is where I'm going in my life— to the next person— and what would you suggest?

0:55:58

And taking all of these opinions and it's, like, okay, that wouldn't work for me. That's not okay. This is okay. That's how I formed a lot of my wisdom, I guess you'd say, based on other people's instincts. So for me that was very important. So again, the barbecuing, the before part and during part, that's where you get to tie into other people's experiences of wisdom and all of that. That's just fun.

Corie Ramirez: I'm wondering if it's like the food brings the people or the people get rewarded with food for coming, because it is about that connection. Because even after the meal we sit around and talk for— you don't get up from the table when the food's done. It's there and cleared and we still sit around and catch up with people and connect, and so it's not like you're using the food as bait to get them there but it's just almost a reward for coming and sharing your time with us.

0:56:59

And we're gonna do this together.

Michael Ramirez: It's the payoff for sure, yeah.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. When we spend that time together.

Cynthia Torres: Well, the other day you were at grill and Sal was with you, your youngest, and he's got the fire gloves on and he's flipping. What are you hoping to pass along or what are you hoping that they're getting out of all this?

Michael Ramirez: The same exact thing that I did, because for me rolling all the way back to when I was very little, the clinging back to those good, wholesome real family moments that somebody has spent all these years doing, passing it on to you. For me, that's what I'm hoping, that he'll do that and then he will do that with his children, and they will pass that on.

0:57:59

Right now most kids don't want to be outside. They want to be tied into their devices and stuff, and he's very busy 'cause he has own stuff that he likes to do, but I'll force him to break off from that a little bit and come on out and let's learn how to do something with your hands outside.

And so for me, that's what I'm hoping to pass on to them is just this feeling of you did this, let's make this happen. Because the time's gonna come where I say, okay, everything's there. Do it. I'm just gonna sit back and watch you.

Corie Ramirez: There was something that night when we came inside, there was something I ate or tasted. I don't know what I said. I said, "Look what Michael made." And Sal goes, "I made it." And so he was very proud of himself that he does that now and that he's fifteen, almost sixteen and he's the only one of his friends that grills, I think.

0:59:02

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: And he's the only one that does all that. But he takes great pride in, like, no, I'm starting the fire or I'm gonna do this, or I'm gonna be able to grill for everybody.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. It's easy to have friends over and stuff like that, order wings from one of this popular wing places, but I prefer to make them myself.

Corie Ramirez: Ooh, yeah! We've made wings out there. Oh, they were delicious!

Michael Ramirez: I just put them on grill and— yeah. And also just the self-satisfaction of also looking at the faces, like, okay, they're enjoying that. There's nothing left. I didn't meal prep well enough today. [Laughter] So there's also that, as well, just having that satisfaction as, like, everybody was happy. This is good and look how this worked out, so it's nice.

Corie Ramirez: But we do look forward to doing that with their kids, and we talk about that even now.

Michael Ramirez: Absolutely.

Corie Ramirez: Even with the big [inaudible 0:59:54] and stuff like that about looking forward to, like, oh, when we get to teach our grandkids one day, when that day comes, how to bake and cook and do things.

1:00:05

Because a lot of it is not written down. You have to go learn, smell, touch, taste, feel.

Michael Ramirez: Listen.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, listen a lot. And that's the way you learn.

Michael Ramirez: That's how you cook. You cook with your senses, every single sense you should be using. If you're not then you're not doing it right.

Corie Ramirez: Not from a book, right. So we're looking forward to being able to pass it along.

Michael Ramirez: The next generation of children. [Laughter]

Corie Ramirez: It was a big deal when my dad handed the grill over to you even at his house.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: When we would go over there and he was, like, "Nope. Michael will grill now."

So it's kind of a—

Michael Ramirez: Passing on the torch.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah, literally. An honor.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah, it's a huge honor. You're very careful about— I was, like, uh . . .

1:01:00

Corie Ramirez: 'Cause in Texas you don't touch somebody else's woman and you don't touch somebody else's . . . ?

Michael Ramirez: Grill. [Laughter]

Corie Ramirez: That's true. [Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: For sure. For sure.

Corie Ramirez: You don't touch another man's woman or another man's grill. That's what it is. So when they say, "You're gonna take over," when your father-in-law tells you, "You know what? You're gonna grill at my house for the family," it isn't a test, it's a passing of the torches. An honorable thing that's kinda cool that they get to do that.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah, it is.

Corie Ramirez: We enjoy that.

Cynthia Torres: And now you're not just cooking for family and everything, you have your own business. You're opening up your own business and everything, and that's amazing. I see you on your Facebook page going from your Sweet Notes Cookie Company, Sweet Notes Baking Company, and you're connecting not just with your family around food, you're connecting with your community.

Michael Ramirez: Right.

Corie Ramirez: That's what we were just talking about today we're excited about.

1:02:03

I mean, it's fun that you get to springboard the love of food and what you do, preparing food and creating foods for people that they're happy. We're just, like, isn't it cool that we're just making people happy? That's our job is just to make you happy by coming and tasting something or making—and then we're always wanting to improve also. And so we want genuine feedback. But I just told Michael, like, hey, our best "commercial" or social media post would be, like,

people walking away from us once they have that thing in their hand because we always see how happy people are when they taste something good.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: And it's fun to be the person that prepares that.

1:02:58

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. And we get to be the joy part of their day.

Corie Ramirez: We're the sweet note in their day. [Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: That's fun.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. We both had fulfilling careers. We've done really, really good work with children, a lot of our work, but this is kind of fun, feeding people.

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm.

Corie Ramirez: Feeding people and creating, doing with our hands, teaching— 'cause we still love teaching. We've had some classes where we teach kids to bake from scratch and get in there and get their hands dirty and it's fun. It's unfortunate it's something that's not more revered or taught in schools.

Michael Ramirez: Well, everybody's so disconnected now, and so this is a very fast version of a barbecue.

1:04:02

They're gonna come through. The idea is to make them feel like part of the family, the Sweet Notes family, and give them something that they really, really enjoy.

Corie Ramirez: Come back for more! [Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. But just because they feel like this is a wonderful place and I want to be around this.

Corie Ramirez: Right, right, right.

Michael Ramirez: And it tastes great, too, so that doesn't hurt.

Corie Ramirez: Sure. Even when we do go to restaurants, when we do go out to eat, we want to go to places where we know the name of the owner, we know the people that are preparing our food. We do know. We do do that. It's more than just, oh, we want to support local. We want to have the meal that our friends prepared, and we want to be that where we connect with our customers at our bakery, where we want to know their names. We want to be able to—

Michael Ramirez: Well, just think about this, though, 'cause this is how I looked at it. Because I played saxophone and I would get called to play at a lot of different events in people's lives.

1:05:02

Corie Ramirez: Oh, yes.

Michael Ramirez: So we get to be part of everybody's experiences, birthday parties—

Corie Ramirez: Graduations we've done.

Michael Ramirez: — graduations, right.

Corie Ramirez: We've done a wedding just recently. Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: So we get to be part of that family. Even though we're not there we're getting to be part of that celebration. And so going places we like to meet people. We also want to be celebrated also. When I retired and I walked into the restaurant everybody was, like, "Hey, Mike! How are you doing? Hey, how's it going? Hey, how close are y'all to opening up the bakery?" You felt wonderful. You felt very valued and valid. And so those are tenets that are just exceptionally important for a business owner. And just a person with your children and your family and in anything you do.

1:05:59

Corie Ramirez: But it's been fun 'cause even when we had our popups and customers come through and they'll get the thing that they know they want, and they're, like, "Yay, I made it and I was able to get cinnamon rolls!" I'm, like, "Okay, I'm gonna give you the meringue, though." [Laughter] And I'll be, like, "Have you tried the meringues?" And they're, like, "Well, no. We saw them but I really, really wanted cinnamon rolls." I said, "Okay, but I'm gonna give you one of these." And I'm, like, "And you taste it and you let me know what you think, but I think you're gonna like it." So it's kinda cool to be able to do that and give people other tastes and flavors that they're new to.

Michael Ramirez: Right. And historically, also, we're kind of treating the bakery like a barbecue restaurant like they do, because there's a certain point where we do sell out, and when we've sold out that day we're done.

Corie Ramirez: That's it. Yeah.

Michael Ramirez: That's it. There's no more. And so that happens quite a lot, and so it's the same— again, going back to barbecue, it's the same things that you see barbecue restaurants— Okay, sorry, we're out of chicken. Okay, now we're out of brisket. Okay, we're out of everything. [Laughter]

1:06:57

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. There's a barbecue place here in Texas that we've been wanting to go but we know— there are two, actually, I can think of off the top of my head— but it's, like, okay, we know we got to get in line to get that hours ahead because it's so popular it's gonna sell out. And now it's kind of fun when we've had our popups that our customers have that attitude and they're lining up outside. The last was only about half an hour, but for half an hour or forty-five minutes before we opened our doors they were already kind of— it wasn't hours but . . .

[Laughter] But they get excited about— and it's funny because people— because of COVID we were only letting two customers in our store at a time. So then the people that are outside are, like, hey, is there gonna be some left for me!? 'Cause we don't limit. If somebody came in and said, I'm taking them all, all the cinnamon rolls you got, or all the whatever, we've never said, "You're only limited to two things."

Michael Ramirez: 'Cause I was always the outside guy, the doorman.

1:08:03

And so you'd see people just watching back, how many did they take? Can you see what they took?

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. Are there still some left? [Laughter]

Michael Ramirez: It was funny to watch all of that. Hilarious!

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. And as we're growing into the new storefront it's a little nerve-racking 'cause we want to make sure we have enough for everybody but everything's from scratch so it's as much as I can make in a day every day. But it's exciting.

Michael Ramirez: Yep.

Corie Ramirez: It's fun to be able to prepare it all.

Cynthia Torres: I really love that over time you said it takes a while to prepare, but those are the best moments and everything and you're coming together as a family and stuff and building those bridges and everything and making people feel valued and wanted because you're taking the time to get to know them. That's really beautiful.

1:08:59

And that your business and the way you support other business owners is you're, like, extending your family connections. That's really amazing. That's what I love about coming back from what I remember. It's really beautiful. Yeah. If you had some last comments or something, what would you want folks to know about the family?

Corie Ramirez: As you say that, Cindy, I think about it seems like every meal is a celebration.

Every meal. And it's not, like, oh, it's such a formal thing. But even if it's, like, hey, we're getting tacos and picking up this, we want to feed you really well and sit with you and do that.

We want to have coffee and breakfast with the kids or brunch with them when we do that on the weekends.

1:10:01

I think I remember someone— maybe it was college years, somebody that I met, and they said, “No, our family just eats and runs,” or “The food’s there and we eat when we have—” They never sat down at the same time. Or somebody I still remember saying, “Oh, we just eat standing up in the kitchen.” And I thought, what!?! Meals are just a time to— it just seems so celebratory every single time we sit down.

Michael Ramirez: Well, it’s we’ve made it through another day. We’re all breathing, and this is a way to say, “I love you,” without saying the word. It’s an actual action. For me, love is an action. It’s not a word. It gets thrown around too much.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. Very, very, very rarely does anyone eat alone in this house or in our family.

1:11:00

And even if it’s, like, I’ve been hungry all day. I’ve been waiting for Michael to get home because I want to sit down with him. Or he’ll come in and he’ll grab something. I’m, like, “I’ve been waiting for you to eat!” And he goes, “Oh, I thought you already ate it’s so late.” And I said, “No, but I’m waiting for you.” Because it’s not about the food it’s about the time that we spend sitting down together and kind of catching up. And so I will wait for you to eat. Like, that’s a big deal that we wait and eat together.

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm.

Corie Ramirez: Or the kids will, as well. Or they go off and do their own thing but then it's, like, "All right. It's dinnertime!" And everybody comes out and we spend some time. So it's nice that we can really— it's so much like the way I did with my great-grandma, the way we did with our parents with us where it's just coming together and sharing.

Michael Ramirez: And the world and life is so fast, and people are so wrapped around so many things going on.

1:12:00

But I think if everybody tied into this kind of setting of let's grill, let's talk, that's how we do it. Let's sit together as a family—

Corie Ramirez: Slow down.

Michael Ramirez: — you'll have less of the issues we're having out in the world right now. It's a scary time right now for some families. So I think that is exceptionally important to do with your family as they're growing up and becoming their own adult because you're training and raising children to become what kind of parent? So that's on you to do to teach them, this is how family does it. This is how we function. And when it's your turn you've got to make your decisions how you're gonna do it but for the most part you always return back to what's familiar and what you know. So to me that's exceptionally important.

Corie Ramirez: It's our church.

Michael Ramirez: For sure.

Corie Ramirez: The dinner table is our church.

1:13:01

I'm trying to think, when do you come together with other people? We don't see the kids during the day. They're all doing their own— they're at school, they're at work, they're with their friends, they're— whatever it is. But even then we'll say, okay, we're gonna make time to even go to my parents. And it's about going to dinner or sharing the meal. So it's the only time that we leave everything else behind and come together. And then, after dinner it's, like, okay we might maybe watch a movie or play a board game, but most of the time they go out and do their own thing and go back to their own lives. But it's the only time that we plug into each other really.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: So it's sacred. We don't want to take phone calls. We don't want to— we can invite other people over. It's fine.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. The conversation or the questions might be a little bit different because that's where you also get to catch is, like, okay, what did you say?

Corie Ramirez: What's going on? [Laughter] Rewind.

1:14:01

Michael Ramirez: Okay. Let's talk this through a little bit. How did you perceive this?

Corie Ramirez: And check in with them, um-hm, and things.

Michael Ramirez: Yeah. And you can catch things out ahead of time if you just ask enough questions. Everybody likes to talk. Generally speaking, most people will say too much, and you get these, like, wait, what? And so, yeah, it helps.

Cynthia Torres: Very nice. Well, thank you all. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Corie Ramirez: I'm looking at you. I'm thinking about, what are we grilling tonight? [Laughter]
We can decide where we're going to because this has been, like, I want to grill.

Michael Ramirez: You told me not to, so . . .

Corie Ramirez: I said not tonight because it's so many hours. I think it's really cool and this weekend that we're expecting family to come into town.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah.

Corie Ramirez: And just getting excited about sharing a meal together with them also.

1:15:00

And then, Jeff does that. He'll sit and he'll grill for hours and stuff, so it's kind of fun that it's a thing that our family shares, that our cousins, because we grew up doing that, grilling with our cousins and doing all that, and they do the same and they've kept up with that tradition. And then we get to do that when they're here and in town and together. It's nice to be able to keep doing that and pass it on. There's nothing else we do with my parents really.

Michael Ramirez: We'll go to restaurants with them from time to time, but it's not the same. It's not the same thing.

Corie Ramirez: Yeah. Right. It's nice.

Michael Ramirez: Well, you get to be a family.

Cynthia Torres: Well, thank you. Thank you both so much for taking the time to do this.

Michael Ramirez: Absolutely.

Corie Ramirez: You're welcome.

Michael Ramirez: You're welcome.

Corie Ramirez: It's nice to think about it.

Michael Ramirez: Um-hm. Yeah, it is.

Corie Ramirez: I've enjoyed it.

1:16:02

[End]