



Richard Garcia and Lori Pathak

Brownsville, TX

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Cynthia Torres: And here we go. My name is Cynthia Torres. The date is June 10th, 2022. We're in Brownsville, Texas, and today I'm speaking with . . . ?

Richard Garcia: Richard Garcia.

Lori Pathak: Lori Pathak.

Cynthia Torres: Great. And how old are you?

Richard Garcia: I'm 57.

Lori Pathak: I'm 51.

Cynthia Torres: Awesome. And how are we related?

Lori Pathak: We're brother and sister, so we're both Garcias. Pathak is my married name.

Richard Garcia: And we are both second cousins of yours.

Lori Pathak: Yes.

Cynthia Torres: Yes. Because your . . .

Richard Garcia: Our grandfather and your grandmother were brother and sister.

Cynthia Torres: Okay. And your grandfather's name?

Richard Garcia: Placido Garcia.

Cynthia Torres: Okay. And your parents are . . . ?

Lori Pathak: Noe and Elvia, but Dad was always called Sonny Garcia.

Cynthia Torres: Okay. I didn't know that. I thought it was his name.

Lori Pathak: [Laughter] Yeah.

Cynthia Torres: Okay. Interesting.

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So we're gonna start from the beginning, your earliest memories of getting together, dinners or sitting around the table. What are your earliest memories around food and family?

Richard Garcia: Well, we came from a very close-knit family although it was not close related. My father was an only child so most of his family, which kind of took the place of siblings, were all his cousins because it was a big family, there were a lot of cousins. They all kind of grew up close in proximity and so they grew up more like siblings than cousins. And so when we came along, they continued that tradition of always socializing together, always having gatherings, always cooking together, and even vacationing together. So what were our cousins were kinda almost like our siblings, as well. [Laughter]

Lori Pathak: Um-hm.

Richard Garcia: So yeah, we came from a very large, close-knit family, extended family.

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Lori Pathak: Same here. Yes, we were extremely close. But I also remember that we always ate at the table growing up. We rarely went to go see the television or anything else like that. And I don't know if it was just the sign of the times, but I remember that being something that we were always talking about our day at the end of the day. And on the weekends we were with all of our extended family. I can't remember many weekends where we weren't around everybody else. So weekdays we would typically be around the table for dinner at the very least. Breakfast was

always rushed. Lunch was at school. But then, come the weekends, we were always grilling, or we were always making something with relatives at one of our houses.

Richard Garcia: In our family, our father was extremely social, and our mother was more of the introvert, but my dad just always wanted to get together with people and have fun and do things.

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And he was the griller so that was basically what happened is everybody'd get together and grill and go to somebody's backyard or even got to the beach or a park or something. And barbecue was always part of it. It was always fajitas.

Lori Pathak: Yeah. And he was a charcoal griller. He did not like gas, propane, anything. He liked to take the time to let the fire build up and settle in. And that was very social for us because we were always waiting on something so as kids we were always playing outside around everyone or sitting with them. So yeah, that was part of the experience.

Cynthia Torres: Nice. When you were having dinners during the week who was responsible for preparing the meals and what kind of meals were being prepared?

Richard Garcia: Our mom.

Lori Pathak: Our mom. And it was pretty structured. I think for scheduling reasons she had certain things scheduled. Like, on this day she'd make this meal and then we'd have the leftovers the next day because it was a rush day. And the next day she'd make this other meal, and then the next day we'd have those leftovers.

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Fridays our dad would usually either take us somewhere or pick something up for us. Sometimes we'd go have pizza after a football game or sometimes he'd just bring home sandwiches or something. And then, the weekends were the bigger days where it was the bigger meals at someone's house or at our house and everyone would get together. There were many times when-- it was mostly a lot of potluck I would say, too, from what I remember. Someone would bring one dish, someone else would bring another dish. We would cook another and make another. And because our cousins were like siblings it was just very standard. It was like everyone's home was our own home. We were always pretty comfortable everywhere.

Cynthia Torres: What was on the menu? What were some of your mom's . . . ?

Richard Garcia: Well, it was very heavily influenced by Mexican food, so we'd have fajitas, usually rice and beans. What else would we have?

Lori Pathak: I'd say she made a lot of [**pico de gallo** 0:04:59].

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She made dishes like pico de gallo. She'd make fideo with chicken and potatoes. But I do remember that as we got older she started branching out a little bit. She started making spaghetti more or she started trying to make fried rice a little bit here and there. So as we got older I think it was just her own spirit. She wanted to try to--

Richard Garcia: Her own journey.

Lori Pathak: Yeah. To try different things and introduce different things.

Richard Garcia: Yeah. She made these salmon patties that she knew were my favorite, or she made a really good lasagna.

Lori Pathak: She did, um-hm. And it was always the first time she'd made it. She didn't grow up with it, but she would try to learn how to make new things and bring those in. And I think that was great because we'd go places, and we knew what was on the menu at a restaurant somewhere instead of just being limited to only Mexican food. I remember there were a couple of Sundays maybe when I was a teenager and she'd spend the day making eggrolls, spreading it all out and making it and then freezing them in batches and say, "Now we can enjoy these when we have fried rice or something."

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Chicken almond she liked, too. But mostly it was Mexican fare. She did try to branch out a little more, though.

Cynthia Torres: Nice.

Lori Pathak: We didn't really cook with her, but we were always with her helping in one way or another though.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah. I was gonna ask what your roles were in the meal preparations.

Lori Pathak: Setting the table. Getting things out of the refrigerator. Helping set something up. She did the major over-the-stove cooking, I'd say.

Richard Garcia: She was also kind of from the generation where that was kind of like the woman's role was to prepare the meals and do all that. And then, I guess for some reason it was okay for the man to do the grilling.

Lori Pathak: Yeah. [Laughter]

Richard Garcia: But yeah, she did all of that stuff.

Lori Pathak: I think she also-- [**not just a mother** 0:06:57]. She had grown up for many years with a single parent household.

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My grandparents had been married and then divorced for a few years and then got back together. There were many years where she would help out at her house, help her mother out and prepare things and do a lot of things because she was always working. And so I think she just kind of continued with that responsibility all the time. She was used to it.

Richard Garcia: Yeah. She was the oldest daughter and so she took on that role, as well, of kind of helping a lot around the house. And so she was kind of the nurturer type of personality.

Lori Pathak: Um-hm, yeah.

Cynthia Torres: When did you start cooking or learning?

Lori Pathak: I actually started baking at an early age. She did a lot of the meals, but I was probably eleven or twelve when I started baking cookies and cakes and things like that.

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So baking I did learn early or practice early and she'd give me a recipe or give me a box and just stand back while I did all . . . I enjoyed doing that. That was kind of something I enjoyed. I didn't start regular meals until I was grown and out of the house, but then I would try to go back and remember, how did she do this and what did she do? I like to experiment, too, just like she did. And you're a big baker, as well, too.

Richard Garcia: Yeah.

Lori Pathak: And I think that's--

Richard Garcia: But actually I started baking maybe, like, ten years ago. My husband is the cook in the family and he's an excellent cook and he's an excellent griller and so I never really had to do that. But I do like sweets just personally so, I don't know, at some point I said, you know, I'm gonna start learning how to make some of these things that I want to eat. So now I'm known as a baker.

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And I'm sort of self-taught, but interestingly I don't cook, I don't enjoy it, but I do enjoy baking. I'm not sure why. So yeah, I do that. And I didn't do it till, like I said, my late adulthood.

[Laughter] But I do enjoy that.

Cynthia Torres: How do you think-- go ahead.

Lori Pathak: Oh, I was gonna say I think it's very similar for us because my husband loves to cook, too, and I still love to bake. So a lot of times when we separate things, like, I'll do the salads while he does a main dish, or I'll do all the baking, sweets and things, while he does something else. And I'll do a main dish here and there, but he likes to grill a lot, too, and since that was my dad's thing I just kinda let it go. I enjoy that, and then make the sweets on the side.

Cynthia Torres: So growing up eating and getting together with family was a very social thing.

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What kinds of things did you learn about that kind of influence the way you are right now, gathering around food and everything? What was it about gathering around family at the barbecue or in the kitchen or sitting down at the table that really made an impact on who you became as adults?

Richard Garcia: I don't know if it was conscious, but we do the same thing now. We have a weekend home at a lake outside of Dallas, so we'll do all the lake stuff during the day but Saturday night without fail it's the big meal and having people over and having a big gathering. And so it's all focused around that Saturday night dinner, the whole weekend is, basically. Even during the week before people call and they say, "What are you going to make? What should we bring? What would go good with what you're gonna make?" And then, I'll say, "What do you guys want? I'll bake something."

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So it tends to kind of guide where it's all going to that dinner Saturday night. And I hadn't really even thought about it before but it's kind of the same routine. [Laughter] It's very enjoyable and I didn't realize that maybe that's where it came from or maybe that's just kind of the way things work anyway. But there are a lot of parallels there.

Lori Pathak: I agree. I never even thought about it growing up. It was what we did. We got together. I think it would've been very strange if Saturday rolled around and we found out we weren't gonna see anyone. It just wasn't a question. We were just around everyone, and I think it is the same in our house because we do like to have friends over if we can. And even if it is just the four us, my husband and my kids and I, maybe we weren't too busy which is a rare occasion, but we end up, let's go ahead and pick this up and we can make this and we have time to sit outside.

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I think it's comforting. I think food makes you feel good, depending on what you're in the mood for. Sometimes you just want that cozy comfort food. Sometimes you want something light, and

you want to sit out at the grill and enjoy a lemonade with something. It isn't anything that we really planned. I think it just came out that way. We got a pool put in a couple of years ago and now my husband says, "Oh, this is great, now the kids can have all of their friends back here, too, and they can all come outside." So it just kind of continues that way. We just constantly get together, and it turns into a food fest all the time. If someone's coming to visit or someone's coming for a glass of wine or something, all of the sudden there's more food that comes out or it gets brought over or gets ordered in. And so I think it's just very social. It slows you down with conversation.

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I think food has been a big part. I never realized it would but even just in the mood of things. Is it a cold day outside? Is it a nice day outside? Have we had a busy week? And that determines what we're in the mood for and how we spend our evenings.

Cynthia Torres: So you're both married.

Richard Garcia: Um-hm.

Lori Pathak: Um-hm.

Cynthia Torres: And how long have you been married?

Richard Garcia: Well, I've been officially married about five or six years, but I've been with my husband since 1995, so twenty-seven years.

Lori Pathak: A long time. Yeah. [Chimes ringing] [Laugh] Sorry. I've been married seventeen years now to my husband, and we have two children, so a while.

Cynthia Torres: It seems like you two married people who were very interested in food and social gathering.

Lori Pathak: Yeah.

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Richard Garcia: And the other thing that I was just thinking is my husband is a lot like my father, very social, very, very funny. He just has a great sense of humor, and he keeps everybody laughing all the time. He sees the humor in every situation, so yeah, maybe that's part of it.

[Laughter]

Lori Pathak: Same here, actually. My husband's very much like his husband and like my dad. And I think they all had similar careers, too. They were all salespeople at some point and managers at some point.

Richard Garcia: Yeah. [Laughter]

Lori Pathak: And they're always the ones making jokes and giving everyone a good time around. They're very social. They're very hospitable, too, like, what can I get you? Can I help you with anything? And just very social and casual all the time.

Cynthia Torres: So when you were looking around for people to spend your life with you're just drawn to it or is this conscious?

Richard Garcia: It wasn't conscious. [Laughter]

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Lori Pathak: Yeah. I think just drawn to it maybe, without realizing it. It wasn't until much later that I thought, hmm, that's kind of like how my dad-- but not realizing it at first.

Richard Garcia: Uh-huh, yeah. I don't know. It just sort of worked out that way. Who knows what was going on in my subconscious mind? But I have had that thought before that Jeff is like my dad in a lot of ways.

Lori Pathak: Yep, same here.

Cynthia Torres: And how have you all-- maintaining those traditions with your families? Do you still get together? 'Cause you both live outside the valley. So when did you move outside the valley?

Richard Garcia: Well, I--

Lori Pathak: So I moved when I was fifteen, actually-- sorry-- and then we moved out to the Dallas-Forth Worth area. And then, as an adult after I was out of college, I started moving around a lot more. And right now we're in Ohio where it's very hard to get anything similar to what we can eat here in the valley.

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I try to make things. If we can't order it I try to make it. And this is where I do go back to maybe the cookbooks that maybe my mom had or that my cousins put together for me or something. And I try to figure out, this is what we always did at this time of year. This is what we always did at this celebration. And so I try to maintain certain traditions, not a lot because we like to create a lot of new traditions, too, but there are certain staples that I want to keep in there like [tamales 0:16:33] every Christmas holiday and I've made buñuelos on New Year's Eve like my mom did. And then, my husband will try to bring something else in now and then, but then, there's other traditions. My kids will say, oh, let's do this every night. Every night we have a family night let's

do this, or every night we have a movie night let's do this. So they're bringing their own in, as well, too.

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So yeah, we try to enjoy that. And then, another thing that I started with our family is after my parents passed away I said, okay, every year on their birthday let's pick one of their desserts that they loved. And so my dad used to love this nut cherry salad. It's a Cool Whip mixed with pecans and fresh fruit and things, and we will have that on his birthday. I'll make a big bowl of it, and we can't eat it all. It's always too much in the recipe. [Laughter] But we'll have that at some point. And then, my mom's birthday is kind of an excuse for us to get a banana split. And so it's something simple, but I try to say, okay, on their birthdays let's try to have one thing that they loved, and it's usually a sweet, actually, 'cause we all have a sweet tooth. [Laughter] But we are starting our own sometimes, too. There's certain things that my kids like the way something is made, and my daughter is loving baking now. She has started doing that on her own. My son not so much, but if we sit down and say-- we can do this more in the summertime, too, when there's just a little more time we'll say, okay, well, we're gonna make this dish together.

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You're gonna cut the onions and you're gonna do this, and you're gonna do this. So we try to fit that in maybe a couple times over the summer. We'd love to do it more but timewise it's just difficult, but we try to do some things to at least bring them in. But my daughter will gladly bring out one of her American Girl sweets recipe books and make something, so she enjoys that part. Which I loved baking, anyway, and we did.

Richard Garcia: And we'll still see each other, like, holidays. We usually will see each other for Thanksgiving, and we'll do a big meal then, also. And I'll usually bake. It's usually at your place.

Lori Pathak: Yeah.

Richard Garcia: But we'll go up to Ohio and we'll make a big Thanksgiving dinner and put it all together. And then, their tradition, which is kind of nice, is the Saturday after Thanksgiving is when they decorate for Christmas.

Lori Pathak: Oh, yeah.

Richard Garcia: So we're there for that and we kinda help put up the trees and the decorations, and they listen to Christmas music. And so that's become a nice little tradition also.

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Lori Pathak: Yeah. That was a new one that we started when we were living in Dallas, and I just remember it was because my husband was always traveling. While he was in town for the holiday we'd say, okay, now Thanksgiving's over, next holiday. And we'd go the very next day to buy a tree with the kids. And now we have artificial trees in the house, but we pull them out. You're right. We do pull those out the day after Thanksgiving. And it's kind of nice to start the next holiday season.

Cynthia Torres: Nice. And when did you move out of the valley?

Richard Garcia: I graduated from high school in 1983 and I went away to college, and I have not lived in Brownsville since then, 'cause I went from Austin to San Antonio to Dallas, and I've been in Dallas since '93.

Cynthia Torres: And what kinds of family traditions did you take with you?

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Richard Garcia: Well, we still do all of the holiday things that we always did here, Thanksgiving, Christmas. And then, we would always either go to San Antonio to Jeff's family's for Christmas or to Brownsville, unless we met somewhere else. But we still did those kinds of things. So yeah, just the main ones, I guess.

Cynthia Torres: How about those culinary traditions, like the types of maybe Mexican American foods or something? Do you still . . . ?

Richard Garcia: I don't. [Laughter] But I don't cook.

Cynthia Torres: Yeah.

Lori Pathak: We do. We cannot get a lot of the same foods in Ohio so we will order them. And so for Christmas I did say, "Do you want tamales?" And so we found a place out of Fort Worth, it's a family that makes them, freezes them, and ships them. So we have those, but I keep telling the kids, "One of these days we're gonna just make our own." Because we did that one year here in this house actually.

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We never did it again, but I just remember we had the meatgrinder and we made the masa. And I think the only instruction was it's ready when it has enough lard in it that it floats in the water or something. [Laughter] There was some kind of recipe for that. But then we put it all together and we had a great time. And they may never make them again, but I think we'll do it as some point while they're in high school now. I think it'd be fun. Most of ours have to do a lot with just

holiday related and just creating some of our own now on the weekends but we do still try to get together. Oh, Easter is a big one, too. A lot of them are holiday related. The kids love-- this year was the first year we didn't do it because they were both, like, well, we're kinda done with that-- the cascarón is the confetti eggs that you smash on the head. And that's not food but that's just tradition. But I was talking to some friends about it, and they said, "We have never heard about that."

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And I said, "Well, I think we're gonna have Easter at our house next year because we're gonna hit each other on the heads with eggs." [Laughter] And they were, like . . . "Okay."

Richard Garcia: [Laughter] Our mom used to save up eggshells for weeks before so that we could dye them and put that confetti in them and cover them up with paper. So we did do that. I remember.

Lori Pathak: Oh, yeah.

Richard Garcia: But I don't do that as an adult. [Laughter]

Lori Pathak: We did a little decorating on them when the kids were younger with the confetti, too, but as they've gotten older we kind of have veered from certain things, but still celebrate in a way. So I think this year for Easter they just wanted to have a good meal, so we ate out, and they wanted to watch a movie out, so we went out. They wanted to do that, and we said okay, 'cause they are getting older.

Cynthia Torres: So your husbands are from different backgrounds, right?

Richard Garcia: Um-hm.

Lori Pathak: Um-hm.

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Cynthia Torres: What kinds of backgrounds are you coming together with?

Richard Garcia: Well, my husband is not Hispanic so there is that. But his family's from Texas. His father's from Harlingen and his mother was raised in the Kingsville area so they do have kind of a connection to the whole Hispanic culture. They always liked the Mexican food and all that stuff. So there's that familiarity on his side. But I just think that every generation that you're farther removed from Mexico you're gonna kind of lose that connection a little bit more. Like I said, I bake but I don't necessarily bake anything that's Mexican. [Laughter]

Lori Pathak: I'd like to learn. I have some cookbooks.

Richard Garcia: If I did, I'd have to learn it on my own 'cause my mom didn't really bake.

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Lori Pathak: Yeah. But she did make those buñuelos, though, on New Year's Eve.

Richard Garcia: Well, yeah.

Lori Pathak: So my husband is from Indian descent. His parents are both from the Mumbai area and they moved here at a young age when they were first married. They lived in Chicago for a while and then moved to the Houston area. And so he grew up in a family that was also very close. They were far apart geographically from each other, but they would try to visit every couple of years and then everyone would get together. And food was a huge part of his growing up because his mother could not find anything here that was Indian anywhere, even in Chicago at that time. There are plenty now but when they first moved here there wasn't really anything

there. So she continues to always make her own food at the house. And she's always baking something, and she has a huge pantry with all the spices that she needs.

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Richard Garcia: She has all the spices.

Lori Pathak: Yeah, in big cannisters.

Richard Garcia: She makes everything from scratch.

Lori Pathak: Yeah. She just kept going, and so she's taught him a few dishes that he likes but fortunately we have a lot of great restaurants around now that we can sometimes find certain things and it's easier to just order in sometimes. But there are other things that he'll make. But he did grow up around food a lot and around the table talking and sharing. He just has one sibling so there were just two in their family.

Richard Garcia: One thing that I like about his family is that they like to socialize also around food.

Lori Pathak: Yes.

Richard Garcia: But they also love music and dancing.

Lori Pathak: They do. [Laughter]

Richard Garcia: So every event that we have with his family, fifty or sixty people will get out there on the dance floor and they dance to this Indian music. And his parents had a fiftieth-- was it the fiftieth wedding anniversary?

Lori Pathak: Fiftieth anniversary, yeah.

Richard Garcia: And we all went down. We took my mom and everything. And they had live singers. And they would just throw out songs from when they were first married, and these singers would sing them just by request.

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And everybody was out on that dance floor, even the kids. Yeah, so they really socialize the same way.

Lori Pathak: They do. They were similar, we noticed, when we first got together. All the gatherings we had here were the gatherings he had there. I remember one of the first times he came to visit here we were in this backyard, actually. It was Easter and all our cousins said, “Oh, here, we’re gonna play the tortilla race.” He had never had confetti eggs either, before, but he was, like, “A tortilla race?” They said, “Just put this tortilla between your knees and hop from here to there.” And he was, like, what am I doing here? [Laughter] But there were a lot of little things that actually his family did, too. I remember going over there and they were, like, “Oh, here, this is when you hit on the head, and you do this.” And I’m, like, “What?” [Laughter] So they had their own traditions, but they were very similar.

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There were a lot of similarities on the silliness but the closeness and also keeping it all together. They try to keep their traditions, as well, too. So we try to do that with the kids, as well, too, and try to bring them as much as we can. But yeah, they were very similar to us.

Cynthia Torres: It sounds like your kids probably have a very diverse palate.

Lori Pathak: They do. And he's a little more on the old-fashioned side of, "Try this, try this, try this," whereas our parents never really pushed it. We developed a really nice palate, I think, over time but it was a very gradual. It was, like, "Here, try this one time." And then, later on down, it was, like, "Now try this one time." And then, by the time we were adults, we were, like, oh, we've tried all these things. And so we have a little bit different perspective on that where he gets excited about-- he is, like, "This is so good. You have to try this. Now try this. Now try this." Because he does love food.

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And so we have to balance that with the kids because we don't want to overwhelm them and we don't want them to just say, okay, we just don't want it anymore. But they do, they're developing a really nice palate. We were having hibachi teppanyaki Japanese food last night and my son's ordering his steak and salmon cooked a certain way. My daughter's ordering her sushi, specific ones. And they're young teenagers but I think they're learning to eat a lot of different foods, not just what we grew up with but different things. I think it's good for them. They get to enjoy things and everywhere they go they find something they'll enjoy. And little by little they increase that palate.

Lori Pathak: One way that my husband has influenced me, and my palate is that, for one, I was the quintessential picky eater growing up, so I didn't eat a whole lot of different things but what I did eat was very simple. It was a lot of Mexican food. So surprisingly a lot of foods I didn't have till I was an adult.

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And he introduced a lot of things to me, like now one of my favorite things is eggplant, and we never ate eggplant when I was growing up. And so I really opened up my palate completely as an adult through him because he liked to cook. [Chimes ringing]

Cynthia Torres: No need to back up. I just wanted to wait for the chimes to stop.

Lori Pathak: Sure. [Laughter]

Richard Garcia: But yeah, he's really introduced me to a lot of different foods as an adult which I didn't eat because in our household we didn't eat a lot of nonMexican foods.

Lori Pathak: Yes. I started eating more Indian food really, just because his mom was cooking some of it. At first it was a little difficult because she liked things a lot spicier than I liked but she started to make them more mild for me, which was a little easier for me.

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So I learned about a few different dishes. I had only known about certain dishes that maybe I'd had at fusion restaurants like Indian Fusion or something else that I'd had with friends. But it's opened me up to a few more meals. He always thought it was odd that I didn't like the really spicy food because he thought all Mexican food was spicy, which is not necessarily the case. A lot of times it has to do with the salsas or the chilis you put in it, or you can have it in a more mild way. So yeah, I started eating a few other dishes similar to his palate.

Cynthia Torres: Very nice.

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I was wondering, growing up and participating in meals, even if it was just setting the tables or something like that, or meeting with family, what do you think gathering together as families and

sitting together at tables with your family and talking, developing these new traditions that are still very social, how do you think that that influenced you as people and your value systems that might be a little bit different than people who grew up eating separately or just grab and go kind of a culture?

Richard Garcia: Well, sitting around a dinner table there's always going to be conversation. And you're gonna want to be with people that you want to have conversations with, and you have things in common with. And so it can be sitting around joking and having a good time and laughing or it could be a serious political discussion or more serious topics. So that influences you. You're always going to learn from other people.

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So it kinda helps to shape who you are and how you think. Yeah, I think it's just part of what makes you who you are, I guess.

Lori Pathak: I agree. And I think it builds and strengthens the bonds between you because you are more comfortable talking about things, you are more comfortable asking about things. You do get to know somebody very, very well when we are sitting together every day talking. And I think it helps that family unit, as well, too, because you're not always depending on anything else. You can have your other friends and others around you, other activities, but you know that you have your core stability and something that you can always count on and enjoy.

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So I think there are underlying safety issues even. It's like you feel like you always have a place to go. You always have that support structure even if you're away from home or you've gone off to school or you've moved that there's always that security there. You can always go back. And I

think it builds a real strength there, strengthens the bonds and the relationships. And then, every time you get together, even after you've moved on, it's the same. It's a real sense of security, I think.

Cynthia Torres: What are you hoping for the future, continuing to get together? And what are you hoping for your kids and how these family traditions of gathering and socializing around food, what are your hopes for them as they get older?

Lori Pathak: I hope they continue it. I hope they continue to use it even if it's just getting together with friends or getting together with their own families, keeping certain traditions.

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There are only a few that we have maintained but then a few more that we've brought in with us. And I would like for them to keep some over time, as well, too, and build upon those, too, I think. I think traditions are good. I like traditions. I'd like them to continue that. They might be away at college and maybe they can't get home for a holiday but maybe they get together with their own friends. And I remember living overseas for a while and not being able to fly anywhere because it was just too expensive at that time and just getting together with friends there. And we all brought specific recipes from our own backgrounds and our own upbringing. And we brought different dishes and there were so many things I hadn't tried and so many things others hadn't tried. So it was really nice. And there was another time a friend of mine had a big dinner as well, too, and she made up a rule, she said, "You're all friends here but some of you don't know each other as well as some of the rest of us."

0:35:00

“One rule at dinner, just sit by someone you haven’t sat by before.” So you didn’t necessarily sit by whoever you went with, but you ended up socializing. And the rest of the night turned out to be really fun because everyone got to know each other. And so I think there’s ways to help people open up, too. But I think as long as they continue certain traditions and take them with them I think it would be nice.

Richard Garcia: And just speaking from my experience with Lori’s kids, I think that they’re at the same point where we were at their age because they’re sort of oblivious to everything that’s going on with the meal preparing and all that other stuff while they’re doing their thing with their friends or with each other, and we’re the ones that are cooking all the meals and cleaning up afterwards and it’s all done together. We all get together and wash the dishes together and all that. And they might not be even aware of it, but I think unconsciously they’re seeing what’s going on. And I predict that they’re probably going to end up doing the same thing when they grow up just because that’s what they know and that’s what they were used to.

0:36:08

Lori Pathak: Yeah, um-hm.

Richard Garcia: And when they grow up they’ll probably end up doing the same thing, I can imagine.

Lori Pathak: True.

Richard Garcia: ‘Cause we didn’t think what our parents were doing for us at the time, and now we’re doing that for them. So I think they’re being influenced whether they realize it or not.

Lori Pathak: They are, yeah.

Cynthia Torres: What are some of the-- thinking about leading up to this interview and everything you said that maybe thinking about how the family was pieced together and who was related to who, was there anything that came back to memory and stuff like that?

Richard Garcia: What's interesting is that I had been thinking about studying our family tree and I mentioned it to Lori, and she had been thinking the same thing.

Lori Pathak: Um-hm.

0:36:58

Richard Garcia: So one of the things that I was thinking about doing while we are here is talk to our aunt and uncle and see if they have any other names that we can start with to do the research. So I guess this is kind of a way for us to try to go back a little further and bring the picture a little bit closer together.

Lori Pathak: We were thinking about that exactly. And I told him I'd been looking through some of our old-- even obituaries from our grandparents thinking, gosh, we couldn't remember the names of all their sisters or all their brothers or something. And those are more names that we thought, oh, we can start putting those together, too, and trying to find out more and asking, because our parents aren't around anymore. And they used to tell us a lot when they were here, but we weren't old enough to really think to ask more. They would tell us things just in passing, like, oh, yeah, we used to do this when I was growing up, or my aunt used to do this.

0:38:00

Or my dad had a story, like, I guess a relative had a ranch or something and they used to drink fresh milk when they were growing up unpasteurized because they would just get the fresh milk.

And I thought, oh, I wonder how dangerous that was? [Laughter] But it was so mainstream back then it was normal. And he always had little stories here and there. And I think another reason he and all his cousins grew up like siblings, too, is all our grandfathers were away at war at the same time, so they all lived right by each other for support. And so they were just always at each other's homes and then that closeness continued on. They still had friends that were nonrelative friends but-- [dog barking] So cute!

Cynthia Torres: Okay. Go ahead.

Lori Pathak: Okay. Sorry. So even some of those nonrelatives were like relatives to us because they were close like brothers and sisters that for us we just kind of called them [**tía and tío** 0:38:58]. They were relatives to us, too.

0:38:59

Cynthia Torres: That's what Corie was talking about when we were talking about how we're related and cousins, but we also have cousins who are older, but because of the age it's not like you called them cousins. They were tía and tío because of the age, and that was a sign of respect. So sometimes the family tree can get a little gerbiled.

Lori Pathak: I know. [Laughter] True. And some families are larger than others, so you might have a whole group of cousins here and in this family they had thirteen siblings, in this one they had three, in this one they had one, in this one they had ten. So there are all these extensions that are difficult to keep up with unless you see them all every weekend. [Phone ringing]

Richard Garcia: Sorry.

Cynthia Torres: That's okay.

Lori Pathak: So yeah, I'm very interesting in learning more than I actually do right now. I'd like to have it all down and piece it all together.

0:39:57

Cynthia Torres: Um-hm. And why the interest in your family tree? Why is that important now?

Richard Garcia: Just to see where we came from and--

Lori Pathak: Pass it down, too.

Richard Garcia: Yeah.

Lori Pathak: One of the things we're gonna do on this trip is just drive our kids around, too, because there are a lot of things that they don't remember from when they were younger. When my dad got ill we pretty much stayed home with him a lot, and then my mom passed away. So I thought on this trip-- not the whole weekend, of course. We're going to go spend some time and vacation on the beach. But maybe today, too, drive around a little bit, show them some of the other places we lived in or some of the things we did so they have a little bit more of a reference if I talk about something. And I do think it's important to know where you come from, too. So maybe if they see, oh, that's where the grandparents and great-grandparents lived or something, they'll see that transition over time.

Cynthia Torres: I think that was a big reason for this particular project because what are some of these family traditions? It just gives a foundation.

0:41:00

You know what you're growing from, I guess, and that's meaningful. Maybe it wasn't meaningful when I was younger but now it is.

Lori Pathak: Yeah, I think so. As you grow it's very important.

Cynthia Torres: Um-hm. It was important to have family around and that was the foundation, but now moved away and everything and how do I still have that foundation?

Lori Pathak: I think everybody needs that stability in some way or another and a lot of times, or most of the time, it comes from that family structure, but sometimes it comes from extended family and friends who you may not necessarily be related to, but they were close enough that they were there for you. I know that when we were kids in this town I don't think we would've ever felt alone in any way. If, for some reason, our parents were busy with something or they were late picking us up, which they never were, we had on both hands phone numbers of all our aunts and uncles who we could call. We could immediately say, oh, mom's late. Let me call . . .

0:42:01

Or if we were sick at school we always had someone to call. So I don't think we ever felt alone or afraid or left out in any way. There was always that structure and that support.

Cynthia Torres: Um-hm. And you maintain that?

Lori Pathak: We try to, yeah. Life gets a little crazy, but we try to keep up here and there. We keep up the most with each other but even with other cousins. A few months might go by but then one of us will reach out, "How's everyone doing? It's good to hear . . ."

Richard Garcia: That's one thing that we differ from our parents in is they were born, and they grew up, and they died in the same place with the same friends and the same family all together their whole lives. And our generation has all spread out. We're all in different locations.

Lori Pathak: For jobs and different things, yeah.

Richard Garcia: It's a little bit more of an effort to get together but we still make a point of doing it.

0:43:00

We still try to. Corie and Michael will come visit us sometimes and we'll come down here.

Cynthia Torres: There's the cousin test.

Richard Garcia: Yeah. If the Steves are going to be in Dallas they'll usually text us and say, "Hey, we're gonna be in Dallas. Let's have brunch or something." So we do try but it's not the same.

Lori Pathak: It's a little harder for us because we're a little farther away in Ohio, so when we can come down we do, but not everyone is passing through Ohio. So we extend those invitations. They're always welcome. Family is always welcome. Friends are welcome. And it's just a matter of when someone can get out there.

Cynthia Torres: Does social media play a part in maintaining at all? Not for you?

Lori Pathak: Somewhat. I should be more active on social media. I'm really not that much.

0:44:00

I'll check on it once a month, once every three weeks or something.

Richard Garcia: [Laughter]

Lori Pathak: But typically I like to call or text more if we can. I just prefer it. I don't mind social media. I think it's helpful in many ways. My husband will sometimes post things on a birthday, like, hey, we got to enjoy this on so and so's birthday or something.

Cynthia Torres: But it's still more a personal connection that you look for?

Lori Pathak: Yeah, I like the more personal connection, so I don't mind it. I think it's helpful sometimes. You can't reach everyone all the time, but I think it's more personal when I can actually text directly or talk directly with someone.

Cynthia Torres: Very nice.

Richard Garcia: Yeah. I'm a little more old-school myself. [Laughter] Even texting, I'm, like, oh, let me just pick up the phone and call.

Lori Pathak: One thing that I still try to make my kids do is if they get a birthday gift or some kind of gift to send a personal thank you.

0:45:00

They have their own stationary and I try to make sure that they do that because I do think it's personal. And if we don't have time to mail it let's just spend this afternoon and drive and drop them off everywhere or hand-deliver them. And it's not something you do all the time, but I think it's a nice gesture to keep up with it.

Cynthia Torres: Just continuing the authentic social connections.

Lori Pathak: Yeah.

Cynthia Torres: Awesome.

Lori Pathak: Handwriting, even, [Laughter] It's all important, too.

Cynthia Torres: Well, those are all the questions I have, and I wanted to thank you both for sitting down and for coming to town. I know you have your [own 0:45:35] but I'm glad we could make it work, that we could get together.

Richard Garcia: Yeah. Yeah.

Lori Pathak: I am, too. I'm glad we were able to connect the time and schedule together.

Cynthia Torres: Very nice. Well, thank you so much, and I'm gonna end the recording if you don't have any last minute--

Richard Garcia: Okay.

Cynthia Torres: Okay.

Lori Pathak: Yeah.

[End]