



About the cover —

From the artist, Abha Dabak-Wakankar ...

“The cover is broken into three sections: the top section being of two onggi with fermentation bubbles pouring out on to the rest of the cover, the second section represents my traditional dinner experience with a thali dinner plate and an assortment of delicious foods, the bottom section is meant to evoke the land, its beauty... and then there’s a larger house and a smaller house to depict generational knowledge being passed down. And the sun shines over it all.”

April 3, 2023 — Ann Arbor, MI

This zine is dedicated to its contributors and the individuals that made it possible. And to Nainai, because when it comes down to it, this started on Broadway hill.

A special thanks to my parents, Sharon Simonton & Victor Chao. You are my biggest fans and my harshest critics, and I say that with utmost respect and love. And a special thanks to the following communities, organizations, and individuals:

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This zine would not have been possible without the contributions of the countless individuals, organizations, and communities that supported me throughout this process.

generational knowledge cultivating
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This work was written, produced published, and distributed in Ann Arbor, MI, as a part of a thesis project being completed at the University of Michigan.

The state of Michigan, a name derived from the Algonquin word “Mishigamaw,” meaning “big lake” or “great water,” is home to the Anishinaabe people of the Three Fires Confederacy – the Odawa (Ottawa), the Ojibwe (Chippewa), the Potawatomi (Bodewadmi), and the Wyandotte (Wyandot). The University of Michigan stands on stolen Anishinaabeg land that is the traditional and present-day home of the Anishinaabe people of the Three Fires Confederacy, who all had villages along the rivers of Southeast Michigan. Other nations who walked these lands and possibly considered them their traditional territories too include the Sauk, Fox, and Kickapoo nations and the Miami people. These groups have lived on and stewarded the land of the Great Lakes, resisting European colonization and American colonialism for hundreds of years before (and again after) the United States violently forced the cession of this land in the 1807 Treaty of Detroit.

It is important that we remember that the founding of the University of Michigan was made possible

through the signing of the Treaty of Fort Meigs in 1817, when the Anishinaabek ceded portions so that their children could be educated alongside the children of European settlers for the continuous cycle of 7 generations. To this day, this promise has been largely unfulfilled. Rather, the University of Michigan and its students have created a legacy of mockery, erasure, and violence against indigenous people and indigenous land that is still ongoing today.

With this acknowledgment, we also respectfully recognize the enslaved persons from African countries, their descendants, and other exploited people whose labor and suffering since 1619 continue to build the economy and infrastructure of our nation.

We admire the vitality of these people.

We denounce the ongoing societal, state-sanctioned, and generational harm inflicted on both indigenous and exploited people.

We acknowledge our individual, unequal, and covert benefits from their harm.

This acknowledgment is not comprehensive. These words are a small gesture. Rather, they serve as a reminder of the actions we must take, today and every day, to stand in solidarity with the many people of this land and strive to-

wards our collective liberation.

As a publication centered on the topics of food, land, and place, it is critical to acknowledge the food originally grown, hunted, and eaten here, and the culture associated with it. The Anishinaabe relied on fish; animals, such as deer and moose; plants, such as berries; and the harvests of wild rice, maple sugar, corn, beans and squash, many foods that we enjoy today.

Scan the QR code to learn more about City of Ann Arbor and Indigenous Peoples Day, Language Connections, Relation with the Land, Today's Native People of Michigan, and the City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Archives.



This acknowledgment is informed by information collected from the following organizations and sources –

The University of Michigan Sustainable Food Program

The United Asian American Organizations

The Planet Blue Ambassador Program

Washtenaw Community College Library's research guide dedicated to the Indigenous People of Washtenaw County – libguides.wccnet.edu/indigenouspeople

The City of Ann Arbor's Department of Parks and Recreation's page dedicated to "Early History" (this source includes other helpful resources such as a map showing the network of Native/Indian American & indigenous trails in our area and additional resources for learning more about the Native people of Michigan – www.a2gov.org/departments/Parks-Recreation/administrative/Pages/Park-History.aspx

And the Bureau of Indian Affairs government webpage.

**“Learn something. Apply it.
Pass it on so it is not forgotten.”
— Ruth Asawa**

**“I think that I’m primarily interested in
making it possible for people to become
as independent and self-sufficient as possible.
That has nothing really to do with
art, except that through the arts you can
learn many, many skills that you cannot
learn through books and problem-solving
in the abstract.”
— Ruth Asawa**

A preface —

This project is deeply personal to me, as it represents a journey that I was on long before I decided to label it “Cultivating Generational Knowledge,” or make it into my thesis project. I came into the project with a number of questions. I did not want to answer these questions, but rather explore them. I wanted to be comfortable with the countless contradictions that exist within the identities of immigrant, mixed, Asian, Asian American, refugee, settler, displaced... and explore how they intersect. *If we know that the binary does not exist, and we are willing to revel in the ambiguity of our countless identities as Asian, Asian American, queer, first or second generation, mixed... then why is it that we rarely discuss the complexities of being settlers, and how can that identity co-exist with our histories of displacement, immigration, and social and political persecution?*

Throughout this project, I have been time and time again reminded of an interview I did last year as a part of the United Asian American Organization’s (UAAO) Zine Ed. 4, *The Liberation Archive*. As a part of that project, I interviewed Malu Castro, a PhD student at University of Michigan’s (U-M) School for Environment and Sustainability and a then member of the Oceanic Student Association (OSA). For the past two years, I have started every “interview” I have ever done with the same

question: What identities do you claim for yourself that you would like to share with our readers?

I ask people this question because I think it is a question that we do not ask enough. Rather, we are rarely given the space and opportunity to self-define, especially in situations in which our knowledge, experiences, and histories are being used to inform someone else’s work. This is in part why I dislike journalism and anthropology, and why I do not consider this or any other “interview” - like work I do fit into either of those disciplines. But to return to this question of, “What identities do you claim for yourself that you would like to share with our readers?” I would like to note Malu’s response, which in many ways put me on the path toward this project – “First and foremost, I am a settler here in the traditional and contemporary lands of the Three Fires Confederacy. So I accept that.”

I do not know Malu well and am embarrassed to say that I have not maintained communication with them. But from just that brief conversation we had more than a year ago, I know Malu is an extraordinary organizer as well as an extraordinary person. I note Malu’s response in this preface not because I want to analyze it or unpack it, or even really expand on it, but rather to note that it got me thinking about the topics of food, land, and place in relation

to my identity in what I would call a much more critical fashion. It is just one moment, out of countless others, that led me to want to do this project, that is “Cultivating Generational Knowledge.”

But that is all still painfully vague, so let me be a little more specific.

“Cultivating Generational Knowledge” is a three-part project centered around the themes of food, land, and place that explores how members of the Asian and Asian American diasporic community in SE Michigan, and more specifically those within my existing community, as someone who is born and raised in Ann Arbor, interact with these themes in their everyday lives. The conversations I had, that now make up the majority of the chunky little zine (1) you hold in your hands, are with members of our community that are either engaged in food systems work or make up our local food system. This zine is a collection of conversations with Asian and Asian American students, small business

owners, organizers, farmers, students interested in farming, chefs, and artists, all of whom contribute to our local food system.

I have made the decision to frame this zine as a collection of “conversations” rather than a collection of “interviews,” because at the of the day, that is what they are (1). They are rough, they are a little incoherent in places, and they are beautiful. I am not a neutral actor in these conversations, but rather an active and curious listener.

The other day, I told someone that, what brings me the most joy in art is the messiness of it all. And the same is true of this zine. What makes these conversations beautiful is that they are in places a bit awkward, a bit uncomfortable, and a bit messy. While this project is deeply informed by anthropologic and ethnographic practices, it is not an ethnography (3). It is a collection of conversations; it is a work of socially engaged practice.

Notes: (1) This project has essentially just been a big excuse for me to ask a bunch of amazing people out for coffee... Except I didn't pay for their drinks and in some instances it was actually a 30 minute Zoom call. (2) Why a zine? This is a self-produced, self-published, and self-distributed work rooted in the community. By referring to it as a zine, rather than a magazine, I pay homage to a long legacy of radical zine-making, that is rooted in Third Wave feminism, radical care, and self-definition and -determination on the part of women of color. (3) I owe a lot of my self-growth this past year and a half and a whole lot of other things to a very specific class and professor. I would like to take this space to recognize the impact that Prof. Melissa Burch and her class, “Urban Ethnography and the Black Experience” has had on me. Thank you Prof. Burch.

An introduction—

I want to take a moment to introduce myself and all of the various influences that inspired this project. My name is Mira Simonton-Chao, and I identify as a mixed, second-generation queer Asian American creative and maker. I was born and raised in Ann Arbor, MI. I attended elementary, middle, and high school here and am now finishing my time as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan (U-M) majoring in American Culture (Ethnic Studies) and Arts & Ideas in the Humanities (with concentrations in Art History/Socially Engaged Practice and Ceramics). I am involved with various student and community organizing efforts in the area and have worked in this community since I was fourteen years old. I was a cashier at Sparrow Market for four years; a barista, delivery driver, and shift manager at Argus Farm Stop; for a brief period a high school rowing coach; and a barista once again at Cahoots Café. I sold sauerkraut, pickles, and tempeh for The Brinery for a year at the Farmers' Market, and I've been mowing lawns, cleaning up leaves, and following my dad around with a rake for who knows how long.

At the U-M, I have been a member of the United Asian American Organizations (UAAO) for three years and served as Community

Historian, VP of Communications, and President. I have co-coordinated the Asian American High School Conference (AsAM HSC), bringing together Asian American students throughout Southeast Michigan, and been a member of the Planning Committee for Asian American & Pacific Islander HM for two years in a row.

I note these things because they all contributed to this project. And because I have a substantial presence in these pages and in the conversations that come together to form this publication. "Cultivating Generational Knowledge," and the various components that it encompasses, is a culmination of my time in Ann Arbor and all of the little moving pieces in my life. It is a collection of conversations, a series of unanswered questions, a handful of musings. But it isn't a closing. Rather, it is a beginning. This zine is a way of honoring my community but also myself. It has been a way for me to reflect on the twenty-one years I have spent in Ann Arbor. It is a contradiction that has no substantial resolution, and is not meant to have one.

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— Recipes from the community

A conversation with Renu Dabak-Wakankar—

Renu is an Indian American and brown farmer who has worked at the U-M's Campus Farm as well as a number of other farms in the area. I met Renu through her sibling, Abha, who made the beautiful cover of this zine but have been adjacent to her in a number of spaces. I feel so lucky to have had the chance to sit down with Renu and hear more about her experiences and perspectives on food, land, and place.

MSC: What identities do you claim coming into this project?

RDW: My pronouns are she/her. I guess my parents are immigrants from India, so I am Indian American and brown. And I work, and I'm kind of in the food systems space. So right now I just graduated in December. I studied environmental science, and I focused on Sustainable Food Systems. While I was at the University I was kind of in that space, like the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative (SFI). I worked out of the Campus Farm, and I've done a lot of cool things for them. And now I'm looking to start working at a farm or at some kind of cool, like, educational farm where I can engage with people and teach them about all the things I know and hopefully learn a lot more different stuff.

MSC: That's amazing. That's so cool. I didn't know a lot of that, but congratulations! I didn't realize that you just graduated as well.

RDW: Thank you, thank you.

MSC: I realized I'm gonna backtrack a second, because I forgot to say – Did you have any questions about the project?

RDW: Yeah I would love to know more about it. You said it's for your thesis?

MSC: Yeah, so it's for my thesis, it's honestly mostly inspired just by my experience growing up here and being in Ann Arbor, but then also just like, curiosity, honestly.

So the project has three parts. It's called "Cultivating Generational Knowledge," which is just an easy way of bringing it together. But it has three parts: it has the zine, which includes oral histories and community-submitted recipes; I'm a ceramist, so it has my own ceramic practice that's related to specifically fermentation traditions – thinking about contemporary iterations of those kinds of forms etc. And then a culminating event. It's supposed to be a space inviting people to engage with the people that

make their food, engage with other people about the topic of food, and in some ways move beyond – it’s kind of interesting because I feel like it’s almost become kind of a taboo topic to talk about food within Asian American communities, or like organizing specifically, because it’s so often cliché. *[To expand on this, I want to note that I don’t think that talking about food and the importance of food within our communities is cliché, but rather that we often talk about food in a very surface-level manner. It was only in college that I started thinking criti-*



A photograph of Renu at the Campus Farm. She is wearing a large sun hat which contrasts with the beautifully clear blue sky behind her.

cally about food and especially how food in many ways documents communities’ histories, struggles, resilience, and complexity. Food documents our stories in a way that is often forgotten and even minimized. But

now to return to the interview...]

RDW: Yeah yeah yeah.

MSC: Yeah, just moving beyond those ideas of like food is one specific thing, and rather actually thinking about food as so inherently tied to like immigration patterns, tied to movement, trauma, harm, healing... all of those things.

RDW: Mhm. That’s awesome. Yeah, yeah, it makes me think of – you’ve probably, if you’ve been reading about it – the social hierarchy of foods? And as they come into the US, the kind of place they take in society, and how they move upwards in relation to class, in relation to wealth, and how those specific immigrant communities are viewed in the eyes of the United States’ white population. I think that is really really interesting. Food and class is something I’m really interested in. Like how food is branded has changed so much about the way that – I instantly think of chili crisp or *Lao gan ma*. Like how that has become such a familiar ingredient for so many people, but maybe just five years ago, ten years ago, it wouldn’t have crossed the minds of people to go the grocery store and pick it up. And I think a lot of that is because of branding. Like there is Fly By Jing, I don’t

know if you've heard of them?

MSC: Yeah!

RDW: Yeah, they've like totally transformed the way people think about food, and I think about chili crisp specifically. So I love the idea of how those things are changing not only in like marketing but also, you know, the way that people engage with it.

MSC: Yeah, and that's so interesting because that's – it's so interesting because their branding is "traditionally made but non-traditional," right? [*in relation to the branding of the company Fly by Jing*]. And that's what's so much at the root of the project as well, is thinking about how our traditions as Asian Americans – as second, third, one and a half, however you wanna describe yourself – are just as valuable as, you know, traditions from where our families came from. But then it's also acknowledging the different forces at play. That maybe force those changes [*in our food traditions, with each generation...*]

RDW: Yeah, It's like how my relationship with food from my parents' culture or the food that I associate with India might be different than theirs [their parents']. And the foods that I think are integral to that culture are so heavily dependent on my experience.

And how they might be different from my parents. Yeah, I think it's really cool.

MSC: And then kind of going right into a very related question— how would you describe your relationship with food?

RDW: That's a big question.

MSC: It is a big question; all of these are gonna be pretty big.

RDW: Yeah, I think, like, very very intimate. Like I, I don't know, obviously food is something that everyone has to engage with so it's something that ties people together across boundaries, across generations, across cultures. And so I feel that as well. I feel that food is inseparable from me as a human. But I like to think that I engage with food very intentionally. You can think about it in so many different ways and like what a meal can be. I love to cook. When I cook, everything that I put in a meal and what I am thinking about when I'm making a meal is so dependent on what I'm feeling at the time; so it's really tied to my emotions. It's tied to the people around me. Like if I'm cooking for a large group of people, which I do a lot, it's dependent on those people's tastes and what we, what I, can afford to buy [as well as] what ingredients I can afford to cook with. I think it's very all-en-

compassing; it reflects a lot of the – not only the identities that I have as a brown woman or as somebody that has eaten Indian food my whole life, because that does come out in my cooking I think – but also things that are very temporal almost. Like what I might be feeling at the time, what is available to me, how hungry I am – everything like that.

MSC: Yeah, I love that description too. It's a combination of different timelines... like the long time and then like that moment that you're in. That's really beautiful.

RDW: Yeah for sure.

MSC: Nice. And then the second kind of question is how would you describe your relationship with land, and do you consider that in relationship to food?

RDW: Yeah, that's very complicated. I don't have generational attachment to land like a lot of people do because my parents immigrated here. So when I think about that, [about land], it's very abstract to me; it's very detached. I don't really have a specific attachment to land.

I think an interesting thing is that I love to farm. Like I think that's what I want to do and what I will do eventually. I think it's a really interesting point of entry into

farming for me because I don't have like – I don't come from a family of farmers. Even in India, none of my family have farmed. Like that's not the business that they're in at all; so I don't really have any generational knowledge for that.

.....

“I feel that food is inseparable from me as a human.”

.....

And I also am here [in Michigan], I don't know. I don't have anything that ties me to some specific land, so it becomes very complicated when I think about that. But above all, I think the food that I eat ties me to the land in general; cause food comes from the land. I feel a lot more connected to the people that engage with the land rather than the land itself. Because I definitely have a connection with that experience – like I have farmed.

And I know that so many of the people that hold up the agricultural system in the United States are black and brown people, and I am farming in a really different space than them obviously. Like I have the privilege of being able to go to college and study this stuff and like launch myself into

a career in this rather than doing it for survival, like having to farm for survival. But I still feel that connection with the people that are actually doing that work and getting us that food.

MSC: That’s honestly so much of what inspired this project – thinking about how Asian Americans oftentimes don’t have that attachment to the land. It’s something I think about a lot, because I’m also second generation, or I consider myself second generation. Going off of that question – as someone who is in farming, has been in farming, and plans to be [a farmer/in farming], how do you think about indigeneity and your relationship to the land as someone who is an occupier *[and as such a settler]*?

RDW: Yeah, that’s interesting. I feel like I’m always going to be very open and I am so eager and excited to work with people that are indigenous and have engaged with the land in very intimate ways. And this land specifically, their entire lives. And that spans generations. I don’t have that attachment but I feel like I am in a different position than a white person that would have my background – like educational background specifically. I have experienced similar things – ad-

jacent things – to what an indigenous person or a brown person might experience as a farmer because of the way that I look. So I think coming at it from that angle, I think it’s quite easy for me to know that boundary. When I’m in a space with people that are knowledgeable about the land and that have a generational connection to the land, it’s very easy for me to take a step back and learn from them. Because I think the most important thing is to be respectful; and also they probably know way more about it than I do.

.....

“It’s so important to be aware of the different relationships people might have with food, especially relating to their identity.”

There’sso much to learn from the things that they know. So I think I kind of come at it as a consumer of knowledge, a learner, definitely

MSC: That makes a lot of sense. Do you find yourself, as a brown person in farming, navigating predominantly white spaces?

RDW: Yeah, yeah. It’s an interesting thing for sure. It’s something that I’m always thinking about. Like when I was a manager at the Campus Farm, I was one of the

only people of color on the management team. That's something that I felt a lot because I don't have a generational connection to farming. But as somebody that is brown, it feels really different and it feels really weird to be farming next to people who are white, and next to people that probably don't really think about farming as a thing that can be traumatic for some people or as a thing that can be tied to generational trauma. But that is definitely something that I think about a lot. For example last summer, I worked not only at the campus farm. I was working for a small flower farmer in Dexter, and she was a white woman, really young, like super nice, super friendly. I was one of like three people. But one of the first things that I felt, that I wasn't expecting to feel at all... I was one of like three people that worked there so it was a really small team. I worked like three days a week, four days a week, something like that there. And on my first day there I was like, *"oh my god this is so weird."* I'm in rural Michigan, I'm farming, and there's this white lady. And it was all very – *I felt really disconnected suddenly.* I was like, I feel so weird, and I felt like I was viewing myself kind of from their perspective, and that

made me so uncomfortable. It was kind of the first time that I had seen what it might look like to someone – like me as a brown person farming and there's like a white lady and an old white man standing at the top of the field talking while I'm like planting. And I was like this is kinda weird... like I don't know.

MSC: And it's this thing of like they're in the leadership; they have all the power.

RDW: Yes, exactly, yes. And they're paying, like I'm getting paid, obviously. It's not like it's unfair labor or anything like that. And I agreed to be there. But it's still something that, since that happened, I have thought about. And in every role that I've taken in this space that is how I approach it. Like even at the Campus Farm, my role there was identity group manager, and I was on the engagement committee. And my main job was to recruit groups on campus to come to the farm to help bring diversity to the farm. Which, in and of itself, is good. We want diversity to come to the farm. But their strategy, like the reason that role existed, was because they were like "oh, we need cultural groups of students to come to the farm and do work days." And then they'll be able to

engage in the farm. That was the only form of engagement that they thought of – was to come and do work days. But I was like this is... I don't know this seems weird. Like if we invite La Casa or like the Black Student Union like they're not gonna wanna do fucking free labor. Like they're not gonna want to come and do work days for us. And that was something previous people in my role, and like the DEI Manager previous to me, had brought up. And we were thinking about it, but that position still existed. And I was like you know, I feel like we could... like my brain power goes past this. Like I can think of different things we can do [to engage students of color and cultural groups at the Campus Farm]. And one of the things that they did over the summer, or that they were trying to do over the summer, was dedicate a space specifically for growing peppers. Like different kinds of hot peppers, and stuff like that, to eventually start a salsa workshop to do with La Casa and MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences). And I was like that's such a good idea. It eventually fell through. Like we didn't do the workshop. But that was kinda the direction

that I was hoping that that kind of stuff would go.

MSC: Like beyond just asking for labor.

RDW: Yes. Beyond. Just like, there's different ways you can engage with food other than coming and doing farm work. It's so important to be aware of the different relationships people might have with food, especially relating to their identity. Like you don't know whose parents were farmers, you don't know whose parents had to work in the field; that could be a really tense kind of relationship. And we don't want that to be the association for people. We wanna help people heal and help people heal their relationship with food and reintroduce them to food. In a way that like, food and agriculture and growing in a way that isn't attached to any of those things. Or like takes account of those things but moves forward and moves past them and shows them different ways they can do it.

MSC: Mhm.

RDW: So like I definitely brought up a lot of those ideas when I was working with them, but you know it's such a slow process. Doing things like that and focusing on students in the Campus Farm space requires major shifts

in who we market to [and] where our revenue comes from. Because one thing that I didn't know until I started working there was the Campus Farm is [that] everybody there is paid with vegetable sales. We don't sell a lot of vegetables. Like we sell a really small amount of vegetables, and most of them go to the dining halls. And everybody that works there is paid with that money. There's no funding from the University that goes into the Campus Farm.

.....

“... it's all the work that holds up the backbone of society, and it's deemed unimportant in the eyes of people with power. It's really frustrating.”

.....

MSC: Do you guys get paid for the vegetables you supply to the dining halls?

RDW: Yes, we do. But we don't get any other outside funding as an educational farm. We don't get any outside funding from the University. Everything that we

make goes back into the farm. And that makes it really hard to shift a financial model. Because then we are losing money when we're stopping sales to the dining halls. Like if we wanted to dedicate growing space to doing a community garden or helping cultural organizations on campus grow the vegetables they want – that is all space that could be growing vegetables that could be sold to make money. So when we're thinking about this, it's like a whole big picture. Like we'll have to decrease staff, we'll have to think about what we could sell – it's really complicated.

MSC: So it's like capitalism and institution are against you.

RDW: Yes, exactly. It's really hard to do all of these things that are so mission-driven and people driven, when money is such a big barrier. And that's the thing that I've found. But going forward – I don't work there anymore – but going forward, I'm looking to farm probably exclusively with people of color, like black and brown communities, because that is my space and that is where I feel most comfortable. And yeah I think that's where I think it's gonna go from now on.

MSC: Did you feel any frustrations trying to get into farming as

someone who is brown and only seeing white spaces? And do you think you would have been more encouraged to enter those spaces if you... *[had seen more brown people in farming?]*

RDW: I definitely think so. I didn't even know about the Sustainable Food Systems Initiative until I started working at the Campus Farm and I had no idea how to get involved. I think that's also just a quality of me – is that I am pretty insular. Like until I started working there [at the Campus Farm], I didn't really go out and seek those things. I thought the only way that I could engage was through classes, so I took all of the food classes that I could. But again, there were people that had been working at the Campus Farm that were my age, and we were in the same standing in terms of year and major and stuff like that, but they had been working at the campus farm for like a year longer or two years before I even knew about it. And a lot of those people had come from farming backgrounds and farming families and that made it kind of frustrating. I was like – “Oh, I didn't even know about this and I didn't even know that I could do this. And it was probably easier for this person because

they come from a background of farming and they knew that that was their interest.” But I didn't realize it until quite a bit later. Then when COVID happened, they weren't really hiring or doing anything. Everything was kind of at a standstill. So yeah, I definitely felt frustration. But I think once I was in that space, it became a lot easier for me to get to know people. Everyone there I had kind of talked to or interacted with at some point in classes or at the Campus Farm. One thing that is frustrating about it though is that that space is really insular. And they kind of hire from within their communities and the people that they know. And that's something that I found really frustrating. Like even when I was working there, and they were looking to hire for the next season, I was like please don't just send it to the PitE (Programming in the Environment) listserv. Like there's other people that want to work. They're doing better at it, like there's people there that aren't environmental science majors and aren't EEB (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology) majors that are starting to work there and starting to know about it, but [it is] definitely something that needs to be improved.

MSC: Yeah, yeah.

RDW: So that it can reach a wider group of people.

MSC: Yeah, that's kinda how I feel about it as someone who's always wanted to do farming but has just been frustrated with entry in a lot of ways [for reference I have farmed, but I never saw an easy pathway through the University and found work through my own networks, as someone who has worked in Ann Arbor for a long time]. On that same note, do you think the University and the Campus Farm – not just the campus farm, because obviously you guys are small [and] you don't have a lot of funding or no funding as you said – do you think there should be better support systems or pathways of access specifically for BIPOC people to get into farming and farming adjacent things at the University?

RDW: Yeah, I mean always. Like always. That is always an important thing and always something that could be improved on. I think MANRRS is really cool. I didn't know about them until I started looking but –

MSC: I didn't know about them until this year.

MSC: Yeah, but like definitely, definitely. Obviously there's like only so much one organization can do, but they're kind of like

the organization I think of when I think about it – like when I think about BIPOC in farming. But yeah, always. Like I always think everything could be more oriented towards minorities and like people that could potentially be interested in farming in that space.

MSC: Do you think that farming and agriculture is undervalued? Like in society but also by the University...

RDW: Oh yeah. Totally! Yeah of course. I mean, like, even just like looking at the relationship between the dining hall and the Campus Farm... the only reason they buy from us is because they signed a contract to. And it's very nice that they are doing that. But only about 10% of the dining hall's vegetables and food, produce comes from the Campus Farm. Like 90% of it comes from GFS (Gordon Food Services) and other places. I think just looking at that, it could be more. Obviously our capacity isn't that big, but farm labor, manual labor is so undervalued. Especially like going outside of the University space. Apprenticeships and internships at farms, like that venue, is so inaccessible to people because they pay basically nothing. Or they pay you a stipend. It's really common to have a living stipend,

where you live there on the farm and you work there and they give you like a small amount of money each month, or for the season. I had that experience where I interviewed at a pretty well known organic farm in the Ann Arbor area. It's in Chelsea, and I was kind of appalled at the living conditions.

RDW: There wasn't even a toilet. And everybody was sleeping in one room. And they were like "we'll give you \$1200 for the season" or something like that. And I was like I really wanna do this, but like I can't. It's so inaccessible and that's so common with a lot of farms. Like apprenticeships, where they present it as this educational opportunity and then give you like a really small amount of money for all of this work that you're doing. Definitely. In all food spaces. Like I think food service as well, not just agriculture and farm work. Like it's all the work that holds up the backbone of society, and it's deemed unimportant in the eyes of people with power. It's really frustrating.

MSC: And then backtracking quite a bit. This might seem redundant, but how would you describe your relationship with place?

RDW: With place? Um...

MSC: And you can see that as

the same as land or it could be different.

RDW: Yeah. Um, yeah I don't know. Place.... What do you mean by place?

MSC: Yeah, that's a hard thing. I think of place as where I consider home and where I am mentally, emotionally attached to. And then land maybe is similar, but it's also more based in physical soil. And I see it as, you know, what gives to like farming and our food, and whereas place is maybe a little bit more sentimental.

RDW: Yeah. I would say then definitely. I think it's hard for me to think of them separately. 'Cause, I don't know... the physical space is so tied to the experience that I have had there and like the people that I have been around while I'm there. So it's hard to think of them in separate ways. And this is just speaking from my personal experience, again it's not generational. Because I am the first person in my family that has lived here and has strong associations with the land or the places around me. I guess it kinda feels like I'm laying the groundwork or kind of starting new in terms of my family and where I come from.

MSC: And what do you think about the title or phrase, "Cultivating generational knowledge?"

What does that remind you of or do you have any general thoughts on it?

RDW: I mean it definitely makes me think of food. And things that I know because my mom knows because her grandma knows and because her mom knows. And things like that are really personal to me, and I wouldn't know them if it wasn't for the people before me. That's a lot of stuff. There's a lot of stuff like that in my life, especially with food. Like there's things that I know and things that I do because I was raised that way, because my mom was raised that way or my dad was raised that way. So it definitely encompasses all of those things.

MSC: And do you have any food traditions or generational knowledge that you hold dear to you that you wanna share?

RDW: Yeah! I would... there's so much. The first thing that I think of is food as medicine. And things that I eat when I'm sick and when I'm not feeling well. A lot of those things are deeply cultural and deeply personal. Like if I have a sore throat then I know that – or if I'm coughing – then I know that turmeric is really good because that's what I had growing up. It's been passed down. It's Ayurvedic medicine – is traditional Indian

medicine. Yeah, stuff like that. Like drinking milk with turmeric, like hot milk with turmeric, when I'm sick. Like knowing different kinds of spices really intimately. Like cloves being good for toothaches or coughing, ginger is good for your stomach, just all that stuff. Pepper is good for when you have a fever. Like making teas and stuff – all things that I have learned that are really close to me.

MSC: I love doing these interviews because every time I do them someone brings up something that is so obvious, like in many ways so obvious to my project, that I just didn't think of.

RDW: Yeah, yeah.

MSC: So that's what I just love. I totally forgot my dad used to make me eat raw garlic all the time for coughs and that's part of Chinese medicine.

RDW: Yes! For sure. There's so many things, so many things that you didn't realize until –

MSC: – you slow down and think about them

RDW: Mhm, yeah.

A conversation with Hira Mohsin —

Hira is an Asian American and Pakistani baker, nursing student, and community member. It is a small world, and while I met Hira through my manager, Abby, at Cahoots Cafe, I soon found out that Hira was also close friends with a member of the United Asian American Organizations. Through chance encounters, events, and this project, I have had the opportunity to get to know Hira this past year as a community member, friend, and the amazingly talented baker behind 'Hira's Kitchen.' Hira and her amazing bakegoods bring so much joy to our community, whether she is handing out blondies at a UAAO Open Mic or doing a cake pop-up at Bridge Community Cafe in Ypsi.

MSC: I've been starting all these interviews by asking what identities you claim, and what identities you want to share with the community.

HM: I go by she/her [pronouns], just to put it out there first off. I am Pakistani. I grew up here in Michigan; I think that's very important to me as well. My mom came here when she was very young, so I wouldn't necessarily call myself a "first-generation American," because she went to U of M here, my dad went to U of M here. So I haven't really had a lot of issues getting assimilated, per se. I've seen my friends go through a lot more, where they have to help their parents with things. I've never had that issue. So that's also very important to me. I've had it pretty easy because of that. I speak English at home. I'm not very close with my Pakistani roots... I can understand it. I go to Pakistan maybe... every other

year, I would say. But, even then, I don't really know how to speak it, and... yeah... I think that's kind of it.

MSC: Do you identify with the Asian American label?

HM: I do. I think it's very important. Recently, this past junior year semester [*Hira is a junior in nursing at Wayne State University*], I've become friends with... [*laughs*] only white people. So it's kind of – I'm always that odd one out. Whereas when I was younger, I was in the same group of just like only Pakistani or Indian people, and now being the odd one out, I'm like, "Oh wow, I have to actually consciously put in effort to like upkeep that in me," you know? So, I've kind of tried to make this effort in Detroit to find South Asian artists, and connect with them and just be like, "We need to stick together because like... it's important to remember where we came from." And so, I

think it's only this year I've actually consciously gone out of my way to be like "I am South Asian; I love my culture" *[laughs]*.

MSC: *[laughs]* Yeah, okay awesome! And I think also following that question, how does that identity make it's way into your everyday? Your experiences with food?

HM: Yeah. So, I live at home currently. I'm a commuter to Detroit – I live in Canton. And so, living at home, I have it pretty easy, you know. I'll come home after a long day and I'll have fresh Pakistani food made at home. You know... and it's like I'm constantly having that reminder of my roots. Like Dal Khichdi, that's lentil in rice, that's like super basic fast Pakistani food, and like I get to come home and Dal Khichdi. So, I up-keep that, and, you know, my daily practices through food. I think... That's kind of about it, I would say. Yeah. Mostly through food.

MSC: And how would you kind of describe your relationship to food, and the role it plays in your life?

HM: Food plays a very big big role in my life. I think food is more than just eating it. I think it's a way to express how you feel. I've been baking for as long as I can remember; I've always had that love

inside. And I remember when I was a Girl Scout, when I was really really young, they were asking me like, you know, "What makes you you? What do you like", and I was like "I love food!" And all the other kids around me were like "That's so stupid, what does that even mean? I like horses!" And I'm like, I feel stupid now. Like, I just, you know... But then over time, during COVID especially, I started growing into that. Yeah. And I started making sourdough like everybody else did. And I just constantly want to feed people. Yeah. It's just like a way to express myself. Like I go in the kitchen, and I have all these ingredients out, and I can do whatever I want. I make something – something beautiful comes out in the end. And then I get to see the people's faces when I feed it to them, you know, and it's a science project. So yeah, that's my main hobby. It means the world to me. And, it's like, I see my friends, and we'll just cook together. It's so universal; everyone eats food. Everyone has their own expression about it. And yeah... Food is important to me.

MSC: No that makes... Yeah *[laughs]*. What do you think about the phrase, "food is generational knowledge," and do you feel like you resonate with that phrase?

HM: Yes, absolutely. My grandma... we found out, I think in 2021, that she had cancer. And it took a long time for me to process that because my grandma is really young. I kind of ignored it for months and months and months, and actually years. And then only a few months ago, she actually called me on the phone and was like, "Can you come over?" And I was like, she doesn't do that.

So I went to her house, and she's like, "I'm leaving to Texas, for I don't know how long for chemotherapy tomorrow." And I was like, like... that's when it really hit me in the face. I was like, "Oh my god, this is real." And there's so much I want to learn from her. There's so much that she does; she makes yogurt herself. She just cooks the most amazing food in the whole entire world. And it's like, if she's gone... It's that all of that knowledge... It's gone.

HM: And yes, I can go on YouTube and learn how to make yogurt, but it's not gonna be the same as hers. You know, the way that she makes her Dal Khichdi is not gonna be the same as one on YouTube. And just even the way that she cooks it – because I don't know about your grandma but like, my grandma does not do any measurements, you know, she

kind of eyeballs it – so you can't you can't replicate that. You have to physically watch her and take notes and ask questions and be very active in that process.

My mom does not like to cook. So there's kind of this educational gap [*laughs*]. She will cook because she has to. She had me really young. She graduated from architecture school here, and went straight to being a housewife, and had to cook every single day. But she doesn't have that love and passion for it. And so if I want to upkeep that generational knowledge, I have to go to my grandma directly. And she finally came back [Hira's grandma]. She's good. She's healed. She's in recovery. And the first thing that I did a few days after she came back is I was like – "Teach me how to make yogurt." Teach me how to make this, teach me how to make this... And we just had a conversation. And my grandma and I don't really tend to get along like that. I was like, it's time to grow a pair and ask the questions, because she's not gonna be here forever.

MSC: Yeah. This is kind of a backwards question, but what do you think is lost when that generational knowledge has not passed? What does that knowledge represent to you beyond maybe even

food?

HM: That's a good question. I feel like not knowing, or not learning, and losing the generational knowledge, you lose a part of yourself. Like, yes, I'll wear a sari – which is like, you know, traditional Pakistani clothes or South Asian clothing like – I'll still wear it, and I still have those tiny little reminders that I am Pakistani. But it's just like ... There are other components that, if they are lost, then I'm screwing it up for my kids. I'm going to be in my '60's and not cooking Pakistani food, not knowing my language, not knowing traditions and clothing and it just like – who am I then? I've just completely assimilated into the US. And I'm not myself anymore. You know?

And I think when I was younger, I had this disdain for not wanting to be Pakistani, as a lot of kids go through – just being embarrassed about it, being embarrassed about my skin. But then I was like, no, like, this is important stuff. Even my name, like I would let people mispronounce it. And then I was like, "Why am I doing that?" Like, my name is beautiful. Like, people need to know this. And I will correct them. I think it's the loss of that generational knowledge. Just... you lose who

you are.

MSC: Yeah. Do you consider who you are as interwoven with your grandmother's experiences, your parents experiences? How do you think about that as... maybe even embodied?

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“...not knowing, or not learning, and losing the generational knowledge, you lose a part of yourself.”

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HM: That's a heavy question. That's a deep question [*laughs*]. I would have to... my grandma has gone through a lot. And my mom has gone through a lot. And I think the first thing that comes to my mind for me – it doesn't have to be necessarily about food, right? [*I nod no*] But... they both got married really, really young. My grandma, she got an arranged marriage. She didn't even like her husband. I remember the first time she saw a picture of him. She was like, "I cried. I did not want to marry him." And she went through it. Like, she still is married to him. My mom, though it was a love marriage and, you know, they were living here together and at U o f M and stuff, she got married really young as well. She was like eighteen. I remember she was

at the courthouse when she was eighteen signing her papers.

HM: You know, like, they're very, very young. And they lost themselves... because of that, they never got to learn about themselves, know themselves. And so seeing that – seeing what is cultural garbage – truthfully, just seeing them go through this and nobody fighting for them and them not knowing any better to fight for themselves... It makes me almost hate the idea of marriage. It makes me not want to be married anytime soon. And, you know... I sell my baked goods. You know... I'm in nursing school, like there's so much I want to do for myself, and I will continue to do for myself. And I will not let marriage or a significant other get in the way of that. Because I've seen it, like, ruin my grandma and ruin my mom. And now there's so much older and they're finally like, "Wow, I don't know who I am."

HM: And my mom said this to me... Recently, she was like, "I'm really proud of you." She was like, "You are doing things that I wish I could have done. You know, just the way that you dress and the way that you talk and the way that you are and the things that you do. I wish I could have done that at your age." And she's like, "I feel

stupid at the age of 40, that now I'm trying to sell my art." And it really broke me. Yeah.

MSC: How have these people in your lives [and mores specifically your mom and grandmother], and their relationships with food, land and place, impacted your relationship with food, land and place?

HM: So, again, my mom does not like to cook. And I think that [my] love for cooking has come from my dad and my grandpa, which is very random, but nonetheless. My dad, he loves to eat. He has favorites. He has childhood, back home flavors, because he moved here when he was really young as well. So, he's always been into trying new foods and food is his love language, right? Like, when we'll have an argument, no matter how heavy it is, or what happened, he will always call me down [for food]. He will always make sure I have eaten, even if we don't talk for days on end. He will make sure I have eaten, because food is intensely important. And then again for my grandma... like again, she's very limited in what she can do. She doesn't work. She is a housewife as well.

So what she can do is cook. But she has a love for it. She has 11 siblings, seven sisters. And every single day, she will just call each

and every single one of them. And she'll obviously gossip and stuff, but they'll exchange recipes and they'll just talk about new things that they've made. And they genuinely enjoy it. It's adorable. I absolutely love it so much. And they all have that shared love for it. Yeah, so seeing my grandma just be really excited about the stuff that she makes, and you know, feeding us; like every single time it's someone's birthday, my grandma is cooking. I have like select favorite dishes, and she always cook it on my birthday without fail. You know? So that love kind of came from her, just like... like it was my birthday, and she made food for me. Like that was a gift from her.

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“Baking, it’s not just for eating. It’s a process. It’s a journey. It’s a project, you know.”

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This is her acknowledging that, “I remember what you like. And here you go.” But my mom not liking it [cooking], I think made me like it even more, because I was like... I don't know, it was, it's... like she'll do things, she'll be making things, and it just brings up this like deeper issue of her

not being able to have her own independence, and I don't think she can ever really learn how to love [cooking]. I don't don't think she can truthfully, you know? So I kind of do it for her. And when I'm cooking and baking, I'm trying to do it for her as well. You know?

HM: A few weeks ago I was really really busy with nursing school and stuff, and I hadn't been baking. I make a lot at home. Just consistently. There's always something fresh. And when there isn't something in the house, my parents [are] like “Oh, something's wrong. She's actually busy.” So it was a significant amount of time that I didn't bake, and I saw my mom in the kitchen, and she's making banana bread! And I was like, “You're baking! That's adorable!” It was really odd. Like, that's what I mean. Like, I never see her just doing it for fun.

MSC: Do you think that she has, in some ways, a renewed appreciation for baking, or the act of baking, because of what you do?

HM: I think yes. The way that I talk about food and the flavors that I use and just like... I definitely do see that she's like, “Oh, wow, like, cooking is not just for eating.” Baking, it's not just for eating. It's a process. It's a journey. It's a project, you know. I definitely think so.

Yeah, for sure.

MSC: It's funny because I feel kind of similar way about my dad. I think he despises cooking but I think it's because he never got to do it as a joyful thing. There's always like, a need to feed and need to you know... It's so interesting thinking about how much potential food has. Right? This is kind of backtracking. I was wondering... you touched on yogurt-making and how your grandma taught you how to make yogurt. What do you think is the importance behind knowing those kinds of processes? For things that otherwise you could buy at the store?

HM: Yeah, absolutely. I love that question. I first of all, personally, I feel like when I had the time, I would love to only make yogurt at home. I think that making things from its natural source is very, very important. Yes, I can go and buy pie crust from the store. But why would I do that when butter and flour and water, it's all accessible? And you know, I know where the butter is from, and you know, I have a trusted flour that I use – it just makes it a lot more personal. And it makes it... I don't want to say "healthy" because I feel like that's kind of a bad word, but it's just more wholesome to your soul.

That's a better word. Like, you're making it with your hands. And so making yogurt, like the process of making yogurt, is using a little bit of old yogurt and milk and kind of just cooking it down. I don't know, I just I think it's very... It would mean a lot more when I ate it to be like, "I made this myself. I made this from my grandma's recipe that she learned from her sisters and from her mom." I'm keeping the generational knowledge alive.

MSC: Yeah, feeling connected?

HM: Yeah, absolutely. Like, I could buy it from the grocery store. But that's mass produced; there's no love in that. It's the same thing with baked goods.

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“... It would mean a lot more when I ate it to be like, ‘I made this myself. I made this from my grandma’s recipe that she learned from her sisters and from her mom.’ I’m keeping the generational knowledge alive.”

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Like I could just go buy it wholesale from like Sam's Club – which don't get me wrong, croissants are amazing from Costco and wholesale places – but it means so much more when you make it yourself. I put so much effort into folding the layers together to make those croissants, you know?

MSC: And what about knowing that people who make... What is the difference for you in terms of me knowing you makes delicious cakes, like you saying that you have a trusted flour or you know where the butter is from? Like, what is the impact there for you?

HM: I think it just... I feel like it's just important to know. For example, this is kind of going a little bit bigger scale and then I'll go back to a smaller scale of what you asked – but like, if I wanted a cake, right, I wanted a birthday cake... I could go to Walmart and get one. It's a cake. You know, it's yummy. The moisture level is good, the frosting is good, you know it's there, and it's also cheap. But then there's also Beara Bakes, like you know, they're gonna put love and use good amazing ingredients in their cakes and yes, it will be more expensive. But also it's made with love and care and thought, and I just, I think it's important to have things that

are locally made, you know, with the seasons. Like I told you that one time like, it's so important [*in reference to a past conversation I had with Hira at a UAAO Open Mic about her choice of fruits and herbs in her baked goods*]. I feel like we're so used to just... fast, fast mass produced stuff. And a lot of people don't know when seasonal fruits are around. I honestly still don't know. I'm like... we just always have pomegranates for example, accessible to us. But do we really know when it's coming out of the ground? No. And I don't know, just like having this information of what's being given to us, what's around us... It's important.

MSC: Yeah, yeah it did. I'm gonna ask a follow up question. For me, knowing you... there's almost like a sense of awe. I'm like, I can't believe that there's a human, a person that I know, that this talented, creating something so delicious. Yeah. [*laughing*] I guess, I was wondering how you feel about the innate like human-ness of food, and how that is removed when we like, you know, buy things from stores.

HM: You know, it's so important. I'm kind of touched right now... But no, I think it's really, really important. For example, like I said

before, like if I get it from Beara Bakes, I know those people. I know the amount of love and effort that they put into it. And I don't know, it's just like someone is taking time out of their day to make a baked good. And I don't know. I just... it's... the beautiful thing. Yeah, I don't know. It's like... It's hard to put it into words.

MSC: No, that makes sense. When you're approaching doing a pop-up or choosing where you're going to sell, how do you base those decisions? How do you think about like what communities you go into, what communities you want to be a part of?

HM: Oh, I love this question. I, first of all, like to keep it local. Obviously. So the first thought is, where am I going to do it, before I even make the menu. Where am I going to do the pop up? And ideally, I want to do somewhere close to me, somewhere that I'm comfortable with, somewhere that is accepting to people that have tiny little businesses. That's my first thing. And I've come across that at Bridge Community [*Hira regularly does pop-ups at Bridge Community Cafe in Ypsi*], have come across that here, and there are so many other places that I can't wait to do pop ups at. But yeah, having somewhere that is

able to acknowledge and appreciate community and good food... That's the first thing. And then after I have a place, I will pick my menu. And my menu is typically broken down into... what's in season. What is not labor intensive. And what, I think the crowd would like. So those are the three things that I always have to keep in mind. And then once the seasonal fruits are picked, I go to the labor intensive stuff. And I remember for one of my pop ups I made croissants, which I will never do again. I think I only made like twenty-four croissants, which is like decently manageable. But I also sold out in like, half an hour. And a lot of people were like, "We didn't even get to try your croissants." Like, "I'm sorry, boss." I tried my best. But yeah, like non-labor intensive stuff. Like cakes, you know, you can just make the batter, put it in, frost it, boom done. And they're still meaningful, because the flavors and ingredients that are used are still good. And I'm also not losing money, I would say.

MSC: Sustaining yourself.

HM: Yes, sustaining myself. Again, I am a nursing student. I need to be respectful to myself. And also fair to the people that I'm serving it to, because I can't upcharge like crazy. Like, I put all

this effort in, you have to pay me like \$100 for this croissant. You know, that's rude. I think actually Maya taught me a lot, just seeing them do their thing. One, with their "pay what they can" concept but also just them being like, "It's not that deep." [Maya is a co-worked of mine at Cahoots Café as well as a wonderful baker and overall amazing human being]. Like put your love in and people will love it. And, you know, just do whatever ingredients you want; people will love it. I don't know, it's hard to explain it but I like, like they told me that they didn't plan out their flavors, so far in advance. They kind of did whatever came to them in that

moment. And I was like, I'm kind of love that. It's just, it's natural. Yeah. I so I really, really appreciated that.

HM: But that's kind of how my process goes. And it's worked most of the time. You know, the people like the flavors. I did a turnip cake, for my last pop up for you guys. And I was really scared about that. I was like, "Oh, I don't know if college students are gonna like turnips in their cake". And then I'm like, okay, but "I'm college students and I like turnips in my cake". And so I was like, "Okay, I'm just going to take the risk. And I'll just hopefully sell it." Yeah. And so when people asked



LEFT: The croissants with vanilla bean custard of Hira's dreams! RIGHT: The cross-cut of a beautiful multi-layer cake, photographed on a cake stand with a white cloth background

about it, I was like, "It's a sexy carrot." [laughs] And they loved that, and the cake sold out. So...

MSC: I love the way like... you're just so creative with the food. I love it. It's so fun. And it's so interesting. I feel like experimental food is so, you know, taken off into this corner of... it's either like bad or it's high brow. And it's just using the ingredients that are in abundance. [*This isn't a totally baked thought, but to sort of clarify, I think that "weird food combinations" are actually just food combinations that we haven't yet normalized and that our definition of "normal" when it comes to what we eat is also highly informed by capitalism... in all its multitudes. This goes from what is sold to us in our grocery stores, what is sold to us as "healthy," or, what I think may serve as the best example, the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and the American school lunch*]. Like, why can't that just be normal? [*What is so wrong with experimenting with our food? With trying out new flavors, especially when using what is available to us and what is in abundance?*] So you started with, "I start with the seasonal ingredients." So I just want to ask how you think about like, where you're sourcing your ingredients from, where you get things from?

HM: I try to get it from places that are cheap. Obviously, I'm not going to Whole Foods. Like,

yes, they're organic and cute and whatever. But also I just want them to be good quality. Joe Randoz's, I don't know if you know what that is, but that's a place that I went with my grandma growing up.

Actually, before I continue getting into that ... in 2020 that I was looking into, or like, really passionate about the fact that a lot of places upcharge for produce and stuff, while if you literally go to the Indian market or Asian market, the same stuff there is for way cheaper. I feel like a lot of people don't know that and they don't... like people go to Trader Joe's and get Za'atar, which is like a spice, and it'll be like, \$3.99 for this tiny thing. And then you go to the Arab store, and it's like a pound for like \$1.99. So, I try to always go towards stuff that is more affordable, I would say. And whether that is literally be Meijer, or Kroger or like Fresh Thyme, I always try to look for what deals are happening around my area.

MSC: Working with what you can.

HM: Yeah, working with what I can, absolutely. So yes, I don't buy all of my stuff from the same store. I try to be a little smart about it. You know, I'll buy my flour at wholesale, I'll buy my sugar at

wholesale my eggs, butter, that stuff at wholesale as well. Because again, like I have to be conscious of the money that I am spending. I don't necessarily do my pop ups to make money. But also like, I need to be spending it wisely.

MSC: Yeah, because it's your labor. You're putting a lot of work in.

HM: Absolutely. Yeah.

MSC: I mean, it all makes sense to me. Another thing I've been asking people is, obviously you use a lot of fresh produce in your baking. How do you think about food in relation to land in place and in relation to the land that we occupy right now?

HM: Yeah, that's really important. Absolutely. I think that... most people here – very bold thing I'm about to say – but don't really know what is actually grown in Michigan. Yeah. I didn't know that we're land of apples. We make a lot of apples here. But, I think knowing the fruits that come from where you live... Yeah, where you live is really important. You know, getting local fresh honey from here is the best thing for you. It's actually best for immunity as well. We are simple creatures. We like where we are born and the environment we are in. The things that are grown around us are the healthiest and best for us.

And like... When I'm in Pakistan, the fruits and stuff I have there are completely different, you know? And I think that just accepting that different places grow different things, and we don't necessarily need to have everything with us all the time... For example, it's Japanese strawberries. Why are they being sold at Meijer? Like, we're killing the crops over there, and we're spending so much money to get it shipped over here. Just for people to be like, "Whoa, cool. I like a pink strawberry." I just think we are greedy. And I'm just shit-talking on the US, but I just think it's very, very important to have the stuff that is naturally around us and that's why I do it in my pop ups. Because I'm also teaching people as well. Like, currently it's winter, turnips are available, pears are available, thyme is available. And now you know; you left my pop up learning something new. And maybe when you go home to cook dinner, you'll be like, "Maybe I'll use turnips in something."

MSC: That thyme-pear blondie was insane; it was so good [*in reference to, again, an insanely good thyme-pear blondie that Hira made earlier that month*].

HM: I'm so happy. That makes me so happy.

MSC: I think it's such a line,

right... we should be investing not only in our local providers, and what is needed for the land and good for the soil, but also food traditions that extend beyond us, right? Like the food traditions that existed in this land before we were here. We're a community of first generation, second generation, third generation and we want to hold on to our food, our generational knowledge. So how do you kind of balance those things? Or like, what do you think about that?

HM: Yeah, so the land that we do occupy I – truthfully, myself – know nothing about. I don't know a thing about... You know, I would love to look more into that and see. But I think that... wait... you're gonna have to ask the question again. I completely lost my train of thought [*laughs*].

MSC: No, no you're good. So thinking about... people, when they immigrate here, they want to eat their cultural food. And often-times, we don't have those ingredients available to us or they're not native, like you're saying. How do you balance that with wanting to hold on to generational knowledge, and those traditions, but also thinking about the impact on our environment and thinking about – do we need pink Japa-

nese strawberry, or which also are like lowkey not really integral.

HM: Okay, that makes sense. I mean, we have our Asian markets, you know, and for the most part, they get their stuff supplied from, you know, overseas and stuff like that, which I hold onto very dearly. I love... We get all of our spices from the Asian markets and the Arab markets. And without that, it would be a lot harder to feel closer to home. You know, being Pakistani we use a lot of spices, in all of our food, and if we were not able to have this... my grandparents came to this country and didn't have those spices, or couldn't find it. We would have lost so much, right off the bat, right away. I would not know anything about my culture. Because it's small stuff that you slowly start to lose and then eventually you lose everything. And so I am happy about that... that we are able to get that here. You know, like again, this is obviously just nitpicking the frickin' Japanese strawberry again, but for example, if a family grew up eating Japanese strawberry, they're gonna be happy it's here. Like, "Yay, we get to upkeep that tradition of eating those strawberries." So that part I do appreciate. But I think... I think it kind of becomes a bit of

an issue when... I don't know it's used wrongly.

MSC: Yeah. I think it's kind of like the line between assimilation and hybridity, because it's like recognizing that you are in a different location, land, and place, and meeting your new reality in a way that you still feel supported. What do you think?

HM: No, I absolutely agree with that. I agree. My grandma, for example, every single time [she visits] she always brings fresh garam masala; it's so sweet. Last time she brought it in a little Pringles container, just like a bunch of fresh garam masala. And it was so fresh and potent and like when you opened it in the living room it was just... the whole living room smelled like that. I didn't even know spices could do that. Because over here, it's not the same. And so I think, yeah, land and place. It's very important. Like we know it's not going to be the same as it is over there. We're making the best out of what we have. You know, we're still able to have all the amazing food with those flavors. And obviously back home they're gonna be way better. Like insanely better. But yeah, I think it's the effort and the thought that counts. I don't know if that answered your question at

all.

MSC: I think it's really interesting. Like all these conversations I'm having there's just ... there's no right answer, right? Like, if we eat the food that's native to land and place, it's gonna taste different. Right? [*if we make our cultural cuisine with native ingredients rather than those we may be used to...*] But then it's like... it's always this question of is there really a better... Yes, this one is fresher, but it's like what is that transition from like, there to here? Like, what does that indicate? [*How do our experiences, our movement, our displacement inform our food? How does food, land, and place change what consider cultural?]* Like what is gained in that process? And also in your own food, what experiences do you put into your food by doing the experiments that you do?

HM: Yeah, absolutely. I don't think there is a better. Like again, it's the effort that's put into it. It's the love and the meaning behind it. Yeah, absolutely. I think. I don't think there is a better; like I said, it's the effort that's put into it. Yeah. Love and the the meaning behind it. And I think that's all that matters.

MSC: The same thing of like, healthy doesn't matter.

HM: Yeah, healthy doesn't matter – a bad word. It means a lot more when you are there, because you're like, I am physically in that land, breathing that air. So not better, it is just a more intense experience, I would say, because some people never get the privilege of going back to their home country. And this is all they're gonna get. And then for my baking, I would say... Can you re-ask that in terms of my baking? I'm having a little trouble.

MSC: Yeah, so a lot of this project is thinking about how experiences inform food, and how, especially immigration and the waves of those experiences of displacement or intentional movement come up in our food in us and in our community, so how do your experiences show up in your food? *[As well as perhaps Hira's family's experiences... the experiences of her mother, her father, and her grandmother...]*

HM: I like that. So like I said before, my grandma loves to not use measure. She doesn't like to measure at all. And I am the same way when it comes to my cooking, actually. I do not measure anything. I cook so intensely, intuitively that it's almost disgusting. I will use whatever's in my fridge and I'll kind of just put things together

and it might only be yummy to me. But it's never gonna go on my baking account. Which is so interesting, because I view food as just sustenance. And so I intuitively cook like my grandma cooks. Yeah, but when it comes to my baking, I'm very to the T and to the point. Like I measure, very scientific about it, like weigh out in grams and stuff.

MSC: That's very interesting.

HM: Isn't it? I noticed that and I was like, "Oh, wow."

MSC: So you're drawing a distinction for cooking and baking.

HM: Yes. And then I also I realized that when I'm stressed and genuinely want to decompress, I don't bake with measurements. And then I'm like – "Oh, that's really interesting." Because I don't do that. I usually measure everything out. And so why am I treating baking like cooking? And I'm just like, it's two different processes for me. You know, like one is a project and one is just like, a form of therapy. If that makes any sense at all *[laughs]*.

MSC: Yeah, it does. I think it does.

HM: I don't know if I'm answering it; you can re-ask the question.

MSC: I think you are. You have already answered it! You're talking about like your relationships with

your grandmother, your family, your identity as Asian American, Pakistani, but also living in the US ... all that I assume informs your food. Yeah, I think I think I just want to like, elaborate more... what brought you to this point in baking?

HM: What brought me to this point? I think... Wow, I've never thought about that before. God, what brought me to this point of baking. I think it's almost like I'm trying to impress myself. I'm trying to prove to myself that I can do, so I can. I think it's just a challenge. Like, I keep trying to challenge myself. I think that's what brought me to this point. I think, I'm like, "Okay, this is in season. What the hell can I do with that?" I'm fighting with myself. I'm like, I can do this.

MSC: Yeah. It's like a creative risk.

HM: Yeah, exactly. And I think that's truthfully what it is. I'm like, how many flavors can I put into this one thing without it becoming disgusting. And yeah, I think that's what it is. It's just, seeing what is around me. What has inspired me, who has hurt me... and how do I turn it into a baked good?

MSC: That's beautiful. Always built in there [*all of those feelings, those internal challenges about*

we can do and what we can make ...] and maybe we don't unpack it as much. There's all these different influences behind it.

HM: Yeah, absolutely. My pop up that I'm currently doing is inspired by my ex, who really hurt me. The flyer for my pop up – the parking ticket [*that is collaged into the flyer for Hira's most recent pop up*] – it was the day that we broke up. Yeah. [*laughs*]. Um, so I am like completely over it. But I was just like, this was something that occupied my time, you know. I stopped growing my sourdough starter because of him. I spent all my time with him. I started to lose myself a little bit. And so after things ended, I was like, "Oh, my God." I'm like, "What the hell?" I'm like, "I am going to bake my heart's content now." I spent days kind of just sitting there like, oh, I shouldn't bake because he might call me; he might make plans. So like. It's just experiences that I've lived and it just kind of like retaliating against those bad memories. Like the cakes that I'm making... like, some flavors remind me of something that happened when we were together or things that he didn't like that I'm like – I'm gonna put directly into this cake. But it's just like I'm using my life experiences to bake, and

to push things. Yeah, yeah.

MSC: Yeah. That's really cool!

HM: I had this dream a few years ago, maybe like in 2021. But it was this dream where this chef served me a croissant with vanilla bean custard. And it was so specific, but it was like, I remember in my dream, I remember like, feeling the croissant and remembering how it tasted and it was. I remember it was flaky on the outside and fluffy on the inside. I remember how the vanilla bean tasted. And I woke up that morning and I was like, I need to bake this croissant, exactly how I tasted it in my dream. And I would have never thought to make croissants with vanilla bean custard, but because of my dream, because some reason the world wanted me to have that dream, I went ahead and spent the next two days making the croissants with vanilla bean custard.

MSC: Like you got to be open. You got to draw from what's going on.

HM: Exactly, I need to be aware; I need to be present. And that's what I did. And I remember when I wrote my college essay on this – by the way, I wrote my nursing application about this croissant story that I'm telling you – I remember biting into that croissant and I was

like, this is exactly how it tasted in my dream. And it was the most surreal moment ever. Yeah, but I think after that I was like I need to keep going with baking. It's never gonna get boring. It's just – I'm gonna keep growing and growing and growing. But yeah.

MSC: I have two closing questions. So obviously, you have come to this point where you can be very experimental, like you have intuition about what's gonna taste good. You know, flavors and like that... I find this is always a really hard question for people, because it's like so built into us, but how do you build your skills? [*When it comes to cooking and baking... Or how did Hira build their skills.*]

HM: How do I build my skills? Hey, good question.

MSC: How did you learn how to bake?

HM: YouTube, for sure. Watching a lot of baking videos. Bon Appétit. Truthfully, it was TV for me. Like, I would come home after school and the new episode of like, whatever dropped. And I was like, time to go learn. But it was technology; it was social media. Yeah. Pre-my baking Instagram. It was just like, watching what people were doing. And I was like, I think I can do that. Yeah,

and it was literally just getting into the kitchen, not knowing what to expect. And it turned out good. Turned out decent. And that's where my precision came in. Because I'm like, if I don't follow it to the T, I don't put my 100% into it the first time, it might not turn out well. And the first time I ever made French macaroons, it came out perfect. And for most people, they're just like "Yeah, no like it took me a long time to perfect macaroons." It was because I put my 100% into it when I start something.

MSC: You want to build the skill.

HM: Build the skill. And then the second time, third time, I'll become lazy. It'll become a little bit bad, but I'm like, I already know what I'm doing. Even for croissants, the first time made it, came up perfect. And slowly after that it started getting a little floppy and floppy. But I was like, I know how to do it. If I want it to, I can fix it.

MSC: Yeah, you know how to fix it. You know how to like trouble-shoot.

HM: Exactly. So I'm kind of working backwards. But I think that's where I learned how to bake.

MSC: Do you feel like you were exposed to South Asian people in food growing up? Like outside of your family? And South Asian

people in baking?

.....

“ I remember biting into that croissant and I was like, this is exactly how it tasted in my dream. *And it was the most surreal moment ever.* Yeah, but I think after that I was like I need to keep going with baking. It's never gonna get boring.”

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HM: No, not really, to be honest. I did try to keep up with a lot of like, Muslim people, because that's also another really important Identity to me, is my religion. And so you know, I remember when I was, I think in sixth grade, my aunt took me to a bakery. And it was the first Hijabi bakery owner I had ever met in my life. And I was like, I didn't even know they could do that. Like I didn't even know Hijabis or Muslims could do that! It was in sixth grade, like that's decently old. And I remember just being like, "I'm gonna work for you when I grow up," like "I love you." And I'm actually going to a dinner that she is hosting in Detroit next week. And last time I saw her, I was in sixth grade. So I'm excited. But I didn't see a lot. I really, really didn't, and now when I do, I get so excited. I'm just like,

"You're just like me!" The flavors and the inspiration, like we we share that.

MSC: That's really cool that you... yeah.

HM: Yeah, yeah. And I feel like that's why I don't do a lot of South Asian desserts. Or cooking. And it's kind of sad because I'm like, why am I making Eastern European stuff? I'm like, why am I making the French, French's food? Like, I have a culture. Mine is so beautiful. You know, it's what I grew up eating. Why do I not know that? But yeah, that's.. access. Yes. I'm consciously trying to do that now. Yeah.

MSC: And then my closing question is just, what are your favorite things to make? What are your favorite things to eat?

HM: I love it. My favorite things to make for desserts is coffee stuff, like, just stuff that is good with coffee. Not too sweet. Something that like... little snacking cake, you know? Yeah, just amazing flavors. Something that's super, super simple. Because I love coffee. Good pastry. Just like a Danish will always work for me. I will make the craziest stuff. I will not eat it most of the time. Just because I'm like, I just want to leave it as is. I don't want to try it. I'm very overly critical. So most of the

things, actually everything I make and sell, I've never tried.

MSC: What??

HM: Yeah! *[laughs]* Yeah, so when you tell me the pear/thyme bars are good, I'm like cool. I don't know how it tastes. But I'm hoping it's good.

MSC: You never taste anything??

HM: No. *[laughs]* But I think that's kind of a win because, you know, I am confident with myself, now.

MSC: Do you ever eat your own food?

HM: *[laughs]* Occasionally? Yes. Occasionally. Sometimes I will bake for myself but it's very, very rare that I will bake for myself.

MSC: How do you test your recipe?

HM: I feed other people, and sometimes, like sometimes, I'll have it. And like take notes on it. But it's never just to enjoy. It makes it sound like I don't like what I'm making, but it's more so for research. You know, like I don't necessarily want to sit down and eat what I'm making, or even with like...

MSC: I get that yeah; I give away everything. I hate.. I literally like cannot look at my own work.

HM: But my favorite foods, are honestly like the stuff that my grandma makes, you know,

because it makes me feel nice inside. She made me bindi which is okra, like stew. And I love it so much. It makes me feel amazing, with her yogurt and her amazing rice. But yeah, just my favorite foods are stuffed with rice, that makes me feel warm, whole and nice afterwards.

MSC: All right, thank you so much. Thank you so much.

Scan the QR code to follow Hira's Kitchen on Instagram!



LEFT: A photograph of the zine that accompanied Hira's most recent cake pop up. RIGHT: A photograph of Hira in a white coat, looking directly at the camera.

“three time zones” — Zeyuan Hu

I met Zeyuan through the United Asian American Organizations (UAAO). I first saw this piece at the opening ceremony for this year's Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month (AA&PI HM) and was really touched by it ... especially as I was already two to three months into this project. I am so grateful to Zeyuan for letting me include this work, which was also published in the most recent University of Michigan Sustainable Food Program (UMSFP) zine, as a part of this project.

“Typical occurrence in me and my parents’ group chat, where the main mode of maintenance for emotional closeness across is sharing the various foods we consume on the daily in each of our respective time zone, since we don’t tend to express emotions openly. My dad lives in southwest China, where me and mom my moved away from in 2015. He often sends pictures of specialty noodle dishes from our region that makes me nostalgic. My mom sends her cooking that she learns from the Internet amid her life alone in Washington state. I send pictures from new restaurants I’m trying in Ann Arbor.”



A conversation with Linda Wan —

Linda Wan is a second-generation Chinese American photographer and baker. I first met Linda working at Argus Farm Stop, where she would sell her delicious breads and other baked goods on weekend mornings. I have the fondest memories of Linda parked outside the Argus on Liberty with her bike, a basket of bread and pastries, and her brilliant smile.

Over the years, we have had coffee a few times, sharing bits of what is happening in our lives. We are both interested in social justice, activism, and advocacy and have been able to stay in relative communication for the last four years since I left Argus and made my way through my undergraduate education. I'm now preparing to leave Ann Arbor. It is a wonder to us both how long it has been since we first met outside Argus.

MSC: I've been starting these interviews by asking what identities people claim, or what identities they would want to share with the people who are reading the zine. Identities really broadly; I often give the example of myself. I identify as a second-generation Asian American queer creative — so that can be very expansive in what that is.

LW: Yeah yeah, wow. I've never really thought about it. I've just been so busy these days... How do I identify? I guess I identify *[pause]* if my parents were immigrants that makes me second generation right? Okay, right. I guess I'm a second-generation Chinese American. Yeah that's it *[laughs]*. That's not as interesting as yours, sorry.

MSC: No, no. It's all about what you claim. And then I kind of open these up by asking how you would describe your relationship with food?

LW: Hm, how would I describe my relationship with food? Wow, well, food is my art. Yeah, it's my meditation too. When we first started talking, I mentioned I have a lot on my mind these days just thinking about tensions between US and Russia, US and China, and how you know all these great powers are run by militarists who are not giving a second thought to nuclear war, and it's just a very mind-boggling, terrifying time to be alive. But — I make my living as a bread maker, and every morning when I go into the kitchen and I work with my dough, it just grounds me and reminds me of the simple pleasure of cooking and the incredible privilege I have to make a living as a baker and the gift of engaging in play as I'm working for my clients. So yeah, these days it's really been my refuge. Yeah, I guess having baked regularly for about 10 years now, I've gotten to the point now where

I have recipes that I can work with now without thinking. It's really allowed me to be creative and playful. For me, it feels almost like a spiritual act because when I am allowing myself to be loose and open to ideas it's like I'm being connected with the great whatever that holds all of this beautiful world together. And yeah it just fills me up and gives me joy and energy. So I would say [to] what is my relationship to food? It happens to be what I do for a living but I would be doing it if I didn't do it for any money at all.

MSC: And can you describe your journey and how you came to baking? Or found out that you loved it?

LW: Oh yeah, well thanks for asking. A lot of people are kind of – they ask me if I learned to bake from my mother. But of course not. My mother came to this country as an immigrant and came from a culture where they didn't bake bread in ovens. You know Chinese people would steam their bread. But yeah, being raised in North America – I was born in Canada and then we immigrated to the states when I was 13 – but having been raised in North America I grew up eating bread. I always loved bread. Oh, be careful is that ash? [a huge

spark popped onto me from

.....

“For me, it feels almost like a spiritual act...”

.....

the fire between us] Yeah, always especially loved good fresh baked bread, like in the communities where we lived. We lived near farmers' markets where we were able to get fresh made bread, and that was always such a treat. Anyways, always enjoyed bread, always fascinated with baking and making bread. But never learned it at my mom's knee.

I always enjoyed cooking all my life: watching my mom and learning it on my own. But I was always intimidated with the idea of working with yeast because, you know, it seemed like so mysterious and strange. Prior to throwing myself into bread making, I was a photographer and I would photograph weddings for a living. And in the process of getting to know one of my customers, she let me know that she made bread as a hobby and that totally intrigued me because I had never met a serious bread baker who was fairly young too. So one day she brought in one of her loaves, and it was just one of the most beautiful artisanal loafs. It just blew

my mind that she made it in her own kitchen. So she gave me the confidence to maybe get over my fear of working with yeast. Soon after that I bought a package of Fleischmann's yeast at the grocery store and followed the recipe on the back of the envelope and made a tray of dinner rolls that turned out pretty good to my amazement. That was a turning point and I just felt excited to continue exploring new recipes. So I decided to challenge myself to make bread everyday for a month,

just to see what would happen. And yeah it was pretty much after that I was hooked. In that time, I would check out books from the public library - think I've checked out every single bread book in their collection - and I would read and study the technique and then bake as I went along. And yeah, that's how I did it.

MSC: And you just built up those skills and confidence to come around...

LW: Yeah as I was learning along, and learning from the



Photograph by Steve Boyce

A black and white image of Linda holding two loaves of bread. She is wearing an apron and posing outside in front of a gathering of trees. Linda is lifting both loaves up to just below her chin and looking directly towards the camera.

mistakes.

MSC: That's really nice. This project – it's a lot about food traditions, but it's also about how we make our own traditions and how we imbue them with aspects of our identities, but also how we forge our own traditions as Asian Americans. We assume our own hybridity and relationships and etc.

This is a bit of a switch-up. You are a cottage vendor and a lot of how I met you was through Argus and in the community. I guess why is it important for you to engage with the community, to sell at places like Argus and your porch, and also can you describe how you came to do cottage vending? *[In 2010, Michigan adopted a Cottage Food Law that allows people to make and sell specific foods, namely baked goods and bread, prepared in their own home without being subject to inspections or the need for a food license; Linda and Hira Mohsin, interviewed later on in this edition, are both cottage vendors.]*

LW: Yeah, well for real practical reasons I was attracted to becoming a cottage bakery because, you know, it was just really low overhead and a really easy way to combine a simple living, doing what I love, and practicing my

hobby, which is bread baking. Because even if I wasn't making a living bread baking, I would be baking constantly, so it was to my huge surprise and delight that there was a cottage food law for people to bake out of their homes and sell at selected places. So yeah, I did it for practical reasons like, "Oh that's a good thing." At first when I heard – well one of the rules working as a cottage food baker is that you are required to have to sell in-person to the customer. And at first, that seemed really cumbersome to me. I knew that it was going to take time, so I was a bit ambivalent about that at first, but once I got into it and selling outside of Argus and getting to know the customers and seeing regular people, I just came to realize that I'm a part of this community. And very soon it became very clear to me that I was enjoying the interaction as much as the baking itself. And I think in this day and age, when it seems like human beings are so busy and a lot of our contact is not done face to face, those moments when we can stop and talk to each other spontaneously and have a face-to-face conversation that doesn't have a definite beginning and an end, and you usually don't go into

with an idea of being expeditious. I don't know, there's something very sweet and old fashioned and gratifying about that. So I appreciate – I just think being in community makes me more human. I think that's something that's easy to get away from these days. I think it's important to be able to interact with each other face to face, one on one, in a very slow unstructured kind of way.

MSC: You were saying you were kind of ambivalent about you selling to the person. But I think there is such an incredible opportunity of being able to interact so closely with you, like someone who is so involved with every part of the process [of bread making, of cooking, etc]. Obviously, that's a lot of labor too. So it's interesting the balance of, we want the people who consume the food to be able to dive into that [their craft] but it's also so nice when they're able to talk to us [about] what they're making.

LW: Yeah, I never really thought about what the buyer would be experiencing, but yeah you're right. I guess that's something important to give them, to allow them to get to know the person who made the food that they are about to enjoy.

MSC: Yeah, it just feels so per-

sonal.

LW: Yes! It is so personal and we definitely need more of that.

MSC: And there is such a connection between – like for me, I respect your labor so much more because I feel like so – the food is amazing whether you are there or not, but when you are there, I see there's a person putting all this work behind this, and it feels so full of love.

LW: Oh, thank you, thank you. Yeah... definitely need more of that these days. More love, more connection. More of each other. Thanks Mira!

MSC: Yeah, of course. The Cottage Vendor Law is incredible because it gives people so much opportunity. I was wondering if you could talk about the Cottage Vendor Law and what you think the importance of something like that is, especially for people who are new to food, or people who don't have experience in the food industry.

LW: Well, definitely, I think it is a wonderful stepping stone from taking your passion into your livelihood. I can't imagine a better way to do it, to allow people to work in their homes and to do it on a small scale. It just seems so wise. Yeah, I think it's great.

MSC: And then this is a little

bit different. The three kind of themes throughout this project are food, land, and place. For some people land and place are the same, but in other ways not, so I was wondering if you could talk about your relationship with land, your relationship with place, and if for you those two are always together.

LW: Land and place. I think [pause] I think I definitely think of myself as a Midwesterner. Even though I was born in Canada, we came to the Midwest when I was 13 and this is where I stayed the whole time. Yeah, so I think I'm definitely a small-town Midwesterner. The town I grew up in was Bay City, Michigan about 50,000. Yeah, and - sorry, I don't know if I'm going anywhere with this. I've never lived anywhere else. You know I've spent time in California, did a little bit of travel to Asia, but I've never lived anywhere else.

MSC: And that was a choice you made?

LW: Um, sort of yeah. I guess work and then relationship dictated it. Before I became a baker, I was a photographer, and before I was a studio photographer, I was a newspaper photographer. And so the first job I took out of school was - well, the way you would build a career in newspaper pho-

tography way back when, there were newspapers that you would start off at, a small newspaper, and then if they chose you, you would go to a large one. And then so my first job opportunity was in Port Huron. I was at Michigan State, my first job opportunity was at Port Huron, so there I was. And then I went from there to the Ann Arbor News. And then I became involved with this wonderful person who became my husband, and he is very much rooted in the Midwest and so we just ended up staying here. And I guess being working class, both of us, well I guess work just consumed a lot of our time. So I haven't really had time to think beyond working five days a week and trying anything different or moving anywhere else. But I'm not - it hasn't been a hardship or a disadvantage in the least. I've just been carried along by life.

MSC: And how do you think about your relationship with the Midwest, and land and place, and how our ingredients are [inherently] from the land? How do you think about that in relation to how you bake and how you cook?

LW: Wow, these are great questions. Yeah well, I know for myself, as someone who is conscious of how amazing this planet is that we

call home, and the gift of creation and the web of life, I'm really appreciative of the plants that feed us, and the water that makes all life happen. And so yeah, I know we live in the Great Lakes State surrounded by 20% of the world's water supply – this beautiful fresh water. And so I really appreciate local ingredients, the work of local farmers, and I try as much as I can to use their ingredients. Like Bay City, Michigan is the town that I grew up in and there is a sugar cooperative there, and I try, as often as I can, to purchase my sugar from Pioneer Sugar. And then I try as best I can to cook with the seasons, incorporating ingredients that happen to be ripening at that time into my baking. We have some fruit trees on our property so there will be peaches in the summer, apples in the fall in our sweeter offerings, our pies and things like that. Yeah, so I guess that's how I see it.

MSC: Yeah, it's the little things, just doing it throughout how you live and you know if you have this growing in your garden throw it in.

LW: Yes, exactly. Oh yeah, and for a time, I was doing this amazing barter with a local farmer. You know, bread for eggs. So for a while, I was able to use Webfoot

Pines' amazing eggs for all my baking.

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“... it dovetails in trying to make our capitalist into something a little more different, a little kinder.”

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But unfortunately he had to stop delivering in my neighborhood, so we're not able to make that work right now. But that was a real gift when it was able to happen.

MSC: Wow, that's really nice. The same thing of relationships. I think that's honestly – I've been trying to keep these interviews a little bit shorter as I've been over time refining the questions. But I just always like to give space if you want to add anything.

LW: You are a good interviewer. Well, let's see. One of the first questions you asked me was how my heritage shapes the food work that I do, and I really – one recipe that I'm really really excited about is my green onion pancake because that definitely harkens to my Asian heritage. How it came about was that my father recently remarried – my 85-year-old father – to a childhood friend of his who was living in Hong Kong. But they reconnected. And after a half year's courtship of daily

phone calls she decided to come over here, and in April of last year they got married, And I just adore my stepmother. She's been in the states now for, well, about a year. And one day she was talking about the green onion pancakes that she has been missing from home, so I wanted to find a way to adapt some of my bread baking to make these green onion pancakes for her. So I took the recipes I use for my laminated doughs, like my cinnamon rolls and my croissants, and I turned them into pancakes for her.

So that's something that I'm quite proud of, and it gives me quite a bit of joy to connect with my stepmom from Hong Kong and make her feel a little less homesick. I grew up eating them too, in restaurants. And back then I was actually making them, but I was following cookbook recipes that, then, they didn't require yeast. Anyways, and they were a little bit dry back then. So now fast forward, I am now using my yeasted breads to make this and applying some of the techniques that I've picked up through my intensive work with bread. So it's something new to me now.

MSC: That's really nice. I realized I wanted to ask you one more question. You are kind of creating

... or you have this bread company, and you've developed all these recipes. You were talking a bit about your relationship with food and your mother, and also thinking about how you're creating your own tradition. How do you think about those food traditions moving forward in the world, but also generally how do you think about food as generational knowledge.

LW: How do you define generational knowledge?

MSC: I guess knowledge that is passed down from community to community, or mother to daughter; any kind of passing down, and it building on itself.

LW: Thank you for explaining that, Mira. Well, my husband and I, we don't have children, so I don't have family to pass these recipes down to. But something that is something in the back of my mind is the idea of starting up a bakery cooperative that would be... it dovetails in my interest in trying to change our capitalist economy into something a little more different, a little kinder. And creating a workplace that's a little more equitable. So anyways, part of my interest in that is, if I were ever to get this off the ground, that would be a way to pass on my recipes to my community. So that's a work

in progress, I haven't gotten very far in my planning but that is a daydream of mine – to do this.

MSC: That's really great. That's a really cool idea. Even a daydream is a part of generational knowledge; you're already working towards it.

Unfamiliar — by Dim Mang

I didn't have a chance to interview with Dim but knew that I wanted to include their voice, experiences, and perspectives as a part of this zine. I only met Dim in person this Winter, when I had the opportunity to tattoo them as a part of a collab-fundraiser me and my friends put on to support the forest defenders in Atlanta in protecting the Weelaunee Forest and putting a stop to Cop City (you can more learn more about this at StopCop.City). I felt extremely honored to tattoo them, as someone I have looked up to from afar for a long time. Dim was a past President of the United Asian American Organizations and has been an active member of the local organizing community for years. They identify as first-generation, working-class, queer, and disabled Chin American. They are an Asian American organizer, displaced person from Myanmar/Burma, loving community member, and an all-around beautiful person. Below is a writing they shared with me along with various photos of their family in Burma and Tulsa.

My dad wakes up at 5 am, every day, to get ready for a 12-hour shift. Even from my room, I can hear the shuffling of his feet and the whistling sound of the water boiler. Although I was born in Burma and spent the first seven years of my life there, it feels like a distant life. Sometimes I can only grasp at the memories if I try very hard, but for my dad, it is routine

to bring up memories of Burma. Even after 13 years in the United States, his real home is a place that he can't yet go back to. I feel like I understand what missing home is now – missing familiarity. But mostly, missing family.

My father, who always knows what to say, never quite knew what words to say to me when I was growing up. Especially fresh-



"This is in Tulsa. 2006, a year after we arrived in the US. My mom is the main lady in the middle and she's holding my youngest sister (she was born 2 months after we arrived). Then my little brother in the middle and my younger brother (he's a junior at UMICH) on the very right!"



"This is from my dad's birthday in Yangon. That's my little cousin in the bottom left, then my dad, younger sister, and me on the right."

man year, when I was moving into my residence hall, his silence permeated the empty space everywhere we went. When we arrived in Ann Arbor, he turned to me and said, 'Remember that you can contact us every day if you want.' When I didn't answer, he asked again, 'Would you like it if your mom and I visited this semester?' We've always been tight on money, and I never even considered my parents visiting me in college. I knew the right thing to say was, 'It's all right; you really don't have to visit me,' because that's what people in my family do when we make promises we can't keep. We lower our expectations.

When we drove into the parking area of my residence hall, my dad constantly asked me if I was hungry. 'Do you want water?' 'Do you want chips?' He would occasionally talk about the scenery and how beautiful the campus was; at one point he said it reminded him of Burma. I wish I'd seen his facial expression when he had said that. A few hours later, after I was settled, my dad and I stood in my room in awkward silence. After a while, he asked, 'Do you need some fans or maybe an air conditioning unit for your room?' I replied, 'That would be great, but it's not necessary if it costs too much money.' Before he

left, he said, 'I'll come by tomorrow and we can shop for a fan together.' And we shook hands, because that's what people in my family do when we say goodbye. We don't linger, and we don't say goodbye for long enough.

After we set up a fan directly in front of my bed, my dad gave me a bag he'd been holding. Peering inside, I saw there were snacks, batteries, band-aids, and more snacks. 'I thought you'd get hungry.' I took it and gave him an awkward hug; awkward only because we rarely hug. After a while, he pulled away and said, 'Call your mom and me every day, and do well in school. We expect great things from you.' He left for Oklahoma, a home 15 hours away that I wouldn't see for another three months. It's strange to think that I know him better now, 15 hours apart, than I ever had before. After I'd spent a long enough time reflecting, I got up, got dressed, and got ready to make this new place home. Because that's what people in my family do in the face of too much reflection, in the face of the unfamiliar – we suck it up, and we attempt to find distractions. Just like my dad, I find distractions until they feel like home, until the distractions become home."

A conversation with Ji Hye Kim —

Ji Hye Kim is the owner of Miss Kim restaurant in the Kerrytown neighborhood of Ann Arbor. She was a James Beard Nominee in 2020, 2022 and 2023, the Food + Wine Best New Chef 2021, and Miss Kim was listed on Eater's Ann Arbor's 38 Essential Restaurants. I connected with Kim via Instagram (I sent her a DM because I am goofy like that). I am so grateful that Kim saw my messages and decided to take the time to meet with me and be a part of this project. The intention and care Kim approaches her work with is truly inspiring. There is so much complexity to our food and our experiences, and I hope that this conversation may serve as a glimpse into that.

MSC: What identities [do] you claim for yourself, and how [do] you identify? That can be racial, ethnic, but can also be like as a caregiver, that can be as a chef, it can be as a mother/sister... any identities that you assume that are important to you and important you feel to share with others.

JHK: Okay. Um, woman. Immigrant. Asian-American, Korean-American. Korean. I am a small business owner, and I grew up on the East Coast. So even though I spend way more time in Michigan than New York and New Jersey, I consider myself an East Coaster [laughs].

MSC: Yeah, yeah! That's so interesting. I didn't actually know that, so that's really interesting. How do you think that these different identities intersect with the work you do at Miss Kim and in general... what you are doing in the world?

JHK: I think it all contributes to the work that I do. I just... I actually make a considerable effort not

to label it too much, beyond, like, I want to be in touch with it and present with it, and then I want to, I want to sort of like acknowledge every part. I think the key is to be accepting of all these different identities instead of trying to nail it down to one or two. I just want to say – caveat is you don't want to ignore it. It's more about acknowledging all different things without having to label it within yourself because outside world already try to label you so much.

MSC: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Something I've been talking about, bringing up slowly throughout these different interviews, is thinking about food can facilitate harder conversations about identity. I was wondering if you had any general thoughts on that, as the idea of like... It's pretty recognized that food is a really good way to build community and bring people together, but the idea of using food to go beyond that, and think about trau-

ma, healing, etc.

JHK: I think food is a good tool to talk about, you know, empathy, actually. I talk a lot with my Asian chef friends or like Mexican chef friends, or like any chef friends that I have that's supposedly doing the ethnic food, like not new American food or burgers and fries, but they're doing sort of ethnic food, or sort of "the-other-culture" food. And, oftentimes they say the feedback they get from their own are the harshest and most difficult. If when someone thinks they understand where you're coming from, but they really don't.

So we get reviews, like, and this is definitely my restaurant but also some of my other friends' restaurants, like, "This is not Filipino enough," or "This is not Korean food," or "This is not authentic," or "I know authentic Korean food, or I know authentic Filipino food, or Chinese food, because this is not like what my mother make for me." But I think people should understand that they need to be able to see outside of just their experience and *allow other people's experience and authenticity*. And this sort of terror of authenticity is very othering in a sense. Like, they're claiming authenticity for the entire culture but they're

not allowing people's various diverse experiences within that culture. So, I see that play out in Yelp reviews a lot, yeah [*laughs*]. Like, and, it varies, if it's coming from our own, it says like, you know, "This is not what I experience personally in my life", and you don't know if that person is actually just a casual diner or a casual traveler or actually spent a lot of time cooking or dining out. Because cooking at home and dining out is also different. Korea has many different regions, and I'm sure Chinese even more... and, um, different experiences come in play, but if you don't see that your experience might be a little bit limited, and it's not a representation of every single other

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“Food for me is so many sources of inspiration and joy, and it’s also a way to look into myself.”

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experiences, then you start wielding that authenticity as a weapon for other people.

I think food is an easy way to talk about that. It's specific and it has an element of universality, and... even though things, it's actually

relatively low-risk. It's not a police shooting, it's not as heavy as systematic racism [laughs], or... so then I think it's an easier way to get people to start thinking about things and talk about things.

MSC: Yeah, that's kind of what I've been feeling out from my interviews as well. This idea that it's a starting point that we can expand on – there's more complexity to it. But yeah, thank you for speaking to that. This is kinda backtracking a bit, but I was wondering if you could talk a bit about your general relationship with food and how you think about food in your life, especially as someone who – obviously you cook for yourself, but then also

you own this business.

JHK: Food for me is a way to express... maybe things that I cannot express verbally, or even emotionally. And running a food business is a way for me to express my beliefs, right? So, like, how I pay people, for example, or how we decide to train people or how we offer benefits, things like that, how we decided to work with each other during the pandemic. A lot of it plays out in the tiny confines of my restaurant. So maybe it's a way of me trying to make a little something better but within a reasonably controllable environment instead of being out in the world as a social justice warrior. Food for me is so many sources of

Kim is shown holding multiple heaping bundles of carrots up to her shoulder in front of a vegetable stand. The carrot tops are massive and with bundles of celery, leeks, carrots, and beets. Kim is laughing and smiling away from them over her right shoulder.



inspiration and joy, and it's also a way to look into myself. I really do not believe that chefs are artists. It's a craft; it's not an art. But it is a self-expression of people, not just chefs, right? So, you can express it, like where you're from or where your family traveled to or how it evolves, and I find it bigger than individuals.

So for example, one of my favorite stories that I like to tell is about this particular kind of kimchi. So there's 200 different kinds of kimchi, and Koreans like to think that they know all about kimchi because they had it growing up. But what they don't understand is what you had may have been a very specific regional type of kimchi, and what you've heard may have been very specific to 20th and 21st century kimchi. So, you know Korean people go like, "Oh yeah, I know napa cabbage kimchi; I know that, I have that all the time," and then they tend to think that because that's their experience, that it's been like that forever and ever. But that's not true. Napa cabbage is not even Korean; it's Chinese. Chilies are not even from Korea; It's from South America. So it didn't look like that even a hundred years ago. It didn't. It definitely looked very different two hundred years

ago.

JHK: My mother is from central part of Korea, where Seoul is, and it tends to be a little milder than where my friend's mother is, which is from the southern part – the southern seaside of Korea, where the temperature is a touch hotter and seafood is more abundant. So, my guess would be that there needed to be more need for preservation. [The kimchi there is] saltier, and then there's an abundance of seafood, so you use a lot more fermented seafood. And she [this friend] was so determined that if kimchi didn't have some kind of fermented seafood in it, it's not kimchi at all. But she's disregarding centuries of Buddhist cuisine [and] cooking.

So the arrogance of us thinking that, because we experience something, that is all there is out there and everything else is not that. For me, that's ignorance. For me, that's really only knowing... you don't even know how much is out there because you're so confined into your world, right? And kimchi looks different [in] every region, and then kimchi looks different based on season. So, Napa cabbage is the most famous kimchi, but it's not the only kimchi out there. The Korean government has 200 documented kimchi, and

I'm sure it's actually mostly limited to South Korea, because it's South Korean government... Who knows what North Korean government is doing, and who knows what North Korean grandma is doing in the countryside, right? And kimchi looks different, and I find it fascinating that food travels with people, because we – when we immigrate to another country and move to another town – we bring our eating habits with us. So there is a town called Yanbian, uh, right outside of North Korea, and it's, uh, like I think a settlement of ethnic Koreans, ethnic Korean-Chinese, and they have slightly different ingredients. [Their] kimchi uses coriander, but Korean people, South Korean people, claim to really dislike coriander, and they consider coriander or cilantro as a Southeast-Asian ingredient. But that's not entirely true for every Korean, even within Korean peninsula and definitely not for Yanbian Koreans.

And then there is this kimchi called morkovcha kimchi. It's out of Central Asia, like Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan, and that's because USSR took whole bunch of ethnic Koreans that's living in Russia, on North Korean border, and decided to deport them. So, they were forcibly moved to Central Asia.

When they got there, they didn't have all the ingredients for kimchi but they still want to make kimchi. And then they made this spicy pickled carrot salad, or carrot pickles. And then what's more interesting is that, you know, USSR falls and they find independence, and then they moved to the United States [the people living in these areas]. And they moved to United States in Brighton Beach

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“There’s universality to food and the way that people experience food, *but that’s not totally shutting out other peoples’ experiences.*”

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are where both Korean [and] Americans will consider it like “Little Odessa” or “Little Russia.” So they're not thinking it's Korean area at all.

But there are restaurants there that serve, they call it “European cuisine” or “Central European” or “Central Asian cuisine,” but you go in there, and you find Russian and English on the menu, but the dishes are Korean. Because their ancestors are Korean. And, so now you're in Brooklyn, Brighton Beach somewhere in Little Odessa eating Korean food that's traveled all the way from North Korea

through Russia through Central Asia through United states, and, I just, I just... think about the journey and how people held onto their tradition and wasn't really dogmatic about it. They are also resilient, and they make changes that they have to, to hold onto their tradition in their own way. You're gonna walk into a restaurant and tell that person they're not Koren enough; I think you're an asshole *[laughs]*.

MSC: That is amazing.

JHK: Yeah. I think about that and I think about my journey. I mean it's definitely not deportation but, South Korea to New Jersey to Michigan, and what that looks like, and I... So the Yelp reviews still come in, like, "It's not authentic"... And, if they actually had a legitimate complaint, like food was late or cold or a server was not friendly, then we deal with that. But if someone says that the food is "not Korean enough," or I'm "not Korean enough," or "This is food for white people," or "white progressive," I don't respond to that because there is no need. No reason for me... and there's also no way for me to convince someone that I'm Korean when in their mind, it doesn't matter. It only matters that I'm truthful to who I am and the restaurant reflects

that. And if you're too close-minded to allow that your experience is not universal... There's universality to food and the way that people experience food, but that's not totally shutting out other peoples' experiences. So if you're that kind of person, then I'm not going to respond to you.

MSC: Yeah, that's really interesting. Thank you for sharing that. Do you consider yourself first-generation or second-generation?

JHK: I came here when I was thirteen, so what's interesting is like... I thought I was Korean for a long time. But then, it was sort of just like a... If you asked me even like ten years ago if I were Korean-American, I feel really weird about answering that. And I certainly didn't feel like I can just call myself American unless I was making a point like – "I'm American" *[laughs]*. But deep down, I was like "I don't know." And I think it's like allowing the differences within that Korean-American-ness, you know? Korean people like to say "first generation" and then they also say "1.5." I came with my parents, and my parents would be first generation even though they're not born here, and then I'm 1.5. And then if I had a child, that would be second-generation. That's how they count it, and I

think a lot of other people would count it as first generation: as a first people, first generation that are born in the United States. So yeah, I think of that a lot... That even within Korean-American culture [we] separate this.

MSC: Yeah. It's so interesting. It's also interesting having these conversations with people who consider themselves 1.5. The different iterations of when we consider ourselves having come to the US, but then also this embedded Asian American identity, and such and such... That's why I ask,

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“... tradition means that you are *true to where you are.*”

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because there's such a... between how we think about generations and the “authenticity conversation,” in some ways. *[I am not sure I was making sense at this point but I really appreciate that Kim seemed to be right with me.]*

JHK: I find ... I mean the way that I sort it out internally, was like, authenticity to me it felt very subjective – for somebody to label something authentic or not authentic. So I just thought, you know, authenticity is subjective. So I'm just gonna leave that alone.

And then it helped a lot for me to actually look into historical cooking or like diversity in food, and not from a personal experience way but a more impersonal way. Like, I'm not Buddhist but I love all the Buddhist cuisine and traditions. So like, even though I'm not personally Buddhist, I can appreciate that. And that helped a lot for me to try to understand outside of myself *[laughs]*.

MSC: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. I want to ask a broader question... How do you consider – it's gonna sound almost redundant but – how do you think about food in relation to place and land and, not just in a sense of immigration, but also in relation to, like, where we presently are [and] historical ownership?

JHK: I think that's a great question. I think if you are serious about food, you cannot discount where you are. And you sort of need to understand where you're coming from, but also where you landed. I find that approach actually very traditional. It's not a new approach. Like, it's definitely true of Korean food. I hate to say “I lived in Italy,” but I hung out in Italy for almost a year, and it's definitely true of Italian food. Regionality is really important; being true to where you are is really import-

ant. And being true to where you are is traditional.

JHK: So if I'm doing Korean food but I'm in Michigan, then trying to understand the land of Michigan and the produce and the history of that land and the produce that's grown there – that's important. That is upholding tradition. Tradition is not just about, like oh, well, you know, "I used this set of ingredients" or "I used this set of techniques." I think that you have to understand the philosophy behind the tradition, and the oldest cuisines, most cuisines, the tradition means that you are true to where you are.

Sometimes you use wild rice in the restaurant. The menu rotates sometimes, so I don't hesitate using wild rice, because it makes sense. Korean cuisine use a lot of multigrains but also because wild rice is native to Michigan, and a lot of Native Americans used it. It's available and delicious, and I live here; so then I use it. I think some of the food media thought it was really catchy that I described the food that I do as "Michigan-Korean," but what they don't want to hear is that if I had moved to California, it would look different. The food has to look different. As much as I really love Michigan farmers, it's sort of a, "I have to

love it because I'm here," not necessarily because I love Michigan. If I moved to Texas or California, or any other state, then I would try to be true to that land too.

MSC: Thank you. That was really beautiful and well-put. It's so interesting because having these conversations, I realize that [these themes of land and place] are such a part of peoples' process but it's not necessarily something that we see as consumers. We're not actively invited to engage on those topics, and yet of course, everybody in the food world has to... like it's a reality of supply [as well as so much more]. So it was just interesting...

JHK: Oh sorry, I'm going to add one more thing. As a chef, I think... at the end of the day, like make-it-or-break-it, the point is whether it's delicious or not. Because I've been to taco places and they're doing all the right things, they're buying the most expensive, processing it, and then making their own tortilla and all this stuff. It sounds great on paper, but if it doesn't bring you joy then... [laughs] We're not anthropologists, we're supposed to make people feel like they had a good meal.

MSC: [laughs] Yeah. [Laughs]. That's such a great point.

A conversation with Phimmasone Kym Owens —

I had the opportunity to connect with Phimmasone through Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month (AA&PI HM). As a student at the U-M, Phimmasone started the Refugee Garden Initiative and developed a beautiful project engaging the Campus Farm in collaboration with refugees interested in growing their own food, with a focus on foods native to their homelands. The project is a collaboration between Jewish Family Services of Washtenaw County and Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum but has been driven by Phimmasone's advocacy for and commitment to the refugee community. At the start of April, community members had the opportunity to tour the gardens and hear from Phimmasone as a part of a collaboration between AA&PI HM and Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences (MANRRS).

MSC: To start out these interviews, I like to ask people what identities they claim, or what identities they'd like to share with readers of the zine.

PO: Yeah, I identify as Lao-American.

MSC: It can be super expansive, but also it doesn't have to be.

PO: Well, in that case, I think my identity is gonna come out during the interview. But, I identify as, as I said, Asian American, Lao American, to be more specific a refugee. I really wanted to embrace that name "refugee" because it has started to get a bad rep. My mission is to make that a really cool name. So I'm still trying to figure out a really cool phrase to go with it. But I just want to empower the refugee community.

Gosh – I would say I'm an advocate. I identify with that. That's the kind of work that I'm doing, is more advocacy work. I guess

I'm really a grassroots, small, non-profit organization. I just love the smallness in everything, as far as community building, because then I feel like you can do more... if you cut it into small chunks. I believe that being a big corporation leads to greed, power, and it's a form of colonization when you just have one monopoly. I see infrastructure, including government, kind of like a garden, with all these small different plants, herbs, gourds. They all work together as a whole, and as a holistic approach, and that's why it's important to have these little small groups into one group– to create a whole.

MSC: That makes a lot of sense, and that's also just a very beautiful description. So thank you for sharing that, and it's also interesting because you were just talking about the refugee identity. I usually start these interviews by asking

people how they'd describe their relationship with food, and then go into place and land. Do you have a preference for starting with food, land, or place?

PO: I can start with food. I think food is part of my advocacy work to maintain one's culture. I think that when we lose our food, it's almost as bad as losing our language, and that's another form of, again, assimilation and fitting into the majority. It's a form of colonization. You know, when they take away everything that's part of your identity. So, I just think food is a commonality that everybody has; everybody has to eat. I love the idea of bringing people to the table to have a meal together, to cook what they grew together, and then through that connection with food, kind of foster an atmosphere where we can talk about other social - like spread community - kind of talk about things like that.

I feel that with my being that I came here in 1981 as a refugee, I'm noticing generational changes. How our culture was very strong with my parents, it kind of waned down with me, and is definitely almost disappearing with the third-, you know, set of generations coming in. I find that the only way I could excite that third

generation is with food, because they love eating it. This is an opportunity for us to cook together and then be able to share stories together. You know, pass down how to make this dish, talk about this, how this brings up memories. I think food brings up good memories, maybe some bad too, but it's something to talk about, right? It's just encompassing in all of our lives and a great excuse to get together. Every banquet, every holiday, there's always food. So, it's just a great excuse to get together. And I'm a firm believer of making sure our culture is passed down. If we lose the language, at least we'll have it through our foods.

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“When we went into those spaces, we felt like we were stepping back into our old country.”

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MSC: And when you think about food, the same thing of like passing generational knowledge down, that like access to your culture to the preservation of that, how do you think of that in relation to land? And the fact that, especially second or third generation Asian Americans, we are so

separated from the land? So separated from the native ecosystem that gave way to our cuisines?

PO: That is a great question. I think how it is right now has changed from when I first came here. In regards to land, it was much more important in the '80s and '90s, because we didn't have globalization of food as readily and advanced as it is now. Now you can go, it's still hard to get, but there are ethnic grocery stores where you can go to get these foods, right? But before, in the '80s, we didn't have that. Like the fresh produce, for example, everything was canned or frozen and it took a lot of creativity to create our old dishes from our country using what we had. So back then we would create these huge gardens, and it was ceremonial.

When we went into those spaces, we felt like we were stepping back into our old country. We were around our foods, that we grew; we were immersed in our own community; we were speaking our language; and we often cooked on the spot as well. I remember as a child – and these things again, slowly disappeared but – these things were happy moments in my childhood. The community had this huge garden.

It was right by the river, and we would go fishing. Right before fishing, we would harvest herbs and whatnot from the garden, and then we go fishing and have this awesome picnic meal and cook outside. It was just being outside in nature. If you look at the landscape, you wouldn't know or think that we were in the United States. It looked like we were back home.

I think that with gardening you also look at techniques and best farming practices. Everything we did was organic; we didn't have chemicals. We still don't use that: one because it's not necessary and two it's expensive. We're not here to make it look beautiful. If the bugs are eating it that means it's safe to eat, is the way we see it. You just kind of grow more to share amongst every creature. So it's kind of a way to blend in and to work together with the land. Because you gotta work together with the animals that live there without using any chemicals or traps and all that stuff. You're gonna lose some and you're gonna win some. That's kinda been our approach to land.

You know we are primitive. I would call it primitive, because we don't like to use a lot of tools. There are so many gadgets and tools right now that make our

lives easier and whatnot, but just a simple shovel or even a stick to start growing a garden is kind of the way to go for us, and it's been for a long time. That's what we used in the past, and we made our tools, you know? It was often natural, and we didn't harm the earth by buying pre-made, factory-made tools. I kinda love that about gardening sustainably but also looking at different cultures. Because I think immigrants and refugees, before sustainability and organic became a cool thing, we were already advanced in that field, because we were very frugal about what we used and what we had. It's kind of part of resiliency as well. Because refugees, we have very limited resources, so we have to use what we have.

People at one time may have looked down upon that and seen that as being very poor. Which maybe if you look at the monetary... but we thought we were pretty rich as far as the way we lived with the land and took care of our duties to preserve. So, that's my memory with land.

When I think about memory it's not just a vision. I also have smells, taste, sound. I don't know if it is with other memories but when you're a gardener and you relate to the earth and deal primarily

with your senses. I can still smell the... I think it's called creeping charlie? I think that's what it's called, but when you step on it it gives this really strong scent and it's really relaxing. It feels like this fresh dew or rain that just came. And just having that smell. And you could hear the fire cracking when we're cooking outside. And the wind blowing. These are all memories that come together. And the taste of food.

I would say my superpower would be memories of foliage. I don't know why. I'm just so fascinated with foliage. I'm so fascinated with foliage and different shades of green and different flowers and shapes. I also think my other superpower would be taste. I have this memory of different tastes, like different fruits. For example, I remember when I was back in Lao – cause I came here when I was four years old so it's kind of hard to remember anything before four right – but I remember being in my old country and tasting these fruits. And I had this memory still in my head of this particular fruit, and because globalization wasn't available until 20-30 years later in my life, I was able to go to the store and I saw this fruit and I smelled it and I thought oh this smells so

familiar. I bought it and it was like 5 dollars for one. But I wanted to try it anyway. I cut it up and tasted it and I thought, oh my god this is it! Finally, 30 years later I pinpointed what the fruit was, and it was guava.

MSC: Oh my goodness. Wow, that's so incredible. It's so interesting to think about what that evokes too, as someone that was so young when you came to the states. The balance of globalization as this thing that is of course not all good, but having access to those things that give you such a sense of warmth and love.

PO: Yeah. When you talk about warmth, that's kind of what food does for me. This is why I'm doing what I'm doing. Because in the United States, when you come here, a lot of people in the institutions, they mean well, but my motto has always been, these bigger institutions, they do more harm than good. For example, they think because they offer things that are free; they look down on us and say, "It's for free, why don't you take advantage of it." Free is not always good, you know? Free food, for example, from the government, that they give to refugees... okay, so you get a block of cheese, there is milk products. They don't look at what people's

allergies are and as somebody from Southeast Asia, we are not used to having dairy. In fact, dairy is not in our diet, and in the '80s we didn't know what lactose intolerance or allergies were. So I was lactose intolerant in schools. I had to eat the cafeteria food, and everything was milk based. So I often starved, and the food was so, I don't know, it wasn't very filling. I don't know anyone on the face of this earth that ranted and raved about how they had a 5-star cafeteria lunch. It is really bad. But it's even worse when you are not used to that type of food, with all that preservative, and everything's rubbery, everything's tan, everything's bland.

MSC: Yeah and it's not really representative, culturally.

PO: Yes, yes. But it's free, you know! I find that to be really de-meaning. It's still out there right now. I follow these conversations and recently there were these refugees that were kind of like pan-handling on the street for money and one of the spectators asked, "Why they don't go to the church and get free breakfast, free food? It's free right?" They made sure to describe them in this conversation, as foreigners and refugees. That they were not American citizens. That upsets me because

again, free is not the best thing. I was trying to describe to them, that say that they were a refugee in India, and all they had was free hot spicy food, and you were used to eating tan bland food. Wow, would your digestive system handle that? But it's free. I think people just need to reverse that thought. But I think people here are so out of touch to think, "That can't possibly happen to me, that can't happen here. It's the others that that happens to, and there's something wrong with them."

I wanna say, anybody can become a refugee, even in the United States. You look at catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina... those people lost their homes. You can easily lose a home; nobody is guaranteed a permanent home. It's very humbling, and that's kinda my advocacy work, is to empower refugees.

You know how you said it was intertwined with everything? It has to do with policy as well. When you talk about refugees, immigrants, and then with policy, it also has to do with climate change. Because climate change can change the environment. It's the bigger powers, the powerful countries that force the poor countries into having to leave their home because of climate

change or their garbage from the rich countries being shipped to the poor countries. Poor countries are always the ones that suffer environmentally. So I feel that the powers that be, these nations and countries, they have a lot to do with why refugees occur. Nobody just becomes a refugee because they want to. Or you know it has to do with these bigger countries wanting to put a stake in other countries to fend their capitalism and resources.

.....

“When you’re a refugee you’re pretty much voiceless, nobody really listens to you.”

.....

MSC: They are all of the forces directly creating this situation, yeah.

PO: Yeah, and I feel like that doesn't get taught in school. What gets taught in school is dollars and cents. They see refugees as a charge, like a burden to the resources. I wanna change that and let people know that we have an obligation, a moral obligation, to refugees. They are there because of what other countries have done. It's so big. I really wanted to just be a farmer,

organically, get my hands dirty in the soil. But lately, I've been getting my hands dirty in politics. To get anything done it has to go through that way, so that's kinda where I'm advocating. But when all this advocating is done with, I wanna focus back on getting to the earth, getting back to the ground, providing food and those resources for everybody. I think that kids really need to know where their food comes from. It doesn't come from the supermarket. And I think like, I would love to live in a world where everyone was off the grid, because then you can see where your food comes from... I think then you are forced to actually know your neighbor in case something happens. You get to depend on each other; you depend on each other as a community, as a village, to survive. Right now, when you're having too much given to you, everybody I feel is entitled. Even sometimes I feel that way too, like, "I'm so annoyed why is my electricity not on yet dangit," you know, when we had that snowstorm. Things like that, we've become so comfortable in depending on that.

MSC: I also feel like, there's a sense of empathy. All these things are interconnected. Like there's people behind all these things.

There's people behind electricity; There's people behind farming of course. Which I feel is the most obvious one. I really wanted to ask you about that advocacy work and what you're doing with the Freedom Garden. Could you talk a bit about that and how you came to that project?

PO: So, right now my project is called the Refugee Garden Initiatives. It was Refugee Garden because I started it just about food and connecting people to food, but I realized that, after working with the refugee clients, that they needed more than just food. They approached me and shared their lives with me, their hopes, their dreams, what it's like for them lately, what their struggles were. I didn't even come into this space thinking I was gonna be nosey and asking them. I didn't even do that. They just willingly saw me as someone they trusted and could share with and could do something about it. So, I feel it's my duty to kinda be their voice.

When you're a refugee, you're pretty much voiceless, nobody really listens to you. The dignity is not there, and as a refugee you're just trying to survive til the next day. They don't have the privilege that I do as someone that already speaks English, somebody who

is a U of M student, somebody who can advocate for them. So my work, just out of speaking to the clients I realized that I'm barely scratching the surface with food. I realized I'm using food as a connector to other people, so that they can connect with their needs, the refugee clients' needs. I learned that through courses I've taken that I don't want to be someone who fights for the refugees, I wanna be someone that fights with the refugees. Cause I wanna include their voices because I don't end up being like these institutions who means well but does more harm in the end, and I think you do more harm in the end when you don't include refugee voices.

The advocacy work im doing right now, for example, I'm in a lot of groups or collectives, collaboratives here, and I've kind of pulled the powers that be to the side, and I asked them to think about the cultures of these groups. Why do we not have representation from the people we serve? Don't they know better what they need? All these organizations might be biased because it keeps them, their jobs alive; it keeps their business alive. But we don't look at what it is that clients really need... Part of my advocacy

being that I was a refugee myself, and I've asked other refugees what is important to them, and that's transportation. So part of my advocacy is to fight for transportation.

There is a bill right now, it's called the Drive Safe Bill, that Senator Chang had proposed years ago, that we are trying to get reintroduced to get passed. What that does is allows everyone to have access to a driver's license, regardless of immigration status. We all know that the workforce behind all these jobs that no Americans really want, are made up of immigrants and refugees and migrants and undocumented individuals. It's very important to have a driver's license, so we can get to our jobs, that we can go get food, for emergencies, healthcare. That's one thing I'm very passionate about, and it ties in together with the theme of mobility. Refugees and mobility go hand in hand, because we start off with restriction to mobility where refugees are not allowed to cross borders for asylum. We can't get citizenship, and then when we do get citizenship, there's the upward mobility where we can't advance and have resources to get a higher education, get a job.

You know there's that pover-

ty gap that's always there, and it's just sometimes a trend that keeps happening and happening over because we don't have the resources. So that is a theme that I'm working on, just about moving up moving forward. how can we move forward? Including physically – transportation. We need to have transportation. A lot of the agencies, they don't concentrate on that as much. Which makes refugees depend more on the agencies. So I just feel like that's the best thing.

There's a charity out there that helps out farmers, and what they wanted was a bicycle. Having a bicycle allowed them to take their seeds to the market, which increased their income, which increased their standard of living, which allowed them to afford another form of transportation and so on. It's upward mobility, just because they had the mobility transportation to do what they needed to do. Refugees are resilient. We have very little but we make the best out of it, and the most out of it. We just keep chugging away, and just imagine if we had those resources. That's really, I think. We owe more to these people; we've, as a country, caused a lot of these issues with refugees.

MSC: That's so interesting.

The mobility point is not something that I have thought about in relation to this project, but that's the reality. Access to food is so obviously... when you think about food apartheid, that's so interwoven there. It's the same as you need access to income to get food. Thank you. Everytime I do these interviews, there is always something where I'm like – that's so interesting. Food is so expansive with what it weaves into. I wanted to ask if there's anything else you wanna share in relation to the Refugee Garden Initiative, but also with your experience with food, land, and place.

PO: One thing I want to say is that even though I have the U of M background, and I have the refugee background, this journey has been very difficult for me. You would think an idea as good as having a refugee garden would be easy and accepting. But as a minority woman, I found so many obstacles that had to do with the way businesses are run. The foundation is backed up by old colonialistic ways of having somebody on the top, usually a male, a white male. I've experienced discrimination. I've experienced disrespect. I've experienced people stealing my ideas.

It doesn't go away even when you have these good intentions, so it's another battle on top of battling for food as a right. I'm also battling for my rights as a minority woman to be heard. I'm trying to... all these people are like, "Yeah, we wanna support refugees being heard," but they're not listening to me as a refugee representative. It becomes very tiring and some days I wanna give up, but I think if I'm ruffling feathers that means I'm doing a good job. I'm speaking out against the status quo, so that's what's kind of kept me going when I feel like I'm not getting anywhere. I just have to keep going because I must be getting somewhere if I'm sparking conversations.

So that's one thing I'll share with you. The reason I say these things is because I don't want to represent myself as somebody who had this wonderful idea, and it was so easy, and you can do it too. And not let them know what it means to do it too. I think everyone can do it, but I also wanna be transparent and say it's a lot of hard work. It's a lot of red tape to get through. But it's so worth it because if we don't do this now ... look at how women didn't have an opportunity to vote, blacks were discriminated against. It just takes

time but you got to keep fighting the good fight.

MSC: Thank you so much for sharing that. I also, just kind of as a closing, I'm really happy that we're able to connect like this, and that I've able to learn about your project because it's so incredible and I was so taken and impressed when I was reading about it. I really wanna be able to share your work with UAAO and with my communities.

Scan the QR code to learn more about the Refugee Garden Initiative –



Scan the QR code to donate to support the Refugee Garden Initiative –



**select "For Refugee Resettlement Services."*

A conversation with Te Phan —

I only met Te this year but have been going to his restaurant, Ginger Deli, since I was in middle school. Back then, Ginger Deli was a just a little window in a wall. But it was the most wonderful place. You would go up and order your Vietnamese iced coffee, your pho, your spring rolls, and then sit at the outside bar under their awning. I would go there almost every week with my best friends. I have always wanted to sit down and talk to Te, and I am so grateful to be able to include him as a part of this project. Te came to the United States when he was 10 years old. He grew up in Holland, MI and has a really strong appreciation for Ann Arbor, and maybe even Michigan and the Midwest (although I didn't get to ask him this).

MSC: So I've just been in all of my interviews, asking what identities people claim for themselves – that could be ethnic, racial or – as someone who owns a small local business – it could be a small business owner. What identities you claim as your own?

TP: That's an interesting question

MSC: Yeah, it's a very broad question

TP: No, I like that. I never had anyone ask me something like that before. You know, Mira, I was not kind of like traditional restaurant owner. I didn't come from a family of restaurant owners or business owners or anything like that. None of my family, I don't think anyone works in a restaurant. The only thing I ever done in a restaurant was play the piano. I used to play the piano for this French restaurant. I started classical piano. I was a piano performance major in college for a few

years. I played piano since I was five. So I played piano at a restaurant for a few years when I was at art school in Cleveland. And while I was at school, on the weekend, I would play the piano to make money for my rent. But anyways I was never in the kitchen or any of that. But I've always loved to cook. My parents love food.

You know Asian parents, food is not only to get nourishment, it's embedded in every single aspect of your day. In conversation, My mom would call someone in California or Vietnam just to talk about a dish she was thinking of making. She would be on the phone for hours, so that's how I grew up. Every time I go into a restaurant or eat something, doesn't matter what it is, I get so excited. I just feel so inspired. I feel so happy. And it happened too many times like that. And I said you know what I want to do, I want to do something that maybe I can inspire

someone to feel the same way. So I kind of made a mental note, one day in my life I will do that. So here I am, you know? To start from the very beginning and not know anything about kitchen or equipment or how do you do... You know I can make a meal for two people, and I can do that pretty well. But to make it for hundreds of people, that's a totally different cooking style and system. So all that I had to learn. But the bottom line is I love it so much, that I'm willing to sacrifice so much time to build a kitchen.

We used to be in a different kitchen than the one we have now. Our old kitchen. And I built that kitchen one piece at a time to a full really nice kitchen. And our storefront now. And create the recipes and the menu – that was quite a challenge. I did what I love. We create the food that I want to eat, and I eat it everyday. So I didn't make the restaurant business because of money. I knew it was going to be very hard, very tough. But mainly it was through love for food and joy. So maybe it's an extension of myself. Extension of, um... experiences or the opportunity that I'm so grateful to have. All the people that have helped me...

I used to cook a lot for my family

[and] friends. Like if you come by, I'll make you something. But I feel so happy, I feel loved, that I nourished you with what I'm able to do. So that's all; that is what inspired me to do this.

MSC: I remember... I've been eating your food since I was in middle school

TP: Really?

MSC: Yeah.

TP: Wow, no kidding!

MSC: I'm from Ann Arbor. I used to go to Ann Arbor Open, and I would walk from school to your storefront. And I remember it was such a sad day when you closed that location, I was just so sad. But kind of on that note, how long have you been doing Ginger Deli?

TP: Nine years. But you know what, the first five, six years, there were many times where we were 15 minutes from closing and everything was out. Like 15 minutes from closing everything, because a lot of financial problems and things that happened. It just so hard. It was emotionally and mentally... It's probably one of the hardest things I've ever done my whole life. This is the fifth career that I have tried, and I would say the food business is the hardest one of them all. Now I realize that. Back then many people tells me.

But I said if you love something that much, you will find a way to see the better side of things. And that's what kind of helped me through very hard times. And when I had to close that down [the past location on Liberty], I was very sad. And I didn't think we would come back. But I think being in Ann Arbor, the community really helped Ginger Deli a lot. And that's the reason why we get up early in the morning, bake bread and get out to see someone who didn't quit on us. And yeah that makes it so worthwhile. If it was for money, we would not be here today. But it's the support and community. Like when you share with me, I had no idea.

MSC: Yeah it's funny, as a 12-year-old I would come and get Vietnamese iced coffee

TP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

MSC: You kind of answered this in a lot of ways... You mentioned switching careers, but what led you to open Ginger Deli?

TP: Well, I love the whole excitement of food and trying different restaurants. But I just felt... one other thing is that, I love banh mi. It's kind of a simple way of explaining it, but I love bahn mi a lot. I love pho. I'm passionate [about these foods]. I can eat it everyday. But most importantly I

felt that Ann Arbor didn't have any at the time. So every day, I'm like why don't I be the person to take on the responsibility and take on the hard work and introduce that. Because that's quite a responsibility. It's not about the money because it's very hard. Nobody wants to do it; nobody wants to open a Vietnamese restaurant. So I wanted to bring that here. So we probably, as far as Vietnamese banh mi, we're probably the first in Ann Arbor. Belly Deli, I think they started first like a year before us, but Vietnamese, I think we're the first. I think maybe a lot of people know what a bahn mi is, or vietnamese food. But since Ginger Deli came around, it introduced to a lot of people. And you know everything starts with food. I think food is probably the most... it just opens everything. It opens a person's heart, open generosity, open everything. You know you sit down and eat with someone, you just kind of shed all the layers. And that's the power of sharing and eating together. I really love that. And otherwise I don't think in their crazy mind would start a restaurant. You know you have to love something about it, whether making the food or the people you care about. You love people or the whole process or system

of setting things up. Then that person should try restaurant. Otherwise, that's why many people quit. Seventy to eighty percent of restaurants go out in 5 years.

MSC: It seems so intense and so grueling, but gratifying. It's funny, I guess I was also wondering, on that note, being as I think you are the only Southeast Asian restaurant in downtown Ann Arbor, how your identity as Vietnamese – and also do you identify as Vietnamese or Vietnamese American?

TP: I think Vietnamese American. I'm very connected to Vietnamese culture. It's very – it's an honor to be Vietnamese and American. When I was growing up, I grew up in Holland Michigan, and Holland is – have you been to holland?

MSC: Yeah.

TP: When I was growing up it was very, very white. There was no Asian at all. The only black haired kid at school was my brother. And so growing up there, it was a challenge, cause you don't see anyone like you at all. So it was hard. But you know I adapted, and I wanted to get along. I had to learn really quick, find a way to relate to other people. And so I felt if I can make it out of there and I'm able to get along with everyone, not only get along, but really be a part of the school

community, I really feel sincerely about it that I'll make it anywhere. I will be okay anywhere. I don't know if you experience this or if you have friends like this. Some people, they grow up in an area that's maybe more Korean or Vietnamese, or in California or certain areas it's all Asian, all Vietnamese, all Chinese. And then later when they meet a Caucasian person, they're nice but there's something that they're not able to mix, not able to feel completely comfortable. There's a little bit of a wall.

MSC: Do you think there's a lack of understanding?

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“If it was for money, we would not be here today. But it's the support and community.”

.....

TP: Yeah – a little bit of fear? It's from both sides. Like for me, I'm so fortunate and lucky that I grew up in a very hard way in being accepted, in a very white town. I had to adapt, fight, everyday and really try to mix in. All that. I was lucky that I was able to do it, you know?

MSC: Do you think that ultimately affirmed you in your Vietnamese identity? That kind of struggle and fighting – like amidst so much

whiteness and a culture that didn't feel like yours ... that it kind of strengthened your identity or relationship to Vietnamese culture and food?

TP: Yeah, at that time you just want to be well-liked. You want people to accept you or give you some grace and kindness. And at the time I was growing up, it was a little bit different than now. And it was hard. There was no Chinese restaurant in the whole town, in Holland at the time.

MSC: And no Asian restaurants?

TP: Not at the time, you know. I mean the only Chinese food or Asian food was chop suey. They don't know; They just very mostly Dutch. So I think I was very lucky to a certain extent. I had a very strong family, you know my parents very involved with all of us. And I have my brothers and sisters, so I have my clan. My parents were just amazing parents, very loving, so we had a very tight family. So that helps. So when I go out to school ... when I go back home I get that support. So anyways by the time I reach high school and graduate high school, I was so comfortable and I don't feel there's a gap or wall between Caucasian and me. And that was really important to me in that time.

So now later on I got the chance

to live in everywhere: I lived in Korea, I lived in Hawai'i, I lived in England for a while. And I'm able to connect. there are good people everywhere. So going back to the question, or the point earlier, is that after all that, I'm very proud that I was raised the way in a Vietnamese family. But when I was young, like when I first came to America, I was actually kind of embarrassed for a while. You know because like teasing all that stuff. But I was lucky to have a family that really very close and very supportive, so I didn't have too much identity struggle. So later on I become, I found myself. I went to art school, and I felt I have the strength, I found my talent in a sense. And also to kind of be proud of your ethnicity, and all that. And I realize, I cook a lot, talk with my parents and see the intricate, the artform, the philosophy and all that goes into it. A lot of thoughts go into it. So that really add onto the fire, this inspiration. So but I can't help it. I'm a product of my surroundings. So when we make Ginger Deli, I make the food that I like, and that's something that's really authentic. And why that's important for me now, you know I was told by – I'm sorry, I'm kind of throwing up a lot of things on the table here – so when I said

that I wanted to open a food cart, I had family member, my uncle, they would tell me, "You gotta make the food like this, you gotta make the food like that, you gotta make Vietnamese food like this, and it should be exactly like this." My uncle said this, my other uncle, my aunt, my mom, my dad... After a while I said, you know this is too confusing for me. I'm gonna make what I like. And my uncle said, "No, no that's a terrible way to open a restaurant. You're going to fail if you do that. You gotta make what the people like." And I said, that there's a lot of people in this world. Of I made what people like, that's so many people. I don't think I have the time and energy to make for everyone. It's too much to worry, too stressful. So I'm gonna make what I like.

MSC: And do you feel like the food you make, embodies a lot of your experiences and your influences?

TP: 100%. Absolutely 100%. In every way. And even the visual too. You know visually and taste, I am a part of the whole process, the whole thing. Whenever you want to make bread. Just let me know, come on by and we'll make bread. I just bake bread today, before I came here.

MSC: So when you think about

everything that goes into your food, how do you think about where you're sourcing your ingredients, and land and place and how that comes together in food?

.....
"Without the right carrot, or sweet and sour, without that punch, *it would not be a bahn mi.*"

.....

TP: Yeah, that's really important. So just for example, in pho there's cinnamon, cloves, and it's not just any cinnamon. It has to be one particular – Vietnamese cinnamon, not any cinnamon. It has to be very strong. So we have to source that. There's a certain cardamom we use, you have to find a place for there. For rock sugar, it has to be a special rock sugar. The daikon and carrots, the carrot is like rice dish. It's like noodle to pho; the carrot makes the banh mi. Without the right carrot, or sweet and sour, without that punch, it would not be a banh mi. And the carrot is from Richard [the owner of Tantre Farm], local carrot. Tiny little carrot, you know? Even though it costs more, but the sweetness is very worth it. I try to do everything I can to get it closely local as we can. But the daikon carrot is the most important. So

you know, the onion and stuff like that we get from Tantre Farm. A lot of things. And that's why at The Hub, you've been there, that's why being there is such a blessing [The Washtenaw Food Hub, or "The Hub," houses three commercial kitchens with the purpose "to support local businesses and farms with a goal of serving as an agricultural educational center for food, farming and fiber."]

MSC: I worked for David for a long time [the owner of The Bri-nery – that also works out of The Hub].

TP: You did? How long did you do that?

MSC: I actually worked for him for a year.

TP: You looked familiar.

MSC: Well, I also worked at Argus for 3 years.

TP: Okay, yeah.

MSC: Then I also worked for David.

TP: When did you work for David?

MSC: This past year, I stopped in the fall. I worked over the summer and the entire last year

TP: You were down the hallway from us.

MSC: Oh no, I worked at the Farmers' Market.

TP: Oh okay, that's great.

MSC: Yeah, and it's so interest-

ing... so when you're thinking about sourcing those ingredients, you obviously have this relationship with Richard and The Hub – how do those relationships... how important is it to you to know the people that you are sourcing your vegetables, cinnamon...

TP: That's very important. It's all about relationships. And I think that if you know that I care about you, you will care about everything else that you do if it comes to me, or even the next person. So I think relationship is everything. I think that's so important. Even better we can eat a sandwich together. Everything comes back to that.

MSC: Everything comes back to that, yeah.

TP: Just from that we could do a project together, we can collaborate on, maybe bring family and friends together to have lunch or dinner together. From there we could even do some kind of job together. We could do business together. We could maybe educate or teach each other on something. Maybe come together and maybe renovate a room or do some painting of a house, you know whatever. Everything kind of starts from a good energy, a good conversation. A good relation is important.

MSC: And on that note, all those things take community. So this is a little bit of a change-up, but what communities do you see yourself as a part of? It could be very wide-spread – food community, local business community, or yeah...

TP: You know I lived in different part of the country, so I got the chance to travel quite a bit, but I always come back to Ann Arbor. I don't know why. I live in Hawaii for 9 years and LA for 8 years and England for 3 years. I've been to China, Japan, Europe, but I always come back to Ann Arbor. I had an opportunity to move to LA or Hawaii – maybe Hawaii one day – but I always come back to Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor has the right rhythm maybe, the right vibe for me because it has a right feeling. Most people here, they feel like they can try something. Whatever that you care about, that excite you, you can try. And so you feel hopeful when you're around that kind of energy. And I think maybe that's the thing that I looking all the time, from a long time ago till now. I don't know why but that's my feeling.

MSC: That makes sense.

TP: And it's a great place to try something new. You have a new idea? Try it here. And that's why I tried Ginger Deli here. If it makes

it here, then I think I could bring it to other places. It's a great canvas.

MSC: And it's funny that you say that, canvas, I've been seeing this a lot of the other people that I've interviewed, have talked about the inherently creative process of cooking as well as you. So do you consider yourself an artist in that way?

TP: [laughs] You know, I think this is a little bit of a sensitive subject. I think when a person says "I am an artist," you don't need to say that. You exude that. You don't have to say that because people already know that when they talk to you: the fire come out of their eyes or just their feelings or the way they express or the things that they do. It's an extension of you, you know. They just know; they just see it. I think the person never have to address themselves or promote. But if you asked me as a friend, I can speak to you honestly. I think that being around long enough, you'll see the thing that I do. I am very lucky that when I was a kid I loved music and playing the piano, drums, so my parents was able to get me a lesson from a really amazing teacher. I learned classical piano and then later on I loved to draw, and then I found myself – well I went to music school. And then I discovered

design, car design. So I got a job as a custodian at this place, it happened to be a design center in my hometown back when I was 15 years old. And I was taking trash out and I see these people doing these amazing designs and cars, and I was just so mesmerized by it. When I saw the design the car, it was meant for me to do this. So I said, "You know, I'm gonna quit music school and I'm going to go try that." So I end up at Cleveland Institute of Art and Design. That's where I start study automotive design and luckily it worked out. That's where I found my calling, in a sense. I don't really care about cars, actually, I don't really like the whole philosophy of cars, but I love the designs, the whole process of design. Something that is so beautiful but functional at the same time – really thinking things through. I don't know you remember, but a long time ago, Ginger Deli, we had a lot of packaging. We had pho packaging, the spoon, the fork. So that was actually my goal to bring those things in [that design aspect]. But anyway, so having that experience with visual and listening, and audio and all that, and then love to cook. So that's why when you share with me you're doing your thesis, you're bringing all this

together, I love that. And I think that's the only way to do it.

.....

“When you make food, when you cook – you put a lot of care; the person feels that love.”

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MSC: I totally agree. That's a love of mine, bringing all the different creative processes and the people around me together. This is a bit of a switch up, but I had a few questions I wanted to ask – How old were you when your family came to the US?

TP: I was 10 years old.

MSC: You were 10 years old? Off that, I wanted to ask about the role of food in your family. You talked about how important culture and food was growing up and being able to come home and have that space, but how was food described or what role did it play in your family life?

TP: It was the thing that kept the family together. My mom and dad, they don't have anything in common at all. You know, in everything, nothing in common. But the one thing is they love to eat, and they love to cook. I think that was their model. I have friends that growing up, food is just a way

for them to get full. But that's it. That's not for anything more than that. They just throw something in their mouths and then try to go. They don't really enjoy it, *like sit down and take time to really taste the textures or the way it's made, the color, presentation. They don't celebrate it.*

MSC: No tradition. So do you think your love of food was passed on by your parents?

TP: Yeah, absolutely. And also when you play music, musical instrument or visual arts, it's same principle. Textures, composition, how you keep the time – it's the same thing. I think if you play a piece of music with a lot of heart, your heart is in it – you really play it. The person that listens to it, they can feel the love. When you make food, when you cook you put a lot of care; the person feels that love. And that happens for me everyday when I was growing up.

MSC: You felt that from your parents?

TP: Oh yeah absolutely.

MSC: That's beautiful.

TP: And that's why I bring it here.

MSC: So the title of this project is "Cultivating Generation Knowledge – food as generational knowledge within Asian/Asian American Diasporic communi-

ties," and something I'm starting to now ask is what you think of that title and the phrase of food as generational knowledge.

TP: You know I think everywhere you gotta start from nourishment, and that nourishment will become knowledge. I wonder if there's a way we can bridge that with nourishment.

MSC: Nourishment is knowledge?

TP: Yeah, what is that in-between? And how do we hit home with that. Because everything stems from nourishment, from food. Everything. I don't want to get so philosophical, but I have a friend having some young teenager, some challenging family problem, and I said, the normal way we deal with things in our culture is we go see a therapist or psychiatrist or psychologist. But I wasn't raised like that, because my parents, we were too poor to go see a therapist. But my mom and my dad cooked every night at the time, same time. Dinnertime we always sat together and we ate together. Yeah, and we start with that. I don't want to be giving you all, I don't have all the answers. But one thing I believe in my heart is start cooking at home for your kids. Cook for your kids, you cook for your kids everyday. Start with

that. You will see the difference in your family dynamics.

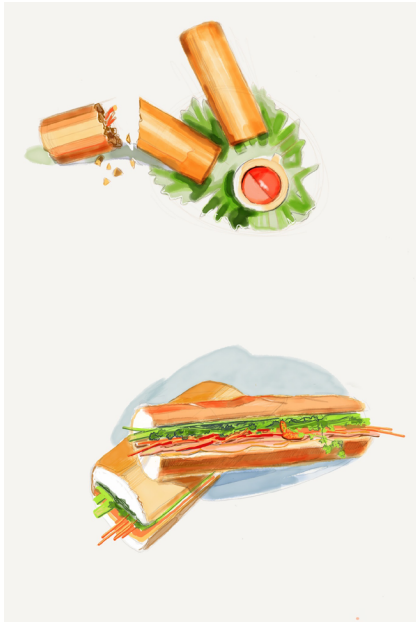
MSC: And do you think that in part because food is so integral to relationship building?

TP: Absolutely, it's everything. And that's why it's a conversation we need to continue. A lot of time we downplay. It's so important, to somehow take a lot of respect in that and time and effort. And that's with a lot of things. It blows my mind that tomato or carrot is not grown from the ground. How is it now that you have to go to the store and separate yourself from, okay, you have more money, you

buy organic, you have no money, you buy non-organic. And no wonder we have so many problems. I think food that is grown in a healthy way, that come from the ground, it's kind of funny to say that it's grounded. It's connecting you to the ground, to the earth. That's full circle of life. When we disconnect ourselves from that, we're gonna have a lot of problems.

MSC: That's what I was gonna ask, do you think in part why the importance of food is so downplayed is because we have become so disconnected from our food and the people who grow our food?

TP: Right, right. I think we've move away from that. We lose the focus in what's important. We want to go for something faster, like electronic device, or flashier, carrying a Louis Vuitton bag or driving a whatever. That kind of status is more important – I get more likes or maybe I get more attention. And that maybe show that you're successful. But what success is, is what you nourish and what you put in your body. It affect you emotionally, and it affect a way a person interact. It's as simple as if you feel hungry and you don't feel healthy. How are we going to be able to be



*Illustrations that Te shared with me. TOP: Spring rolls
BOTTOM: a banh mi.*

happy right? And that stems into home or workplace. If a person is not healthy inside how will they be kind. And it's very contagious. You see people in car, they get so angry. I think if that person is nourished well, they can get very far. But it's so important how we gotta start with that. And it's our responsibility shared to teach.

MSC: On that note, what do you think is lost when our food traditions, specifically Vietnamese or Asian/Asian American, aren't passed along?

TP: I think to grow patient, to take time, even to take 35-45 minutes out of your day... In that 35-45 minutes of preparing food, that's a conversation you can have with a person in the same room. It's amazing how a little bit like that every day can make change. Just try it. Really, of all the things we could try, we're not willing to do that. You know some people are willing to go to the gym 3 hours a day, but they will not have half an hour to cook for their family. Because maybe we will see, it's like fuel, just eat to get fuel. Look at all the health problems that we see. They will eat all this junk all this terrible stuff, but later on now they suffer from health problems.

MSC: Yeah, I feel like so much of that is almost out of our control.

It's just how we've been raised and how society has told us to live. And I feel like so much is having to unlearn that and find people that affirm that you can fight back against like... everything. That media, McDonalds, not just McDonalds but corporations at large, that give us these things *[that tell us that a meal, a diet, a lifestyle should look an singular way; that take our generational knowledge and skill away from us by normalizing a disconnect from our communities and our food for profit].*

TP: Yeah, and I think we can make a change by one meal at a time. One experience at a time. If we hang out at another time, and I think if we could influence each other in that way we can walk away from the conversation...

MSC: I have one more question. Actually, I realize you already kind of answered this, but I was gonna ask what your favorite Vietnamese or Asian foods were... but you have already said that you love banh mis. Maybe a different question, what are your favorite food traditions passed on by your family? Or dishes?

TP: I definitely not gonna say like Vietnamese food is the best. I cannot say that, especially being raised in America. I love all. It's like saying something is beautiful, like this music is better than other

music. No, it's all beautiful. If it's done by the heart, if it's moved by someone that is moved... If you give me a piece of art or if you play a piece of music that you put your heart in, that is a beautiful thing. So going back to food, I cannot say one tradition. But when we sit down and eat together next time, we'll get Eli too [*Eli is my partner that worked at Ginger Deli for a long time*], I just come up with something that I make, because I'm so happy to be with you guys. So this is a piece that I love. And for me, I feel very happy.

MSC: Wait, so what is the dish.

TP: [*Laughs*] It's a tofu dish that I make, tofu and tomato. I'll make it for you and Eli.

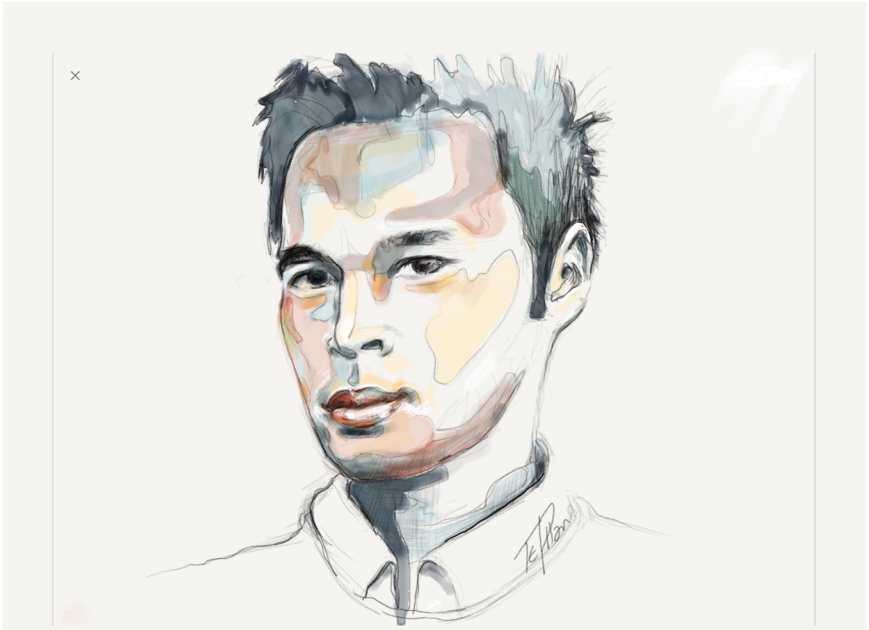
MSC: I've been making a very similar dish... It's tomato, sunbut-ter...

TP: Oh, that sounds good.

MSC: Yeah, with tofu.

TP: Yeah, we'll get together.

MSC: Thank you so much, Te. This was delightful.



A self-portrait — drawn by Te.

A conversation with Priti Kaur —

I first met Priti working at Argus Farm Stop as Tiffin Tonight. This past year, I was able to work with Priti through my position as President of the United Asian American Organizations (UAAO) for our Desi Divine event. It has been so wonderful getting to know Priti further these past few months and to have had the chance to connect with Priti even more through this project.

MSC: What identities do you claim or how do you identify yourself? I've also been open-ended [with this question], for example, recently, I've been using the terms of Asian American, creative and maker. Do you identify yourself as a chef, a cook, or business owner?

PK: I am not a chef, by any culinary education. I am a chef by passion. That's what I grew up with. Hot food was all around. It was a family business. But it wasn't a traditional restaurant. It was my grandfather... He was awarded by the British when he retired from his army duties and they gave him the catering business in the railway stations and railway system in India is one of the biggest systems. Yeah. And when he passed away, my father ran it till the day my father, you know, lost himself with stroke. Yeah, till the end. [There was] food in the trains when we travel. Yeah. And back then there was no Wi-Fi or internet system; it was telegram system. And it was very interesting

how the orders were taken from one station and the food was delivered to the other station, and how those came on platters and how those platters were collected. And the waiters would get off on the other station. So when the trains ran from one station to the other destination, in the middle was the city where my father ran the catering business, and they [the meals] were delivered on the train. And it was a telegraph system. So they would take the orders and from the railway station, they would send it to the kitchen, and the orders will be ready and the waiters would hop up from that station [to] deliver.

MSC: Such a complex system.

PK: No internet, no Wi-Fi. Nothing. So it was really interesting growing up with that. And my father was a foodie too. Yeah. And he would have fishing contracts in the lakes, and I would always see these fishermen come with fresh fish home. So it was just around there you know – the

food. Yeah, so just the beauty of the food, the vegetables, the fish, the meat; I was just fascinated. I was a painter in college. *And the color*, the color is my thing. When I make food, and we make food, the other ladies who are with me, we just admire the color. We will stop and say, “so beautiful.” The color is so beautiful. The smell, the color— of freshness. I mean that’s what I really liked. You’ve seen my meals – all fresh. The spices are fresh. The ginger, the garlic... We have a lot of chopping that we are doing. But it has a different aroma and a different flavor when you put it in there.

.....

“...that’s the connection that I – in my head and in my heart, when I see it when I taste it – it takes it back to my land.”

.....

So yeah, you can call me a chef, you can call me a cook. But it’s all from passion.

MSC: On that note of thinking about the freshness of ingredients, when you’re sourcing ingredients, how do you think about the relationship of food to the land?

PK: When I’m sourcing these ingredients – I mean there are things that I only get from the

Indian store because I know that those are the spices. The fruit, the vegetables, and stuff, I try to source from as much local as I can. I want the same quality, and some things I can get that same quality but, you know, to create it, I want the same texture and quality, the same quality that I grew up eating. Recently what I made... it just takes you home, you know, the childhood and the home – what your mom cooked and what your father cooked. Yeah, and that’s the connection that I – in my head and in my heart, when I see it when I taste it – it takes it back to my land. Yeah. My passion, you know, that’s where it comes out from. The freshness of what was there, then you need to create that.

MSC: And what is the importance of creating that sensation here what is lost when that is not passed down?

PK: What is lost is... then that passion is not there, that interest is not there. And there are times when in my family, my daughter or my son, will also be, let’s make that – And if I know that I won’t get that same end result, I’m not interested. Yeah, you know, what I make is just the mango lassi. And there’s a lot of conversation in the house – make mango lassi

with cashews, make with this. But it's just the thing – if I am not able to create that, I'm not invested; my interest is lost. If it's the same thing that I can bring close to what was there... That is something that, you know, I have the interest and I have the drive to do it. But it's all trial and error.

MSC: This is gonna sound really redundant – how would you describe your relationship with food? When you're thinking about how food has been involved in your life throughout the years, has that relationship evolved?

PK: When there is food, there is gathering. There's connection. I mean, just with what I see coming to Argus, the Farm Stop – that's what I started from [Priti first sold her food as a vendor at Argus Farm Stop] – the connections, the warmth, and the closeness of knowing each other through food. And that was what was in my life at home, was family together. I mean, back those days, family was a big thing. You know, we didn't have to make any schedules to meet or come, family poured into your house to come and stay for the weekend, or a week, without even telling you. Yeah, we would come back from school we would say, "Oh, your aunt is visiting us for, you know, five days." And it

was all about food. There was always food there. And it wasn't a fancy kitchen back then. It was a kitchen where there was fire. The old style, you know, stove made out of clay, and that was always hot. Either the tea is being brewed, or right after lunch is done something else is being stewed – dinner [for example], lentils. So there's always fire, and I love fire. I love fire. So there was always aroma in the house; something is always cooking.

Things have changed. Everything has become very modern and convenient.



A photograph/portrait of Priti. She is shown seated and smiling at the camera.

So for me, is like, when I see food, I see happiness. It just makes me happy. It makes people happy. And when I started, because I am not a professional cook or a restaurateur, and I would go to Argus Liberty or anywhere, and people who had tasted the food – at times I would meet them on the parking lot – and they would see me, and they would put their hand on their chest and say, “Oh Tiffin Tonight, I love it.” And that struck me, you know, it comes from the heart. And when people talk about, they will touch the heart. And that really warms me up that – such a good feeling. I really want to do more.

MSC: I was one of those people. Before we ever even met, I had been eating your food for like two years. And it’s so good.

PK: Yeah, I cook, and then end of the day after cooking, I don’t want to eat my food. I don’t want to eat it. I want something else. But then it’s two days later, I want my food. And it is so satisfying to eat your own food. You know what you put in there. You know, it’s healthy. And it’s made with good intention, and love and time. And all the ingredients. Yeah. *[laughs]*. I think it’s the love, the closeness of what you bring to food, among

people of different, you know, culture. Yeah. And people like to enjoy food from different cultures. Yeah, that diversity is growing.

MSC: What would you say is the importance, in your understanding, of having that diversity of food, but also bringing your food into like, this food landscape? That was a backwards question. So, obviously you associate food so much with community, and gathering, and the heartfelt feeling that people have when they eat your food... What do you think is the importance of having a landscape of different types of food? Like, what is the importance of carrying on these food traditions? *[Our food traditions, our families’ food traditions ... Their memories of that food and its origins...]*

PK: I think offering different food to people, it’s a good thing. You are actually growing the interest of people. Now there are areas where people don’t have the taste for different cultured foods; they will not sell there. But there are areas that people love fruit from different cultures. So I think it’s really good to introduce a diversity; it may be slow in the beginning, but as people grow, through word of mouth or trying new things, it is good for them.

MSC: Do you think that food has the ability to bring a community together that may otherwise be divided, or may otherwise just not be... [In relationship? Or maybe just not as knowledgeable about each other's cultures and thus experiences?]

PK: I think yes. I think it does.

MSC: Yeah. And then suddenly, I was just thinking about when you're talking about lassi... What is the importance for you to pass these food traditions, and your knowledge about food, and your relationship to food – having been born in India, raised in India – to your children? And to younger generations?

PK: My kids grew up eating Indian food. We ate other foods, too. But my kids were not picky eaters. They may not eat certain things, but they ate Indian food. And it was in my house. It was, not never, but it wasn't fried food or the junk food – but the meals were based around Indian food. Maybe four or five times a week. They love food. And they love the Indian food. It's not spicy. It's on the healthier side. But other than that, it's like the mango lassi we're talking about. It's the memory of growing up in the hot – India where I come from it's very hot, – it's summer, going to these small

stalls where was only lassi, and that is not the lassi, that mango lassi, that you see here. Totally different lassi, because those yogurts are made in those clay pots – has a different flavor to it. There's a little clay flavor to it. And they make out of that, and they churn it by one of those churners. So it's not the same lassi. But the memory of that... stopping by when I went shopping with my mom, and we have to stop there, and they are served in a clay cup ... Even now the chai is served in a clay cup. They call it purwa, and it tastes, it smells totally different. Here, you can't do it. So those are the sweet memories, of you know, bringing the food and introducing it to – now my grandkids, they love the mango lassi. Mango lassi is not something in India; lassi is only plain lassi in India. It's the quality of the yogurt and the way. It's made it's not made in machine. Mango [lassi] is something created outside India.

I tried the white lassi too – just the plain lassi – it doesn't really do good. Like it's really food, you put cardamom in it, but it didn't do good. So, Mango lassi is something that is out there. and people recognize it, "Oh it's mango lassi." We need to bring the plain lassi ... see maybe with the cashews

and saffron and you know, on the richer side taste. Not the fruity side. There are lots of drinks with fruits and stuff.

MSC: When you're thinking about where you're sourcing your ingredients from?

PK: I mean, the vegetables has to be fresh. Ginger and garlic. I have to grind myself, to preserve that freshness. It's not the same if I buy it. It's convenient for me to buy it pre-minced in the jar. But then there are preservatives. The least the preservatives the better. The yogurt I buy – a yogurt is yogurt; and tofu is the fresh; paeer, there's not much preservatives in the panner. The vegetables are all fresh. The only frozen vegetable I have are the peas. And that's it. So I mean, it's more convenient and time-saving for me to use frozen spinach. The texture, and the smell, and the case changes with what is fresh. Even if it's pre-cut, the color is different than what you cut things right there before you cook.

MSC: This is a bit of a backtrack-ing, but so much of what you're talking about... the food is kind of just interwoven into your memories, interwoven into your childhood, into a lot of the stories too. Can food be a way for us to talk about difficult things as well? Do

you think that food can facilitate conversations about like, generational change, different things like that? ... Food can facilitate, like, harder conversations about generational change. And the thing that I have in mind is, like, diaspora and the trauma associated, in some cases, with diaspora, especially for people who are displaced. Or even just the experience of immigration [which] can be very different for different people.

PK: I think it can give comfort to people, if you put good food on the table, even in difficult times... In difficult times where, say there was a loss of family... And what I grew up with was the outpouring of food that people bring in times of any difficulty. You see people who love, will come, bring food. And that's a symbol of love and comfort. I do think that food can bring connection closer, or can be comforting and open up people to talk or relieve their difficulty in life.

If someone's going through a difficulty, or has a loss of some kind, my first thing would be cooking something for them. So I think even in broader sense, from the culture that I come – I'm a Sikh from North India. So, if you look into the Sikh history, in

their temples, they have kitchen, that 24 hours does food making. Anyone from any religion, any culture, and, you know, any place, can come and have food for free. And that's a service we provide. During COVID time, there was a free kitchen running. All the time. During times of unrest – there was political unrest; the Sikhs are actually on the border of Pakistan, and they are known by nature as warriors – but the kitchen runs. They will not discriminate anyone. So that's in the culture too. If you're passing from one city, driving from one city to the other city, where I have grown up it's called Langar, and that kitchen runs 24 hours. Tea, lunch, dinner. Homeless, rich – we all sit on the floor.

MSC: Coming to the US and being in Ann Arbor, do you feel a different sense of community?

PK: I was not raised as, as a religious person. My parents are very diverse. My grandmother was Nepali. She was not a Sikh. So I grew up hearing her doing some kind of meditation or chanting. But she had also adapted... I never saw my grandfather; my grandfather's the Sikh religion too. My parents were not strict that we have to go practice our religion in the temple. My mom did. And we had our own holy book in the house,

where she did her prayer, did her rituals, and she did her practice. I was raised in a Hindu area, where my friends are Hindu. I had friends who are Muslim. I had friends from all over the place. And we didn't see friends as Hindu or Muslim or Sikh. We were friends. You know, the families were friends. Now you will hear a lot of dispute between the Muslims and the Hindus. In India, it's history. There are Hindu friends that are their best friends are Muslims. My brother's best friend was Muslim. My best friend still now is Muslim... I was not raised as a staunch, religious person by my parents. So I was always open to diversity. And coming to us, I had language, you know, I learned language. I went to school; I learned English there. So it was easy for me to make sense. And I love and I respect people from different cultures, you know, it just, I can't be tied up to one culture – that's me. There are groups that are only, you know, Sikhs. They don't mingle, but I can practice myself better. I just have a broader view of engaging myself. It wasn't hard for me.

The life was totally different. It is a more relaxed life than India, even now. But I think living here for so long – I like structured way

and disciplined way of lifestyle. I can set; I can plan things. In India, in general, there is no planning; they don't look at the clock. So I'm – I have adapted to this life. And I do admire it. And I do respect that.

MSC: I wanted to ask you one more question. What is so special to you about street? Because you kind of mentioned that in passing... *[before I hit record, Priti had mentioned how much she loves easy to grab food; sandwiches, wraps, street food...]*

PK: You know, I don't like formalities. I like openness, and I like closeness, and I like – it's just the way things are fast moving. I like things fast moving. And I like to see, and I think there's freshness, more freshness, in there made on the spot. On the spot, that fire, I like to see the open kitchens.

MSC: See it all happening right before you?

PK: Yeah, yeah. There's some beauty about it. I mean, when I go to India, there is in New Delhi – there is a place where they only grow food, and the chicken hanging, and fire going, and the plates go, you know, rambling. And there's tandoori chicken, and there's some other kabobs going on. And it's fired. They're doing it right there. There's something fas-

inating about it. It's just this like, a central place, where people just sit down. They think about something from this stall, and they'll bring something else from this stall. They're making naan over there, they're making everything!

MSC: Yeah, that's amazing.

PK: That smell and aroma. It's all beautiful.



TOP: "I was a painter sometime in 1978."

BOTTOM: A photograph of Priti's packaged meals.

From left to right, butter paneer with rice, saag paneer with rice, and egg curry with rice (my personal favorite). Tiffin Tonight has meals available at a variety of locations on the U-M campus as well as both Argus Farm Stop locations.

A conversation with Yeh Rim Lee

Yeh Rim Lee is a Korean artist whose work utilizes traditional skills passed down to her by her parents who are both ceramics artists to explore texture and color in a manner that she describes as abundant and a part of late-stage capitalism (as our current working climate). Lee immigrated to the United States ten years ago after studying in ceramics in both Korea and China and now lives in California with her husband. I met Lee during her brief residency at the Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design and show Dopamine Dressing, currently on display at the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA). I had the opportunity to hear her speak as a part of the Penny Stamps Speaker Series and immediately reached out to see if she would be interested in being interviewed as a part of this project.

Lee was born in Seoul, Korea, and has been working in clay since a young age. She grew up in a family of artists and her father has made Korean onggi for over 30 years. As Lee puts it, clay has been there since the very beginning — maybe even before food — and Lee considers clay as much her first language as Korean. Lee's work, which includes explorations in paper, plastic, and a variety of other media, is interwoven with her background and skills in ceramics, including the traditional skills passed down to her by her father.

MSC: How do you identify yourself? This can be anything — any label or identity you want to share.

YL: I usually introduce myself as a Korean artist who immigrate here 10 years ago. I am still a Korean citizen. I identified myself more as Korean artist before, but now I am adapting those ideas to more Korean American. So I am in the transition of becoming Korean American as first-generation. So yeah when I introduce myself — Korean artist.

MSC: Where would you consider home?

YL: I think right now, where my family is. It's where my family is — but who is my family? It's my husband and parents, [but] they

are in two separate locations.

Because of marriage and because of my parents, [I am] constantly debating where is my home. My family was in Korea two years ago, and now I am married, and my family expanded to my husband's family too.

I think theoretically California is my home, but right now I'm really in the middle. I'm only child, so I'm thinking about my parents a lot. They are getting old. At the same time, I am new to my marriage, so in my brain this is my home. But in my heart I worry about my parents. So on the paper America — California. I don't think this is my home home yet.

MSC: During your talk, you

mentioned how your father always said that having traditional skills will always help you [in your work]. Would you consider your work in conversation with traditional Korean ceramics?

YL: It wasn't traditional skill, it was more just skill in general. In craft like ceramics or weaving, [it is] needed to learn skill to achieve skill. So he [my father] taught me his skill (the onggi making skill) that I cannot learn from the school. He practiced that skill for 30 to 40 years. He teach me skill that I can practice quickly and he think will be confident [and make me confident] to make whatever.

I didn't know I would make sculpture – I had no idea. But having any skill is having competent power for your practice. And then what his skill is, is traditional skill, so it [that artistic practice] could be traditional. Skill is the confidence, but his skill is the traditional. So I learn his skill that traditionally practice.

Visually my work is not talking with traditional but everything – like background, where the material come from, like how I make them and how I think about them – is all by traditional way of thinking. But how they look is not traditional. So that way my work is really connected with traditional

art in Asia and Korea. So I'm not just using coil building, the coil building I use is for onggi jar, which is the fermented jar. So they have different type of coil building from the master, so I use those skill. You cannot see the onggi jar in my work using exactly same skill from those masters because my father taught me.

My father is more of an artist than master. There's people making tradition; they replicate the tradition for thousand years. We call those people master; my father is more like artist. He used those skills. He's using onggi skill too. He's not making onggi jar: little different from traditional onggi jar because traditional onggi jar is supposed to use specific type of glaze, dark. He's using normal glaze, so he's using onggi skill but he's decorated different way. The aesthetic is a response to tradition. My father is really really respecting tradition and history. That's how he introduced those fields to me because he thinks that's really really valuable and beautiful. And I agree too, but I value other things and he respects that too.

My work is reconstructed onggi jar. That's my first title, Reconstructed Feminine Vessel. It looks different, but I definitely think that

the history and the traditional is in my work. And because I studied those traditional and history, I can confidently go far. For example when you make food, you have to know how to make kimchi first to go on to make fusion food. Without knowing the original recipe, people think like that's good food [*but it isn't rooted in anything/ maybe it doesn't recognize where it comes from*]. If I was second generation or third generation and I didn't grow up in those specific traditions or historical background, I probably curious about those tradition more. So I probably go back the other way as my personality (the more traditional route). But I grow up from those traditions, so I go the opposite. So knowing something really deep and like study really deep about where you come from is I think the confident to go far, and then you know where you come back. That's what I think. I know where to go back. [*Lee knows where her story comes from; she knows the traditions*].

MSC: This is a bit of a switch up, but how would you describe your relationship with food?

YL: Hmm. That's really good question. In the first five years come to here, I didn't miss Korean food that much. I was living

in really countryside in United States, like upstate New York or West Virginia or Montana where I cannot have Asian food that easily. I was young and open to new idea. Eating burger – I don't care I think it's delicious as other Korean food. But the most recent place, most recent remote place I lived, is Helena, Montana. And again they don't have like Asian food

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My work is reconstructed onggi jar.

.....

there. After [age] 30 I start to see myself making kimchi by myself. So I think like for 20s, relationship with my food, Korean food, was like same as my journey with my art. Go as far, and I don't miss it. But I think like going farther and farther, I slightly come back to make my own kimchi. I just made tteokbokki 10 minutes before I talk with you! I live in California, but it's not like LA or San Francisco. It's rural countryside, so again I have hard time getting Asian food here. I don't know why I keep living rural countryside in United States [*laughs*] but now I'm making my comfort food all the time at home.

I always say I'm not good cook, I'm not enjoying cooking, that's

what I always say. But now I like making Korean food all the time. So yeah, back to the question, my relationship with food is like my work. I go far, much far and then I miss it. And then by the time I miss it again, I go back to the tradition again. A back and forth. I think that's my journey for art and my journey for food.

MSC: That's a really nice way of describing it. Do you see your relationship with food tied to your sense of place? You kind of touched on that being in these rural areas, but how do you think about where you are in relation to food?

YL: Those rural place definitely make me cook more, and I think that's important. When I don't care about Korean food, I wasn't interested in cooking. I rather go to buy convenient food, which

is why I'm eating American food [in the past]. Rural countryside it's not just [lacking] Korean food, they have nothing there. Thai food, Chinese food-they don't have anything there. But by that time [*when Lee was younger and living in slightly less rural places*], I would just eat whatever they had, now it's not. I look at the recipe and look at Youtube to make what I eat. Definitely living in rural countryside, I study about recipe more and learning about how to make food more so I can make the food as mimic what my mom made for me. And when I live in LA or NYC, I would never eat real Korean food.

MSC: Just like what you were ordering wasn't real Korean food?

YL: Like never you can get. I think food is also in talk with space a lot. Like Korea is really



LEFT: Lee seated in a studio environment wearing an apron. In progress sculptural works frame her on either side. RIGHT: A picture of the Dopamine Dressing show at UMMA.

big fan of seafood, but living in rural countryside, even if I make it, I can't get the seafood they like. And also like parts of meat or fish or parts of things – I have hard time to get those parts. I can eat fresher food over there [in Korea]. For example eel. Last time I go to Korea, we eat grilled eel. My husband, he never tried eel in his life – grilled eel, not sushi eel. I can only eat those things in Korea or Japan. They grow for that food; their land is for that food. So I cannot taste that really small difference. I mimic the food because I miss it, but if I want to eat real Korean food I have to go there. Because water, landscape, how they farm and grab things is all different. So food represents their land, and their characteristic of the people too. Living as an immigrant person, it's always missing and always mimics. Even if I go to really expensive restaurant in LA, probably \$5 street food in Korea is more delicious I think.

MSC: You mentioned your mother's cooking – were you very involved in the cooking in your family? Or how are you exposed to food growing up?

YL: Yeah, I mean I was not involved in cooking that much, but I eat her food all the time. And even though I didn't ask her, she

explains [*how to make the food, what she is making, etc.*]. By that time we didn't know I would live in United States, so she would always say if you had baby in the future, if you pregnant you will miss this – mom's food. And she talks about recipes. [Back then], I think that was mom's talking. That time when I was young I was like, "Oh yeah my mom talk about the food again." But for some reason those conversations remain here in my brain, so whenever I stay home and miss Korea those conversations come up. I didn't involve the cooking that much, but those small talk is coming back in my kitchen. Then finally I get what does that mean, and I really miss that food.

And then a lot of my other Korean friends, they are really good cooks.

And also culture in Korean is [that] they love to share food. They make a lot and then they pack kimchi and give kimchi to people – or whatever food they make.

It's a really shared culture. So even by that time I was like, "Wow they are amazing" [Lee's friends] but... I still not confident to share my food with other people. But those sharing culture and all those culture come to my kitchen or my

practice, and it's like living further and further. I understand food is important a lot. Good thing is like Youtube. Because of Youtube I see a lot of food traveling shows. I cannot imagine people who before Youtube, how they make the food. They really record those tips what their mom and grandma said. Right now, sometimes Youtube gives better tips to me than my mom gave to me *[laughs]*.

I think that's really interesting, the internet is bringing diverse recipes from each different family's recipe – other country. When I lived in China, I really loved Chinese food. It was like really, "Oh my god! Chinese food is amazing." It's just like so delicious. And then after China, actually after that year, I come to United States. So I live in China one year, then next year I live in United States and then go to Panda Express, and I really like, "Oh... this is interesting" *[laughs]*.

I think it makes it funny or almost comical [in reference to American Chinese food]. At the same time it's delicious in that way.

MSC: This is a bit of shift, but I wanted to talk more about clay and ceramics. During your talk, you mentioned the comfort you find with clay, and I was wondering if you could speak more about

that.

YL: I even living in different country, if I touch clay, it brings me to my childhood– like when I touch clay with my father. So for that way clay is my comfort zone because that materiality, that feeling, and memories bring me back to my family in Korea. So the place I using the clay becomes Korea and my childhood; So that way my comfort zone. And at the same time, for the other way, being in other countries always having language barrier, and first three years I always avoid people talk to me because I have hard time to communicate with them because still I don't understand and I have hard time to talk. So whenever I touching clay, it's my escape from those language barrier. So for that way it's comfortable. Touching clay is more comfortable than talking to people for the really beginning of immigrant time. Clay is both like my escape zone and comfort zone to record my child memory.

MSC: That makes a lot of sense. I also love the way you described it as a language in itself. You communicating through the clay...

YL: I mean it was even more easier because Korean is my first language; clay is my first language. English is my second

language; Chinese is my second language. So whoever like talk to me in second language I was so nervous. So I use clay language easier. That's a comfort zone.

MSC: When you talk about Korean food and your practice of making Korean food, and then clay as something that is so rooted in every part of you... [similar to food]. Do you consider the two of those to be intertwined? Or do they exist separately?

YL: I mean, absolutely, it's intertwined because the food is as you say – food represents those cultures. So I am Korean, I love Korean food, and I eat those food and those language. But the clay was there from the beginning for me. So they absolutely cannot separate... My mom is a ceramic artist too, so she touching clay while I was in her womb... so probably even before I eat food. I mean, like, she eat food while she as pregnant with me. But at the same time, when she had me, she eat food and she practice ceramics. So it was all at the beginning for me.

MSC: And then when you think about clay itself, it's very earthy and associated with land and place. Do you think about that in your own work too? And in relation to food? How do you think

about the medium [of clay], as a part of the earth? [*as something that is such a part of the earth and yet removed, is what I might say if I could go back...*]

YL: Can you repeat?

MSC: Yeah, I guess something I've been thinking about in this process is kind of like the parallels of food as from the land and clay is such an earthy material. Do you think about where your clay is from? Or how do you think about the groundedness in your work?

YL: So it's good and really big question. So each country produces different kind of clay. In Asia, really back into history, when they first made ceramics in history in China and Korea, by that time they dig the ground and make the ceramics. It's not by the recipe, it's just by the land: the motherland. China and Korean both produce high fire temperature clay so they using high fire porcelain and high fire earthen stoneware. But in Europe, in their land, they don't produce high fire clay, they have low fire clay like pannecotta or soft England, like soft ceramics. So when I come to United States, the first time I used low fire clay to mimic the tradition of United States, because low fire clay is not the historic way of ceramics in Asia. But I raise my temperature

to higher after a while - what was the question? I think I'm going towards your question.

MSC: Yes you definitely are. It was just how do you think about where your clay is from and about land in relation to your clay? [as well as work]

YL: Right right. So in that way I like those traditional feeling of clay. That's why I started using

you made that shift from low fire to high fire, was that in relation to you thinking about how you're familiar with high fire? Or was that because you liked a particular [clay] body better [*a clay body is a type of clay i.e. terra cotta or stoneware; that is it*].

YL: I thought I liked low fire the first time. For 3-4 years, when I come to United States because

Korean is my first language; clay is my first language.

.....

higher fire and higher temperature clay than low fire clay. My father actually dig the clay by himself, and he's traveling Korea. Once in a while he goes to the mountain, he digs the clay, and he makes the work out of the Korea clay. And then whenever he's in the workshop outside of Korea the feeling of work is never that way because the land is different and material is different. So I'm not doing that, I'm not using the clay I dig but those concept of high fire clay in my work is connected with the idea of the clay [*as in more traditional and rooted in place - place being Korea*].

MSC: You were saying when you

low fire, you can create more vivid color and there is more variety of like - it looks more like acrylic to me than like celadon or porcelain. So for me in my mind celadon, porcelain, onggi, those things are traditional looking and other things with more color is low fire which mimic more acrylic colors. I really enjoy the colors because I like color, but what I found out was that this didn't look like ceramic to me. I needed some kind of rich and traditional feeling in my work. People didn't [and don't] recognize, but in my practice I like those traditional feeling of ceramics, so I always put high fire temperature as a base and fire

lower and lower and lower.

MSC: Yeah, because you refire a lot of times.

YL: Yeah, I refire a lot. The first firing is my traditional way of glaze, then I cover with more color and texture as the contemporary way. But that can be changed too because fire that much after school and residency is really expensive so. Practice can change but so far, the Dopamine show, that was higher fire and low fire. Higher fire is more traditional idea of ceramics and low fire is more colorful, more contemporary idea.

MSC: That makes a lot of sense. I have one more question which is related to your ceramics practice. So your work touches on ideas like late stage capitalism, abundance, and decadence. I was wondering how you kind of came to focus on those ideas?

YL: After I learned traditions and deep connections and deep, deep, deep historical ideas. Coming to United States is like freedom to not think about that. So those expression itself is freedom, like color or texture. Just thinking about those simple ideas is really big shock to me because I don't – it come to my work, long story, but I don't need to make tradition. I can make tradition or I don't need to, both those ideas are in

this country so I started making what I like, which is those that are connected with capitalism. So I am not critiquing capitalism or those ideas. I am not talking about this is bad or good, I am just talking about the existence of what it is in capitalism. It's like my work, it's just what it is. People like color and texture as a fashion, and they buy things and they like over abundance. It's what it is. I'm not talking about that's bad that's the problem, or that's good. It's just as it is.

MSC: Are you saying it's not a critique, it's just part of what it is existing [*that we exist in conditions of late stage capitalism and the work is itself abundant and decadent*]. You're saying we exist in late stage capitalism, [and] this is part of it? [*"this" being Lee's work*].

YL: Yeah it is just human condition as it is. I come from such a deep historical and traditional base, and I always question thousands years of history. Coming here this is what it is, and what is happening in the world. It can change, it can develop, it can be critiqued but that's what it is.

[*and then we wrapped up our conversation and said our good-byes.*]

Poems to share — from Hesna Faaris

Hesna is a poet and visual artist with a mission to explore hospitality, community, and citizenship throughout food and various art mediums. Hasna and I first met in high school as a part of an art showing at the Unity Vibrations tasting room in Ypsi. We have known each other for years, drifted in and out of each other's lives, and seem to always have plans to get coffee sometime in the near future. We first connected over our love of good food, good people, and art, and that connection remains. We unfortunately didn't have a chance to sit down and talk about this project, but I knew I wanted to include Hesna's voice in these pages in some way or another. They generously shared these poems with me to, in turn, share with you all.

we should make a documentary about aunties

Collect the nosiest ladies your village has to offer, a couple stik-an, and some damn good gossip to share

these are the materials that'll bring the neighborhood ladies to you like ghosts at a seance

with creeky knees to set the soundtrack

Selima will give you spinoff material, from what she saw at the market just last week

these ladies carry their stories, and everybody else's like the groceries they balance on their heads all the way home

they carry tales of infidelity and the best way to pickle to your beets better than they'd like to admit

and until our wrists start to wrinkle like the dough they knead,, we'll be stunned at how these oracles knew

about that boyfriend, that outfit you swore your mama would never see, hell even your test scores aren't safe from your aunties

but every now and then,, these info vultures crack, and remind us that they too were girls
with dreams and a lover to hide
they too were girls

dolma roast for the soul

been looking at iraqi dolma recipes for 6 weeks now

you always add sugar before the parsley

it'll make up for the bitter in the tomato paste

if you switch the ground beef out for diced sirloin

it'll taste like summer nights where the wind chills

just enough to act as a fan everyone forgets the citric acid

how else do you get the sour to sing

my mother got the recipe from her neighbor because her mother couldn't cook

i left home before i learned it before i could broil lineage

back into bones

i've frankensteined the recipes of 20 iraqi women

in an effort to recreate my moth-

er's trademark
held a million bodies & no one's
arms are firm enough
to knead the ideal stuffing
mama would say the key is
avoiding shortcuts
wrapped in grape leaves
i am a path of shortcuts
a labyrinth of wrong recipes
my momma would make a day
out of dolma
spend 2 hours alone forging
onion shells
cutting zucchini
carving out the seeds
we would simmer the bitter out
let it breathe for at least 15
minutes
before she would flip the pot
on a now overflowing tray

bad roads love us too

i think of the ways baghdad tried
to love me

with her raspberry slushies
& prayer beads

her cement trucks &
traffic hubs long enough to grill
you alive

every road is unpaved
each slice of concrete holds a
branch for my family tree

blocks of sidewalk show me the 5
miles

my parents walked to school

on calcined lime & broken radia-
tor

each step is a family reunion

on asphalt that can't tell me apart
from my cousins

baghdad/ a door that doesn't
recognize my key
baghdad the auntie who needs to
be reminded what my name is

baghdad places two kisses on
each cheek
before calling me by my mother's
name

***(dead) as in corpses
were involved***

my mother says war is coming

"the sky tastes the same as the
day we fled baghdad"

the air sits on my tongue

my mouth spends the next twenty
days reacquainting itself
with the hiding feeling

before we fled
we spent three months couped
up in a little brick house

at the (dead) end of hayil aamils
sandiast road

we hid

(dead) silent
stretched one bag of jasmine rice
three months

turned the fruit to jam before it
went bad

sticky air
& marshmallow

fine with our jasmine rice our jam
our hiding feeling our silence

this could have been the first time
i swallow blood

until the knocking came
until we got 8 minutes to grab
what we could and flee

today i watch my mother cut citrus
in perfect halos

in the car ride across the border
i might have asked my mother for
fruit

she places them in a glass jar with
ginger and bathes it all in honey

five years old
hello kitty pajamas unsoiled
i am hungry
i have a moon pie for dinner

she wants the fruit to last : she's
turning some of it to jam

my mother uses the last of her
cash to buy this ride

we sit together and talk about
god that night

my tastebuds marinate
in the hum of SUV tires on dirt
road

we sit together and talk about
god

our voices a hymn
ringing like fresh fruit on a lovers
doorstep



*"I don't have a photo !
So I will send u a picture
of a clementine."*

ابراهيم

on my 5th eid/my cousin ابراهيم/climbed the brick fence/that kissed the date tree/in our front yard/other side
decorated/with barbed wire/our neighbors put it there/when the boys from down the street/climbed the
fence/into their daughters bedroom/this border satiates/a craving for something sweet/a deflowering/a taste/of
girl/of fruit/it's his 5th eid too/ابراهيم wants a date/with bulbs for hands/stumbles up alabaster bricks/a block
away from harvest/ابراهيم & his cardamom belly/full of the wrong flesh/a bad plum/a fig ballooned/with helium
wasps/i watch him fly/clutch at sun/skid/slip/slither/his shoe is off/ابراهيم is mist/ابراهيم gets the barbed wire
reserved for boys/with curious hands & impudent leaps/ابراهيم gets the piglet shirt/we used to stop the
bleeding/ابراهيم is barbed wire/is his eid clothes/& the shouts for his left shoe/forget the blood/forget the metal
in his cranium/& the fallen dates/forget in this moment/ابراهيم is still a boy/ابراهيم still wants his shoes/ابراهيم is
still/ابراهيم is christopher walken/alloy cords honey/i am winnie/gently lifting his head/into pink cloth/halting
raspberry leaks/waiting for the sun/to drop a candied fledging/into this ingot bush

A conversation with Indira Sankaran —

Indira is a junior at the University of Michigan majoring in Programming in the Environment (PitE) with a specific interest in water, aquatic life, and water ways. I am not entirely sure where I met Indira. It may have been at a UAAO event, potentially in the basement of Vail Co-Op... But we crossed paths a number of times this year, and after running into her again at the Maize & Blue Cupboard. I asked if she would be interested in talking with me as a part of this project.

MSC: So I start these interviews kinda just by asking what identifies you claim or what identities you'd wanna share with like a reader.

IS: Yeah so, I'm mixed, so I am half Indian and half white. But my mom is Italian so it's definitely, like, mixed between Indian and Italian. But yeah that's what I kind of identify racially and ethnicity-wise. Gender identity? I've been going through a lot of ideas. So I go by she/her pronouns, but it's been interesting within the past couple months developing through that. I'm like still deciding what pronouns to use, but I think for now it's like what I kind of express as. And then, yeah I think that's what I kind of identify as. I feel like it changes, it evolves all the time. You identify in so many different ways, and so many different eras, like how we go through our childhoods towards, like, everything. So yeah, I feel like I identify with a lot of things but it always changes.

MSC: Exactly yeah that makes total sense; we're always transforming.

IS: Transforming! Yes.

MSC: Also I feel like gender is never a static thing. Or even how you identify, like all those things aren't static.

IS: Yes, yeah. And I know it's hard to like, bind that towards specific pronouns, because I'm like yes, pronouns are amazing but sometimes I don't know if I can define myself within these specific things that we have within our society.

MSC: Yeah, that makes sense. Going from there – this is like a new question – but how do you think about yourself in the food system? And what work do you do, whether that's with an organization or just yourself [within our food system]? And how do you consider your relationship with food?

IS: Yeah, okay, so growing up... my aunt owns a farm in New Hampshire, so every summer I

would spend my days there. It was just an amazing experience going on a farm and going there every summer and being with my cousins, being with my family, and just being in that very immersive experience. I had so much fun, like, riding the tractors and going with the horses and picking so many blueberries. It was like, I don't know how to describe it, but such a wholesome – and that's why I got into PitE (Programming in the Environment) because it just brought me in touch with nature and my family. So I grew up definitely with a hard-working farmer within my family. But then I think it evolved towards me like working at the Maize and Blue Cupboard, being within Ann Arbor and being a college student, and knowing firsthand the struggles of finding food in a cheaper way. Especially living in a city where it's rich, finding healthy options is so hard. So I really wanted to be part of Maize and Blue because it's such an immersive experience, really like literally anyone can come in. It does not matter about your financial status; it doesn't matter. It's open and free to the public, whoever has a MCard. And I really love how welcoming it is. Yeah, that's where I'm at right now, just being a part of that food system

where I can give food to anyone. And they can come in no questions asked, and they can leave no questions asked.

MSC: So are you really interested in utilizing resources or making resources known?

IS: Yes. I am thoroughly part of that. I love working with organizations, the grassroots organizations, making sure everyone knows about the resources. I feel like, especially within Maize and Blue but also MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences), no one knows about these things! And it's such a nice experience to be a part of, and I want everybody to experience it. Like I really want people to know about it.

MSC: How did you get involved with Maize and Blue?

IS: It's funny because my friend... I was part of a GroupMe, and they were like we're just looking for people to work at this place and I was like well... I need a job. And I was like you know what I'll work at Maize and Blue Cupboard. I also worked as a lifeguard, so I had like two different incomes and it was hard. Like working two jobs, I was like oooof. But it was just... I really liked working at Maize and Blue Cupboard, because it was like I get paid, but

get paid for doing what I love. So yeah, that was good.

MSC: Would you say there's like an aspect of community or just like relationship building in Maize and Blue? Or do you feel pretty detached from the customers that come through?

IS: I think it depends. I feel like within Maize and Blue I do feel a little detached, because I never know if I'm like overstepping. Because a lot of customers just want to come in and out. Especially if they're coming with their family or if they're like a recurring customer, sometimes they don't want any conversation, like, at all. And I feel like we're trying to change that with tabling services and the samples that we give, but I think when first-time customers come in, I think that's when I feel more connected. It's when I talk to them and am like, "This is our layout, you don't have to check out or anything, this is all free." And I love seeing their faces light up, they're like, "We don't have to check out? This is all free?" Like that's the most wholesome experience... a person coming in for their first time, and I wanna like navigate them through it. But overall I think sometimes it can be a little detached; it also depends on the day. Sometimes I'm really

tired, and I can't really like interact that well with a person, so yeah.

MSC: It's also so interesting because, with Maize and Blue, you don't ask customers to write down what they're taking or to even really do much of anything as they're leaving the space, in relation to what they're taking. What do you think about that?

IS: That's an interesting question. I feel it comes with... we wanna create a space where people can come in and not feel stigma. If people write down what they're getting, it's keeping a list of what they got, and if they see it it's like, oh my gosh I've taken too much, you know? So there's that aspect. And then there's another aspect, where we wanna create it kinda like a store? I know a lot of different food pantries they have like a cash register, even though it's all free. Like they're still like bagging their food and stuff. So it has that like, kind of humanizing aspect, where they're actually going to a grocery store, but it's like -

MSC: So it doesn't feel like stigmatized?

IS: Stigmatized. Yes, yes. And so it's definitely interesting how people kind of set it up.

MSC: Yeah, that's interesting. And then can you describe in your own words what Maize and Blue

Cupboard is what your role is?

IS: Maize and Blue Cupboard is a food pantry that's in the basement of a dorm house. I feel like it's very, like cut off sometimes.

MSC: Yeah, the physical space.

IS: And it's basically like, physically and just like overall, it's a little bit cut off. And I think in my role as a worker, I'm just like, stocking. I'm just like, doing my role, you know? And I feel like, within the whole managerial aspect, I think my manager, Kelly, she's trying to change a lot of stuff. But, within my role, I feel like sometimes I don't have the space to do it. Because I just come in for a couple hours, and then I just leave.

MSC: Yeah.

IS: And it's so busy sometimes because we have like tabling events we have like, all these different organizations come in. We have UMSFP (University of Michigan Sustainable Food Program) with their food lab. And sometimes we don't know what they're doing. So we're just like... Okay, we'll just, you know, we'll just keep to ourselves, and we'll try to help them do their stuff.

MSC: So is there much cross-over between UMSFP and Maize and Blue?

IS: I feel like, within my role, I

don't really know. Like, I don't really know a lot. We don't have any really good connection events. Because they usually have their Communities of Practice. Like they have food lessons or cooking classes.

MSC: But they're not – do Maize and Blue staff overlap with that or no?

IS: Not really, no. Which is interesting. Like, it's very interesting how, although people are always like, "Oh, yeah, Maize and Blue Cupboard, like you have to go to this amazing resource." A lot of the different food organizations, there's not a lot of intermingling or like, events that happen. And so I feel like that's the one thing where like, it just becomes an added resource that people can go to. And not collaborative, with events.

MSC: In some ways, would you say that's a good thing? Because it's like, at its bare bones, it should just be a food resource... or do you think that a sense of more community would be a good thing?

IS: I don't know. I feel like it depends on the customers that come in. I think that's why we sometimes have events or meetings. Or there's something called SAN (Student Advocates for Nutri-

tion). Which is, there's a bunch of students that are like a supportive network, where they like, tell us – oh, this is what you need to –

MSC: More like an advisory?

IS: Advisory, yes – what you need to work on. As a worker, I don't know people's experiences coming in, and what they want. But coming from my experience, I feel like a sense of community may be better. But then again, from a customer standpoint, maybe people just want it to be bare bones, a food pantry, where they just come in and come out.

MSC: I know you guys have that program where you can come and eat a meal?

IS: Yes. Yeah. And then you talk about it.

MSC: What is that?

IS: Yeah, we had one recently, and I think a lot of it was having to do with aspects of how it's laid out, basically. I think a lot of people are more in tune, or are more worried about, the layout of the food pantry, more than the sense of community. Like they wanted an extra table for, you know, bagging and stuff.

MSC: So it was like a feedback session?

IS: Yeah, feedback. And they wanted another produce stand or something like that. So it's

feedback on the overall layout. I don't know if it has to do with like, organizational skills.

MSC: That's cool, though. That you have like a space where people can give that.

IS: Exactly. Yeah. Because I think that's what the most important thing is, having what other people think about. Like, that's why they come in, and like understanding their opinions, like what they want.

MSC: And it's responsive.

IS: Yeah, exactly. Like, my manager immediately ordered an extra table or immediately wanted something to come in.

MSC: Yeah, that makes sense. And then, I guess I did kind of ask you this question, but I've wanted to ask it again, because I feel like it's different when it's disattached from the like, normal food system. But how would you describe your relationship with food and the role that food has played in your life?

IS: Yeah, I feel like for me, it's definitely coming back to farming. I think growing up with my aunt's farm... I don't know how to describe it... Like, it does have to do with culture. But then again, it has to do with like, how the food was made. And like the love and respect that is put into it. Because my aunt completely made that

farm in like rural, like redneck New Hampshire. Like, she did that all by herself. And I think seeing that, and seeing her as a role model, and like the love and the hard work that she put into that food and the produce that she made... So I think my connection to food has to do with how much effort people put into it. And from my parents perspective, like the cultural aspects, like how they cook their food... My dad spent an entire day just cooking huge ass portions.

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“... how I connect my family, is through food.”

And it'samazing to see the amount of work and amount of love that they put into it. I think that's important coming from an immigrant perspective, where how they connect to their loved ones is through food. And so seeing those two different perspectives where my aunt, who's a farmer, who put so much hard work into that, and like her food, and seeing that nurturing aspect, and then my dad's representation of how he views food as like, his love language, and how he kind of connects to his...

MSC: Yeah. And then they're

both coming together.

IS: They're both coming together, yeah. So that's something really interesting, is like the farmers perspective and the immigrant perspective.

MSC: Yeah, the people cooking the food and the people who grow the food.

IS: Yes, exactly. Where they come together because they love and they put so much work into their food. That's how they connect to others.

MSC: Yeah, that's really interesting. Because you're kind of saying like, the two different cultures are like your two different sides of your family, right?

IS: Exactly, yeah.

MSC: That's really cool. Do you feel like food is something that unites your family in lot of ways? Especially coming from like a mixed background?

IS: Yeah, I think definitely. I mean, like, it's so interesting how food... like I was literally talking to my roommate about this. I'm going home for the weekend, and I'm going to have so much food. Like, that's how I connect my family, is through food. And I think that's what brings my family together. How they express their love is through the amount of food that they create, and what

they grow and stuff. And even like, where they get it from. My dad loves going to the Indian market. Like that's his main thing. And seeing him, like, express his generation and his cultural background by going to like a market ... Like, that's the food that he grew up with. I think that's where, you know, I – that's totally off-top-ic. But yeah.

MSC: No, that makes sense. I also feel like so much of this project is thinking about how food, land, and place kind of come together. And oftentimes people will associate land and place as kind of the same things. But I was wondering how you think about those two ideas in relation to the food you eat, the food that's grown?

IS: Yeah. I think it's interesting because although, land and food connect... I don't know how to answer this question. But I'm gonna try. I feel like, coming here, like, in my dad's perspective – I'm gonna hone in on my dad because as an immigrant I think he's definitely had to change a lot of his ideals. I feel like, coming here, it has given him a sense of comfort to making that food and like connecting back to his roots. But I think he's also had to change a lot of his recipes, especially from

his like, mom's recipes, because he can't find the ingredients that were, you know, from India. like he can't find that within Michigan, you know? So he's had to, like, kind of westernize those recipes. But he still has that connection. And he still has an opportunity to make that. If that makes sense.

MSC: Yeah, that does make sense. And also, I was wondering what you think about that, like, as someone who works at a food cupboard, and but also as someone who's a PiTE major? How do you think about the balance of the importance for people to have access to culturally relevant ingredients, but also the balance of like, the impacts of globalization on our environment?

IS: Yeah, no, that's really interesting.

MSC: And honestly, how that kind of comes back to your experience too, as someone who is the child of an immigrant?

IS: Yeah, I feel like within that perspective, it's so important to have opportunity and access for people to have those culturally relevant foods. I don't know how to answer this question. I'm trying to like –

MSC: It's a hard question.

IS: It's a hard question, yeah.

MSC: It doesn't have to be

right, it can be very much just like a round –

IS: A roundabout, okay. I took a globalization class last semester, and we talked a lot about agriculture systems, especially in different parts of the world. But in America, I think the fact that we have these large-scale operations, and we try to kind of put those large-scale operations into all these different ecosystems, where they don't fit, where we grow... we're now growing avocados in like, I don't know, Florida or something like that... And they don't fit with each other. I think we're trying to make it so that we still have that connection to like all these different foods. But then it comes at the sacrifice of our, you know –

MSC: Our own ecosystem.

IS: Yeah. Which is like, I don't know if that makes a lot of sense. I'm trying to find a balance between like, yes, we we need to have access to these different foods and stuff. Where like, people have the opportunity to cook their own food that they came from. But it comes at the cost of, where's it sourced? Where are we getting this food? Like, is it ethically made? Or the labor. Like, are the people getting the their wages? And the laborers...

MSC: Yeah, are there good working conditions?

IS: Yes, exactly. Like, I think there's that balance between having that food that people grew up with, but then also, you know, where is it? Is it sourced ethically?

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“People can view water, but they don't have access to it.”

MSC: And would you say that these questions are ones that you think about a lot? Or like what are your kind of areas of focus in PiTE? And then also, like, as someone who's a member of MANNRS, what are you thinking about?

IS: I did not have a focus on agriculture at all. I am more focused on STEM and bio-related topics. And going into MANNRS, where it's more like food systems, I definitely had to change my perspective. But in a good way. Because like, my research focus, my passions, are very aquatic. I love the water. I love being by the water. I love the Great Lakes. And that's what I really want to do in my future is kind of like, be by any coast. And like, literally, I could go on for hours, but I love analyzing stuff. That's how my brain works. Like looking at the small things

and understanding why our world and our nature is what it is, especially in aquatic systems, because we don't know anything about it.

But going into MANNRS, going into Maize and Blue, like within my background as somebody who's been on farms, it's interesting, because I think our culture is such a unique and amazing focus. And it's just changing my perspective on like... I don't know, I love the water, but like, I love food. And I love how it's re-assembled and how we kind of create it. So like, I don't know, I feel like...

MSC: And they're so interwoven, though, right?

IS: Yeah.

MSC: Like water, land and food. Like you only get food with land and water.

IS: Yeah, and exactly. And the rights that we have to it. Like, I don't know. I just want people to take more PiTE classes. That's it. Because I feel like it is, it's an underrated world. And no one knows about it. But it's so connected to everyone. Like everyone can have some connection to nature. And the water and everything, and even their food. And people don't know about it until they're like taking a class that talks about it. And then they find that connection. So yeah.

MSC: And a lot of this project is also thinking about indigeneity, and our access to native foods or native food staples, but also thinking and recognizing that, like, we are inherently not in our native land, right? Oftentimes, the people I'm interviewing are second generation, first generation or refugees – and everyone immigrates here for a reason. But how do you think about that? In relation to food, but also when you're thinking navigating waterways and things like that.

IS: Yeah, I know what you're saying.



A photograph of Indira in a greenhouse surrounded on either side by lush greenery. Indira is standing on a brick pathway smiling at the camera. She has a waterbottle in her left-hand and is turning towards the viewer.

MSC: It's a hard question too.

IS: No, I mean, these questions got me thinking. I feel like I'm saying some stupid stuff, but I'm trying.

MSC: No, it's okay. It's also, like, I feel like a lot of this process for me has just been like, sitting down, talking with people and like pushing questions I don't have answers to either, but just... *[just starting conversations, I would say; and taking the time to connect with people within my community already engaged in such interesting spaces and food adjacent work... that is truly what this project has been about].* How you kind of think about like, occupation and indigeneity in relation to food, land place, but also your interest in water?

IS: Just trying to see... yeah.

MSC: Just having conversations with people about tough topics in our community.

IS: Yeah. And that needs to be talked about! Honestly, for me as a second gen, but also because my mom's white, it's definitely been interesting with my identity and... It's interesting because water is everywhere, but it also isn't. I feel like people can view water, but they don't have access to it, especially on the west coast where a lot of indigenous com-

munities do not have access to these rivers that are only going to LA, you know? That's not meant to have so many population in it. So I think within that, it's interesting to see how a lot of people who have grown up here, had generations here, still don't have access. Because it's fuel to the people that have colonized that region. And so I feel like a lot of people have felt that disconnect. Where like, they have that disconnect from their land, because they don't have access to it. And I feel like that's an interesting aspect, and that's where my interests lie. I love bio, I love the interconnectedness of nature. But seeing that relationship with humans is such an important aspect in this day and age. And how our different generations, I guess the people that have been here the longest, and the people that have come here, like, as a second gen first gen, just seeing how people relate to the water. Also their generational knowledge. But it's like that disconnect, because they don't have access to it. I don't know if that makes sense.

MSC: That does make sense. I think that's really interesting... the idea of being separated from your native resources or native land creates a sense of disconnection,

even within a community [... that may still be in that physical land, but simply denied access to their generational home, in all its form]. Obviously, that's true for our historic land, right, like the people who lived here. Like the Anishinaabe – Ojibwe, Potawatomi [*– the Three Fires Confederacy, made up of the Ojibwe (Chippewa), Odawa (Ottawa), and Potawatomi North American Native tribes*]]. But, also thinking about how that applies to Asian and Asian American communities. And like, what it means when we don't come here, by choice; or even as like second generation, we don't necessarily have a sense of attachment to much of anywhere... Maybe... [*This was the last interview that I did as a part of this project, and much of this conversation with Indira is a culmination of the tens of conversations, and thus thoughts, I was having leading up until this point.*]

IS: Yeah, I totally feel that. Like, I feel like my dad was forced to come here for his education, like he was forced to literally leave his entire family to come here. And although he's lived here most of his life, I still see him not feeling connected to the land that he has... He has been here for longer than he was in India.

You can live in land for as long as you want to, but you still don't feel that connection to it. Because like, you may have been forced on that land, or you may have just not had the resources to fully have that generational... You know. And so yeah, I think it's definitely interesting seeing that firsthand, but also within the historical sense too. And it's completely different. So yeah.

MSC: Yeah. And then the more fun side of these interviews is always asking what food traditions your family has or that you have?

IS: My gosh, food traditions. Oh, let me think about this.

MSC: That can also just be like, favorite recipes. It doesn't have to be deep.

IS: Yeah, no, oh, my god, favorite foods? I'm trying to think. So okay, thinking about my dad... My dad likes to cook a lot of food. I became vegetarian like four years ago, but he used to cook some really mean lamb. And it hits so good. Oh, my God, I used to come home from swim practice, and I, like, ate it up so much. And he spent so much time on it. He would spend [his] entire Sunday just making this lamb. And then just the amount of spices that you smell when you first walk into the doorway, and you're like, I'm go-

ing to eat good tonight. Like you already know. I think that's one thing that like. I miss just walking into my house, and you can like smell it, and you're like ooooooh.

MSC: And you associate that with nurture and love, because it's such a labor of love.

IS: Yeah exactly. And that's how he connects with me. And through the different spices that he has and the different... like how he makes his food. He's connecting to how he has grown up but also connecting to his family like to myself. So yeah, I think that's one food tradition. And then oh my god, this is gonna sound so funny, but my family's – we're just a really weird group of people and we don't really celebrate holidays that much. I didn't know this was a universal thing, but on New Year's we would always go to this Asian buffet. And we would go there all the time, because we don't really to celebrate New Year's that much or Christmas. And then I found out that's, my sister's like, yeah, that's what sometimes Jewish people do – is like they go to get Chinese takeout. And I was like, what?

MSC: That's what my family does too. I feel like if you just feel kind of out of place celebrating a tradition, it makes sense that we would

all kind of come to this, like, one thing [*that we would resonate with other people's traditions and in someways adopt them as our own...*]

IS: Exactly, yeah. It's not a holiday that we celebrate, but in like society [more broadly] they do; then it's like oh, okay.

MSC: Yeah, how we make our own traditions... I love that though.

IS: It's so funny seeing how different families kind of go against traditional holidays, and in their own way. Like they don't talk about it, but they do it.

MSC: Yeah! Thank you so much for meeting to talk with me.

The Maize & Blue Cupboard's mission is "To ensure members of the University of Michigan community—whether on a tight budget or physically restrained from getting to a grocery store—receive equitable access to healthy, nutritious, and nourishing food and the ability to prepare it for themselves or others."

Scan the QR Code below to learn more about the Maize & Blue Cupboard!



A conversation with Allison Jiang —

I met Allison playing soccer at Fuller Fields over the Summer. Allison is another one of the wonderful people that I just kept running into and then eventually just decided that I wanted to ask them to be a part of this project. I am so glad to have had the opportunity to have had this conversation with Allison and learn more about their perspectives on food, land, and place as well as their love for farming and agriculture.

MSC: In the broadest of terms, what identities do you claim for yourself?

AJ: I am Chinese American. I feel like that's a big part of who I am. Gender wise, I just don't really think about it too often, but I am increasingly aware of how I am perceived and that influences how I act and behave.

I'm trying to engage more with the creative side of things. I feel like that wasn't really encouraged for me when I was younger. So I've really been enjoying creative spaces, even though I feel like I'm lacking, kind of.

I'm a learner, in everything I'm doing. I always put myself in the learning phase all the time, even when maybe I should pick myself up a little more. I wouldn't consider [UMSFP] organizing work, but it's working with various student organizations and working with a team, which is this dynamic I haven't really experienced before. I really like it. So, I think being an organizer in a community is some-

thing that I really look forward to integrating into part of my identity, although I wouldn't say that it's part of who I am right now.

MSC: I think that's really a lovely way of describing it. I also feel like a learner can be a leader too. When you're talking about creative spaces, what kind of spaces are you talking about? Where have you found that kind of energy recently?

AJ: I think UMSFP has definitely helped with that, because I'm the marketing person, so I do a lot of graphic design. I'm also in the zine. None of us had ever really completed a zine, so it was a lot of trial and error and trying to think of what to do. And that was a nice creative process, because no one knew what was going on.

[I personally really resonate with this as someone who has a deep love and respect for zines; I think part of what makes zines so incredible is just how inherent the mess is to them. They are expressions of self, oftentimes made by individuals who are learning as they are going - and that is

beautiful.]

I think that's something that from the very start of working with you UMSFP, they emphasize: process over end product. I've always been very end product oriented, like, "If it didn't turn out this way, then what's the point of getting there?" But that's stupid. I think the process is way more important. So I like this emphasis on process and learning more about mediums. I'm getting more into tattooing. I actually did one on my friend for the first time, and that was a lot of fun. I was learning a lot while I was doing it and that was really interesting. I talked to Zoe [*Zeyuan Hu, whose art work is featured in this zine*] a lot about it too, because Zoe is very artistic, but they never really talk about it. They used to have an art Instagram, and they mentioned to me, "I don't have it anymore. Because I feel like I'm creating for other people." Hearing about their relationship with creating art as if it is for the consumption of other people is strange. I don't want [my own work] to be consumed by anyone else, because then I'm always afraid of judgment. But I need to learn to handle that and be resilient in those kinds of environments, especially if I plan to be more creative in the future.

I learned about UMSFP through the Planet Blue Student Leaders (PBSL), because Clara is the advisor for both of those programs. The summer before PBSL, I had worked on a farm, so food was very much on my mind. So almost immediately, I was like, I want to apply for this. And it worked out.

The start of it was kind of daunting, because there's 15 of us. We all have very individual roles and tasks. I'd never had that kind of job before. I was used to being told what to do. And [in UMSFP] you figure it out as you go. But it was specific tasks, like you have to do the weekly newsletter, you have to do all the dialogue boards. I didn't feel like I knew what I was doing. There's some people who were on the team beforehand, and I felt like: I really need to fit in and do a good job because a lot of people already know what they're doing. But everyone was experiencing the learning curve, because people had new jobs even though they had done UMSFP in the past. As a whole, we're 15 students: some grad students, but mostly undergrad. We all have these different roles like financial manager, marketing manager, farmstand, and education manager. The major events that we do are the

farm stand, which goes on in the fall and summer. That is a way to connect students on campus to the produce that's grown at the Campus Farm. And that produce ends up in dining halls too. But of course, they don't really see it. Students will walk by and are curious about it. Most of the time, they don't even know we have a campus farm, which is fun to talk about. And students get a discount. It's trying to make produce a bit more accessible on campus, although some people still say it's too expensive.

I don't know the financial side of things too much, but there's not really a great walkable grocery store on campus. So it's a nicer way to get access to some produce. We also do Harvest Fest and Rooting for Change. Harvest Fest is at the Campus Farm; we celebrated the 10th anniversary [this past year]. It's just another way to get students aware that we have a farm, and we grow food, the food is grown by students, and you can grow food too. A lot of local vendors will come to share their stuff. It's just a fun celebration, especially in the fall time. Rooting for Change is another big one. It's a three day event with learning workshops about various things like fermentation or dying with

plants. And we also connect a lot of organizations on that; I think UAAO is doing the learn shop and some other clubs too. It's a good way to cross collaborate with other student orgs on campus. And then Tiny Talks is having students and other community members talk about what interests them with food and bringing those voices to the campus and the wider community, although I feel like we're pretty closed off to U of M at the moment. We're trying to connect with areas like Detroit and Ypsi in some of our closer food sovereignty projects. And we're always coming up with new ideas. [At this year's Rooting for Change, in late March, UAAO hosted a workshop on how to dye your clothes with natural plant dyes. I also spoke about this project, Cultivating Generational Knowledge, as a part of the Tiny Talks event].

Our advisor Claire really supports us in trying to find new projects. We do a lot of utopian visioning – if we had all the resources, what could we do as this organization on campus to bring about food justice and food sovereignty? Sometimes we're still confused on how exactly our work can promote food sovereignty, because we're still limited by the

university. Like the idea of a community fridge was thrown around, but that was not very applicable, because if things go bad, and anyone gets sick from it, then the University is in trouble, or we're in trouble.

.....

“I feel a disconnect between me and my culture... Not being able to speak to them in the same language, it’s kind of frustrating. *Food has now been a way for me to connect with that side again.*”

.....

MSC: Thank you, that was really helpful. How would you describe your relationship with food?

AJ: I wasn't too interested in it until this past year. [Growing up] I was such a picky eater, and I feel so bad for my mom, because she's trying to make food and I think I felt anxious, bringing my own food to school, even though no one ever gave me any shit about it. But I didn't even realize what was happening and why I didn't like that. So I kind of rejected Chinese food for a long time, which I feel so bad about. My parents didn't really know what to do. I didn't really know why I didn't

like it, even though it wasn't because it didn't taste good. It was just because it looked different.

Recently, I've been trying to connect more with it. I'm not fluent in Chinese – not even close. So I feel a disconnect between me and my culture, because I don't speak the language and all my distant relatives live in China – it's just my parents here. Not being able to speak to them in the same language, it's kind of frustrating. Food has now been a way for me to connect with that side again. My mom always grew produce. We don't have a lot of space around where we live, but we would always garden and I really enjoyed doing that. That's something that has brought me and my mom closer together. My family is very engineering oriented. I've always felt like the odd one out, so being outside and growing food and learning to cook and stuff has brought me closer to my mom.

I think working on the farm really changed my perspective a lot. I really liked environmental work: going outside, learning about plants. And food is such an integral part of that, even though sometimes it butts heads with it. How do we farm the land in a way that's restorative and doesn't damage the environment? I just

like the act of [farming]. It makes sense: there's a seed that came from the plant and you plant it, and take care of it. I think there's a beauty to it, actually seeing what you planted.

I really liked working like service jobs: I worked at Starbucks. That was an OK experience, but I liked actually making something – people came in, they wanted to drink and I made it for them and that made them happy. I guess that's my joy with food. It's something you can share with your friends and you can make it with other people and you can learn recipes from other people. There's so much storytelling involved in it. I love that so much. I think that's what drew me further into food outside of farming: how even having food at a social event can really revitalize that space. There's just so much creativity. It's like art-work in a lot of ways. You're doing the most of what you have, which a lot of times isn't a lot.

Food has been like the most important tool for me to find community here, which was actually really, really hard. Getting involved with the farm and UMSFP has connected me to a lot more people and everyone loves food in some way or another.

MSC: That was wonderful. How

do you think about your relationship to the physical land you farm? How does that play into your relationship with food?

AJ: Sense of place and land in general is something I've been thinking more about. It is very strange, because I viewed Michigan as my home. I was born here and my parents moved here quite a while ago. 've stayed in the same place: the house that I grew up in as a kid, my parents still live there. So a really strong sense of place in that sense. But also, it's very much the suburbs, in Rochester, and it's very white. Every time I go back home, I realize I didn't recognize that when I was younger. And so there is this sense of I don't really belong here. But also, none of you guys belong here. There's a lot of change going on in the neighborhood, like people are selling their homes and newer families are moving in. It does feel very weird, because it is very white. So I feel a little uneasy in terms of sense of place.

I've been trying to learn more about the land that I'm on and get involved in land-back initiatives and thinking more about how the university can play into that. But that's very tricky.

That's why I'm very interested in land sovereignty and food

sovereignty projects, like Detroit Black Farmers Land Fund. Land ownership is such an important part of generational stability, and who was able to own land for hundreds and hundreds of years? So I really cherish the amount of land that I have around my house. Like I mentioned, it's a very white area, so I feel maybe not the most at home, but it's the home that I have in the home that I've known for the longest time. I've come to know it very well, seeing where certain plants pop up again and again. It's very important, like the small amount that we have. I feel like everybody should have just little bit of land to themselves. But it's not something that is very possible.

MSC: Do you ever talk about

those kinds of themes, of land in place, with your parents?

AJ: They don't really bring it up. But I'll ask them: "Does this feel like home to you?" I can't imagine like being my age now and moving to a completely different country where I don't really speak the language, and I have barely any money. It's strange. I feel like they see Michigan as their home. Maybe they miss where they lived, to some extent. My dad grew up in Wuhan and lived there until he was 17. But then moved out after that, and has actually never been back. I feel like I'd want to go back, but I guess maybe we were raised in a different sense of Go to school in America and start this new life. And they were inspired by that. But I'm not that way. I

A photograph of Allison working the U-M Farm Stand outside of the University of Michigan Art Museum (UMMA). Allison is holding wooden tongs in their right hand and smiling directly at the camera. There are a variety of veggies samples on the table before them.

Follow the U-M Farm Stand on Instagram at – @UMFarmStand!



don't really like to move around a lot. I really like getting to know where I am. Once I get to know a place, I start to really enjoy it. So it's kind of strange. I feel like my parents should miss China more. They like it here. They're glad they moved here.

MSC: How would you describe your experiences in farming as someone who is an Asian American and a person of color?

AJ: It's a little strange because everyone's white. I've been fairly lucky to where we can have those kinds of conversations. I applied for this farm apprenticeship [in Oregon]. I did get it, but I don't think I'm gonna do it. I asked them during the interview: "All these past apprentices seem to be white, have you ever taken on someone who wasn't?" They were quite transparent about it. So I feel like the farming spaces that I've occupied are predominantly white, but they seem to be trying to recognize it. I'd like to have those discussions. So I'm really grateful for that, I guess. But I think it would be a very different experience if it was a much more diverse space. I really want to kind of cultivate a community farming space that is very diverse because it also brings in a lot of different recipes, too. It's cool that

the campus farm has grow quite a few Asian vegetables. I talked to the farm manager and I was like, why did you decide to grow this? And he's like, "Oh, just look really cool."

The farm that I worked on that summer, Raindance, the owner recognized every time we'd have garlic scapes, we'd have a lot of East Asian customers coming to the market. But then after that, it's just white people. So I think that's kind of interesting. I felt more of a sense of identity with that, and even told my mom about it. I know she had prepared them before, but she didn't actually know what they were called in English. So, there have been great experiences working on the farm, but I feel like I don't know what I'm missing out on.

MSC: Do you think that you would be more inspired by farming if there were more people that were Asian American and more POC farmers?

Yes, I do. Because like I said, my whole family is engineering, math and CS minded. I definitely tried to be that way, especially in high school. I really liked biology and I knew I liked environmental stuff but I very much rejected it silently to myself, until I actually started doing it and I really enjoyed it. [

thought} I should do what I like. I felt like I had to really try harder to realize I liked it in order for me to break into those spaces. Because most of my friends, especially in high school, weren't white. Most people from my high school that I talked to pursued medically related paths. And I knew pretty quickly that I didn't want to do that. I liked health (that's why I'm in public health) but I knew I didn't want to be like a practicing physician. I feel like it wasn't encouraged to be creative in the process of what I wanted to do. I remember telling my mom, "I really like anthropology." And she was like, "I don't think you should do it." She's much more open minded about that stuff now. But I think if I saw people actually doing these things, I would definitely be more inspired. I would have loved to have seen more diversity in farming and environment. I definitely think that would have attracted me to it earlier.

MSC: You kind of go back and forth between creativity and farming; Are those similar to you? How do you think about them?

AJ: I've never really thought about that. There's a lot of decision making that goes into a farm. Like we have these giant monocultures of corn. But then there's

also very beautiful ways you can make a farming landscape, like the intercropping methods, cover-crops and integrating flowers to bring in pollinators. It's kind of like a landscape design mindset, which I haven't been able to play around with, although I would love to, I think I'd be very overwhelmed with it, though. There's so much to do. But cultivating the space, for better or for worse, it's very freeing. You have to take in a lot of considerations about the environment - what if you're using fertilizers? Who is the community that this land is involved with? So I think food has allowed me to be more creative in a way that I didn't really expect, especially the farming aspect, but also making food. I'm not the best cook, but I get very excited when I learn how to make something else.

MSC: When you were growing up did you feel like you had a strong sense of where your food was from? Or what farming was and what the land could do?

AJ: Not at all, really. My mom and I had a very tiny plot of dirt. And we would get some tomatoes and some cucumbers every once in a while some bok choy. And that was a very small thing: supplemental stuff. But I really didn't feel very connected to my food

at all. Because the grocery store is a huge place and everything's just on a shelf. You pick it up, and you don't really think about it that much. And so I think that has motivated me to want to connect people to food. It's something that if you aren't told about it, you don't think about it. And we didn't really have a decent Farmers Market either. So I honestly didn't really think about it that much..

MSC: That's really interesting. Do you have any food traditions that your family carries on that have stayed with you?

AJ: Actually, I made something this morning. It's a porridge/congee type of thing. My mom would make it a lot like in the morning. It's an easy dish, but I've never really known how to make it. I've never seen her make it. It was always very warm and nourishing. So when I went home this past break, I was like, "Can I have some more pickled eggs?" And so she gave me some of those. And I think I mentioned how I want to make a big part of this to share with some friends. And she's like "I don't think non-Asian people will like the pickled eggs." I'm like, "That's okay." I don't care about that. And that's funny, because I definitely would have cared about that when I was

much, much younger. So I made that this morning, a huge pot of it, because I'm out of food.

I kind of made it my own way. The first time I made it, which was a week before break, I didn't really know what to do. I tasted it and I was like, Wait, this tastes just like how my mom made it. And I was so excited. That has inspired me to want to learn some more dishes. And I've told my mom this. I think food kind of stresses her out, because of traditional family roles. My dad barely ever cooks, so my mom does like all the cooking and I feel like for her there's a bit of a pressure to make stuff that everyone's going to like. She's very giving and she doesn't ask for anything in return. That's kind of concerning to me. Don't you want more credit for what you do? And she's like, "you're my family -I don't think about it." I kind of feel guilty because I'm not the same way. When I have to do other people's dishes, or cook for other people I get stressed out. I'm like, other people should be putting in some more work. But whenever she makes something, me, my brother and my dad, sit down and eat it and she'd be eating leftovers. And I'm like, "Do you want some of this?" She says "No." Or she's like peeling shrimp

and she'll peel me some before even eating any of it herself. And I'm like, this is so sweet. But I also want you to do good things for yourself. I want this to be for yourself. But that's just not the way that she thinks. She doesn't feel any guilt about it. I admire that a lot. I don't think I'm like that. It just makes me want to give more to her. I want her to live her best life and I want to be able to provide as much as I can for her and I want to cook for her because I know she appreciates that. But she would never ask me to do that, so I don't

MSC: Do you think working with your mom in the garden has changed your relationship? Do you think seeing her cook has influenced how you feel about food and your interest in farming now?

AJ: I think so. I think for her, making food is very much an act of love and a love language, in a sense. So I get very excited when people express interest in wanting to eat my food. I think it also emphasized like these traditional gender family roles. That's very frustrating to me, because there were times where food isn't ready or something and [my dad] was in a bad mood. And I'd be like, "then why aren't you cooking?" My parents would always say that I'm

more like my dad and my mom's more like my brother. And so my mom and brother were very non-argumentative. But me and my dad are very confrontational. So whenever he'd be annoying about that, my mom and my brother wouldn't say anything. But I'd be like, then make your own food, then do the dishes. The house is dirty and clean it like why are you complaining about it?

So then I thought, why is she doing all the cooking? I try to help out as much as I can. But I'm thinking, why isn't my dad doing this? And my brother's so bad at cleaning stuff. I don't like the expectation that women are supposed to cook and do all this stuff. And was raised like that was normal. They both work full time. My mom would make this meal and would get no credit for it. This is just an expectation from her. That was weird to me. And I don't wanna have kids. But if I did have a family, I would want everyone to be involved with cooking. People should know how to cook and a lot of guys don't want to cook. I admire my mom a lot. She is a very traditional kind of person. And seeing her working in the garden is also very nice. I think it inspired me a lot too. It's very tiring at times, but it's very reward-

ing and you enjoy it a lot. It's kind of like another form of exercise too.

MSC: That's great. The theme [of this zine/thesis] is cultivating generational knowledge. Do you feel like you have inherited generational knowledge based on your experiences?

AJ: I'm working on it. I think I have some, but I definitely have a lot more to learn. And this just comes with like me being interested in food much later than maybe I could have been. And also realizing like, the way that I had rejected my food cultures. It was bad. And I realized, like, why I was doing that, and kind of counter-acting that. And so I really, really do want to carry on more of these food traditions. But I feel like there's a lot of like... cut off with our family, because my mom never got to meet her grandmother. And so she knows absolutely nothing about her. And her mom doesn't talk about her that much. And so I'll even ask her like, "Is there a recipe that grandma told you that you really liked?" And I don't know, I guess she doesn't think very intentionally about these, like, cultural things. But she does have these recipes. And I don't think she realizes how significant they are. I guess because

she's lived in China her whole life. And it wasn't, you know...

I'm growing up in a very different environment than she was. I feel very disconnected. I'm kind of like, trying to grab at something; like really trying to take hold and remember things. But for her, it's like that's most of her life. That's what's most familiar, and she doesn't realize how far away that is for me. And so there's some more like baozi type recipes and things that she makes... I think I was like getting ready to like, go back to Ann Arbor.

I was getting ready to go back to Ann Arbor – I'd stay at home for the weekend – and she just like spontaneously started doing the dough and making them like, right now, like right here, in the next two hours just like, like, that wasn't a big deal. So I definitely want to learn that. And hopefully I get to share these recipes and traditions with my friends, if not the kids that I will not be having. So yeah. And I'm hoping my brother picks up on some stuff too, because he does want to have kids, and I do want them to remember some things. And I don't know. So I have some, but I definitely want to learn more. Especially if I'm not learning language right now, I really want to be learning food.

MSC: Yeah. And why, I guess, do you think that's important for us to pass along these food traditions? Like what did they symbolize or mean for our community?

AJ: Well, growing up, I didn't have any of that. I didn't have it [an appreciation or attachment to these food traditions]. I grew up not liking it [the food]. And I hate that I feel like that caused me more agony than I needed. And also caused my parents some. They probably couldn't didn't understand why it was happening, either. So I don't want future generations to feel that kind of shame or like guilt, especially when they don't really know why they're feeling that. And just like accepting... Yeah. And so I think passing this stuff on, there's so much significance in it ... Like it's not just you [and your food traditions], it's long lines, generations of people before me. I know very little about my grandmother. And so I think food has been a way to hear bits and stories. [The] first time I went to China, she [my grandma] made me like tong yuan [rice balls with black sesame filling, usually served as a sort of soup], and she knew I really really liked it, which I don't really like it that much anymore, because I don't like sesame too much. But she knew I really

liked it. So every time I would go [to China], when I'd show up, she always made it for me. And I didn't realize she was doing that until like my mom explained, like, oh, like she knows you really like this. And again, it's like an act of love, especially when we can't really speak to each other very fluently. And I think those types of connections are very important. And there's just so much knowledge that can be lost, and so much knowledge has been lost, due to like colonization and white-washing and various things. And I hate that. And I feel like I would know so much more, as well, if I didn't reject so much. Or if I didn't grow up in predominantly white areas, in schools. And yeah, I think I would be a very different person if I was [had been] exposed to more of my cultural food, and I didn't reject it so much. Maybe I would have better, like, Mandarin speaking skill

MSC: This is kind of the same question but flipped... What do you think is lost when that generational knowledge is not passed down?

AJ: Just like a sense of identity... Because before college, I didn't really think too much about why identities were important. I just kind of walked through stuff. Of

course it's there. But I think you find so much of yourself through these identities because they're like lenses to see the world through and to like meet people with and to know yourself. And when you're not thinking about it, you're not exploring what's important to you. Sounds very vague, because I think it is still very vague to me. Yeah. Like with the farming, you don't know what you're missing out on. And that's kind of like what's so bitter about it, is like, you're just thinking, like, I'm missing out on so much, you have no idea like you can't even really contextualize what's gone. And so I think that is very sad, and so much more can be created when we have all that understanding of our past, and our history, and how that influences us now.

MSC: Yeah. Do you think that, in part, it's important to think about our generational/cultural traditions in order to understand the importance of the cultural traditions of... the places that we now occupy? Do you think it's important important, kind of like tracing back these cultural and generational traditions, like food as this like knowledge, understanding that importance, because we can then recognize how other communities, and the communities

that we're kind of taking over, how important those traditions are for them to?

AJ: Yes, and I don't think about that enough. Yeah, I think that's why I've been very drawn towards more thinking about how communities can kind of, like, grow their cultural knowledge. And if that identity isn't a part of me, specifically – because, you know, they're very different struggles, but also very similar struggles – like trying to remember things and trying to carry things on. But it's hard when there's a lot of things in place doing that. And so, again, it's me, wishing things were different formyself, I guess, growing up, I think I didn't realize that's a big



A photograph of Allison wearing shorts and a t-shirt. Allison is wearing blue gloves, and kneeling to place a plant-start into the ground. They are facing towards the right of the photograph and is smiling as they work.

really talking about it now. And seeing other people who have, I guess, embraced it – but have been surrounded more by their culture – and see them actively integrate those things... I think I've mentioned Zoe a lot. But Zoe, like, you know, is fluent in Mandarin, and is very much closer to their Chinese culture. And I admire that a lot. And I wish I had that. And sometimes I just feel like less Chinese. And I feel like I'm like, "Oh, I wish I knew how to do this, so I was more familiar with this." And I really like seeing them integrate this part of their culture into just like conversations and relationships, even if it's not explicitly. Like I can tell... and I think people would feel much more secure and safer and welcome in a lot of different spaces, if everyone could do that, with wherever they've come from – their communities and their land. Yeah, just like a sense of belonging, I guess. Because I think that's what everyone is kind of seeking in a way, like they want to belong somewhere, whether that's being a part of community that accepts them.

MSC: That was a beautiful answer. Um, is there anything else that you want to talk about before we, kind of, close?

AJ: I've mentioned all these [things] in some ways, but about environment stuff being very white... I feel like food is also a tool to kind counteract that, because food brings in a lot of different cultural perspectives. Like every culture has their own food traditions. I think it's a great way to experience other cultures and learn about it. And people are more open to that, because we all need food, and we like to taste different things. And it can be very exciting, especially when you eat, kind of, the same thing most of the time. Yeah. And so I'm hoping that in the work that I do, food can be used as a tool for that. That's just a small comment at the end, I think. Yeah, that's about it.

MSC: Thank you so much. Wonderful. Thank you so much.

The University of Michigan Sustainable Food Program (UMSFP) organizes and amplifies student voices calling for a more just and sustainable food system.

Scan the QR Code below to learn more about the Maize & Blue Cupboard!



KIMJANG

김장
음양

*THE ANNUAL KIMCHI
MAKING DAY IN AUTUMN*

SUBMISSION
BY: JIHYE
X KIM
ALLIED
MEDIA



I remember my mother on the phone, probably with a neighborhood auntie, wondering out loud whether our family should have 50 heads of cabbage or 100 for kimjang this year. Our family at the time had 6 members, two of which were 6-year-old me and my 4-year-old brother. I'd question my memory if it weren't for my own ability to kill a half head of napa cabbage kimchi in a day. After all, this was for kimjang, the annual kimchi-making tradition that will end with a feast of pork and all the kimchi that will last our family for the entire winter months. Or maybe it was for several households, since kimjang then was always a community affair.

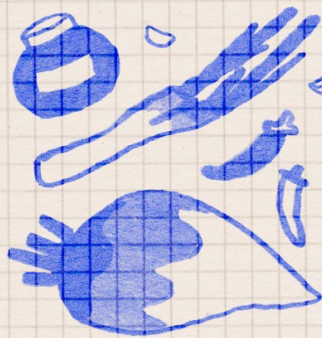
There are memories I have from that time in my childhood, when our family lived in the older, less-modernized part of Seoul in the early 80s, that I hold like snapshots, sometimes in fuzzy sepia and sometimes in full technicolor glory.

This one time, I remember all the old sliding doors were pulled out from our old and traditional Korean wooden house. The house was a series of rooms lined into a square, all the doors facing a courtyard in the middle. Like a square donut with the hole as the courtyard. The doors were like frames with intricate wooden slaps making tiny windows of various shapes, except the windows were all covered with traditional Korean papers treated with some kind of glue to keep the wind out. That one time when the doors were all pulled out, the adults were changing the papers. That memory is in sepia.

he memory of kimjang is in full color. Even though we lived in Seoul, the neighborhood streets were winding down and narrow, and often distant relatives lived in the neighboring houses. I wasn't sure which auntie was actually a blood relative and which auntie was just a neighbor auntie. Kimjang brought all the women of the neighborhood together, everyone contributing to the back breaking labor of making all that kimchi without the help of a food processor or vitamix. They would chat, laugh, and sing together all day, with their hands never taking a break from chopping and mincing and dressing (or actually painting) the kimchi. Everything was in full color. Napa cabbages in white and yellow, only the outer layer in bright green. Red red chili flakes. Green minari and scallions. My mother would take a smaller piece of brined napa leaf and paint it with the red kimchi dressing with her fingers, then wrap it onto itself. She extended her hand out to me, holding the painted napa leaf, with her fingers glistening. She would call me over and say "ahhhh". I would dutifully say "ahhhh" and she would pop it in my mouth. Studying my face, she asked this child for her assessment of all day's work.

When the kimchi making process was nearing the end, mom would go into the kitchen and make pork belly for the evening's feast. Soo Yook is the name of the pork that was boiled until tender but with some chew and texture left. Bossam is what we ate when we wrapped sooyook with brined napa cabbage leaves and kimchi dressing. It was joyeus to eat with hands surrounded by women. I'm sure my father, uncles and younger brother were there, but for some reason, I only remember women on kimjang days.

After everything was done, women left, packing their share of kimchi home to feed their own families, too.



CONTINUE 4
RECIPE

- ① KIMCHI KIMJANG
- ② SOO YOOK
- ③ BOSSAM

KIMJANG KIMCHI

김장김치

* NAPA CABBAGE

KIMCHI*

INGREDIENTS

- 5 lbs Napa cabbage (about 1 head of cabbage)
- 2 cups Coarse Korean sea salt
- 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups Water

Vegetable prep:

- 1 lbs Korean moo radish
- $\frac{1}{3}$ lbs Minari, watercress, mustard greens, arugula, or any leafy bitter greens
- $\frac{1}{4}$ lbs Scallions

Kimchi dressing:

- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup Gochugaroo (Korean chili flakes)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Salted anchovy sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Saewoo jut (Korean salted small shrimp)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoon Sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ lbs Scallion, finely chopped
- 3 tablespoon Garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon Ginger, minced

Kimchi sauce:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Water
- pinch Coarse Korean sea salt

For extra credit:

- $\frac{1}{4}$ lbs Shucked raw oysters

INSTRUCTIONS!

BRINE NAPA CABBAGE:

1. Slice a thin layer of the hard, browned top of the core and remove drier outer leaves of napa cabbage. Slice the napa cabbage in half, lengthwise from the core.
2. Keep the core intact, but score it half way from the top (away from the part where leaves are attached). This will ensure that the more dense part of the core and the cabbage will have better exposure to the brine later.
3. Make the brine by dissolving half of the sea salt into the water.
4. On a cutting board or in a large mixing bowl, place the napa cabbage, cut side up. Separate the leaves with your hands and sprinkle the rest of sea salt between the leaves, toward the core. Think of it as flicking sea salt toward the core of the cabbage where the leaves are heartier and stalker. Submerge the salted cabbage outside up into the brine. Make sure the cabbage is fully submerged in the brine.
5. Let the cabbage sit and brine for 6 hours—cut side up for the first 3 hours, then down for the next three hours.
6. Rinse the cabbage under running water. Gently squeeze the excess water out until there is no water dripping from the cabbage. Place the cabbage in a colander and let water drain further, for about 3 hours.
7. Set some brined napa cabbage leaves aside for a pork belly feast later, about 6 large leaves or 12 smaller leaves.

PREP VEGETABLES:

8. Trim the roots and leaves off the radish, peel and wash the radish, then julienne the radish into 2 inch long and $\frac{1}{4}$ inch pieces (like matchsticks). Trim the roots and any dry pieces off and wash the bitter greens and scallions, cut into 2 inch pieces.

MAKE KIMCHI DRESSING:

9. Finely mince the salted shrimp. Combine the shrimp, anchovy sauce and red chili pepper flakes, mix well until it becomes paste.
10. Add the red chili paste to julienned radish and toss together with your hands. Once the radish and paste is evenly mixed, add the rest of the ingredients for the kimchi stuffing and toss again gently.
11. If using freshly shucked raw oysters, gently fold in the oysters into the dressing at this point.
12. Set some dressed radishes aside for a pork belly feast for later, about $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup.

ASSEMBLE KIMCHI:

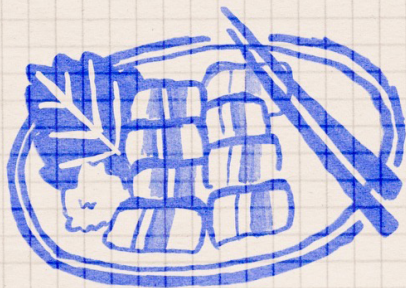
13. Gently spread napa cabbage leaves with your hand and spread the kimchi stuffing between napa cabbage leaves, taking care to get close to the core of the cabbage. Rather than "stuffing" the leaves, think of it as painting each brined leaf reddish with the kimchi dressing. Take care to evenly distribute the paste between two brined halves of napa cabbage.
14. Once all painted and stuffed, roll the cabbage onto itself, with the outside folding in, core in the center and outer green layers on the outside. Use the most outer leaves to wrap around the cabbage to ensure that the stuffing does not fall out. Save any loose leaves aside. Set aside the mixing bowl without washing.
15. Put the kimchi in a container and cover with loose leaves.
16. Take the mixing bowl and add water and salt to make kimchi juice. Mix and stir well with your hand, as though you're rinsing the bowl with the kimchi juice salt water. Pour over the container. The bowl should be almost clean.
17. Pack tightly by pressing down with your hands, so there are as few air pockets as possible between the cabbages.

Kimchi should be kept in your fridge at all times, fermenting slowly at about 39-40F. It is good to eat as soon as assembled or until it is very sour, but the fermentation and flavor hits its peak in about 4-6 weeks and starts souring in 3 months. At that time, I prefer to cook with the sour kimchi.

Soyook

肉片

* BOILED
PORK BELLY
FOR BOSSAM*



INGREDIENTS

- $\frac{1}{2}$ lbs pork belly
- $\frac{1}{2}$ each spanish onion
- 6 ea peeled garlic
- 2 ea scallions
- 6 ea whole black peppercorns
- 1 TBS doenjang (Korean fermented soy paste)
- 3 TBS soju (Korean alcohol, you can substitute 4 TBS white wine or 2 TBS vodka)
- About 4 qt of water for boiling

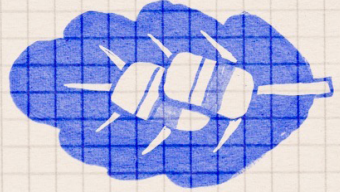
INSTRUCTIONS!

1. Cut the belly 2-3 pieces so it's about two-inch wide pieces. Score the fat side half an inch deep, half an inch apart in parallel lines. Place it in a container and cover it with water. Keep in the fridge for about an hour to draw the blood out.
2. In a pot, put the rest of the ingredient along with water and bring it to boil.
3. Take the meat out of the water it has been sitting in, rinse under running water.
4. Place the meat into the boiling water, fat side down. The water should cover the meat.
5. Keeping the lid off, boil in high heat for 20 minutes. After 20 minutes, reduce the heat to medium and boil for another 20 minutes. Then simmer for another 25 minutes or so until the meat is tender but not falling apart. The texture should still have some chew to it.
6. When cooled enough to handle, slice the pork $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick.

INGREDIENTS

- Soo Yook, the boiled pork belly sliced
- Kimchi dressing filling
- Brined napa cabbage leaves
- Extra freshly shucked oysters in half shell, if desired
- A cup or two of ice or Koran seasalt for plating oysters, if using extra oysters.

BOSSAM
보쌈
* BOILED PORK WRAP *



INSTRUCTIONS!

1. Make the bossam platter—shingle the sliced pork belly pieces evenly in a circle, add a mound of kimchi dressing filling in the center of the pork belly circle. Slice the brined napa cabbage into a palm sized piece, about 5-6 inches long and 2-3 inches wide. Plate freshly shucked oysters in half shell on the bed of ice or Korean sea salt.
2. Make your guests wash their hands!
3. On the palm of your non-dominant hand, place a piece of brined napa cabbage leaf. In the middle of the leaf, place a slice or two of pork belly. Add a dollop of kimchi dressing filling on top of the pork belly.
4. Take one end of the leaf and gently place it over the pork belly and the kimchi dressing filling, making sure to tuck in closely and there is no loose air gap. Then the other end of the leave over on top and gently wrap the whole thing into a perfect (big) bite. You can add shucked oysters here, or you can eat the perfect bite and slurp additional oysters. Don't worry about the fingers getting messy.
5. Pop the whole thing in your mouth. **DO NOT TRY TO BITE IT OFF IN HALF.** You are unlikely to make a clean bite and it will just be a spicy mess.
6. Repeat, enjoy it with rice and/or alcohol, preferably makgeolli rice wine or soju.

PAKLAVA

SUBMISSION BY:
MADINABONU
NOSIROVU

Like most immigrants, I had to adjust to a huge culture shock after moving here mid-elementary school. A big part of that change involved food and the attitudes of those around me to the foods that I brought from home. Through realizing which snacks were not easy for the white Americans to handle (shoutout to my favorite fermented dairy snack qurut...), I did also find which were the easy traditional foods. Especially paxlava. This dessert is important to me because it's one of my favorite desserts, but also because it's a pastry that I have not seen replicated anywhere outside of an Uzbek space within mainstream America. It's something that I can mention to those around me and chances are high that they will know what I am talking about... except why did you pronounce baklava weird?

While they probably originated similarly, paxlava and baklava today are prepared and taste quite differently due to regional differences. Talking about paxlava is easy because I'm comforted in knowing I don't have to worry about what this probably-first-impression of a food will have on the rest of someone else's view of Uzbek culture, and it gives me a chance to mention Uzbekistan's influence on the foods that are popular even around here. Paxlava is not only a delicious pastry, but also a dish that reminds me of all the ways in which my culture intersects with other Asian cultures, yet is always in the shadow: the little brother to Asian countries and the oriental backwards country to the Western world. This family-favorite recipe is my tiny attempt at bringing it out of the shadow.

INSTRUCTIONS!

This is my family's recipe for paxlava ("pahh-la-vah"), similar in name to baklava yet noticeably different in preparation and taste from baklava!

The recipe calls for... (see ingredient list)

In a bowl, the baking soda, softened butter and sour cream should be electrically mixed, and flour gradually added until the batter turns dough-like. In a separate bowl, cut up most of the walnut supply (keep at least 30 half-walnuts), add egg whites (save the yolk for later!) and about a half a cup of sugar. Mix.

From here, split the dough in half, and line a sheet pan with an even layer of the dough. Spread the egg-white walnut filling over the dough, then cover with the rest of the dough. Secure the edges of the paxlava by folding the bottom layer over the top. Simply brush the paxlava with the egg yolk, cut into diamond shapes, and place a half-walnut in the center of each diamond slice.

Finally, bake at 350°F, periodically taking it out to spread honey over all the crevices that were cut to create the diamond shapes (I take it out about two times). You'll know it's ready when it's a perfectly golden-brown color, somewhere between 40-60 minutes based on the size and thickness of the pastry. When it's ready, spread the crevices of the pastry some more with honey, and enjoy with tea <3

VEGETARIAN

INGREDIENTS

- 2 sticks of margarine
- 250g of sour cream
- 0.5tsp of baking soda
- at least two cups of walnuts
- 2 eggs
- about a half-cup to cup of sugar
- as much flour and honey as needed

The measurements of the ingredients aren't specific because it's been passed in my family between post-it notes and phone calls so comfort with eyeballing is necessity!!



PALAK DANEER

SUBMISSION
BY:

PARVATHI

One of my favorite meals that my mom makes for me- had to learn how to make it when I moved out! The first Indian meal I learned how to make on my own.

INGREDIENTS

- Oil Jeera /cumin seeds
- 1 tomato
- 1 small onion
- 2 green chili peppers
- Garlic
- Baby spinach



VEGETARIAN

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Separate pot
2. put cut up paneer
3. Blend spinach mixture
4. Add more chilli powder if no spice



Phở bò bắc

* NORTHERN
BEEF PHO *

SUBMISSION BY:
ANNAVI

I grew up in a remote area with little access to Asian grocery stores. For phở, it was easy to keep noodles and spices in the cupboard without having to get rarer fresh ingredients. My family would always make phở for our non Vietnamese friends, so I love making it for my friends now. Phở bắc is a very region-specific dish, so it is rarely (if ever) found in Vietnamese American households or restaurants. Because I can't find the exact dishes I grew up with at restaurants, I've started to relearn the techniques and make the dishes myself.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 sticks of cinnamon
- 4-5 star anise
- 1 black cardamom pod
- 2 shallots
- 10-20 peppercorns
- 1-2 inch knob of ginger
- 4 cloves
- 1-2 T of salt, fish sauce to taste
- Toast all aromatics (loose ones in a pan, shallots and ginger on open fire or stove until charred)



INSTRUCTIONS!

GLUTEN
FREE

1. Fill an instant pot, crock pot, pressure cooker, or any other large pot with water. Add aromatics in a spice bag (or loose if you want to fish it out later)

2. Add a whole package of beef with bone in to the water with the aromatics and cook on a low simmer for 6-10 hours. (short rib, neck bones, etc)

3. when the broth is ready, cook your pho noodles in boiling water for 5-10 minutes. check often and stir to prevent sticking. When the noodles are done immediately drain and rinse with cold water.

4. Thinly slice beef (flank steak, strip steak) so that the cut is perpendicular to the grain of the meat and mix with minced ginger.

5. strain the broth by skimming the top off with a mesh sieve and chop up the meat used for the broth. Add fish sauce to taste!

6. assemble a bowl with noodles and microwave for a minute until the noodles are hot. Add both types of cooked and raw beef and add green onions (green parts sliced normally and white parts sliced lengthwise). Boil the broth until there is a rolling boil and pour over assembled bowl (this should cook the meat!) garnish with lime, thai chile slices, cilantro, and or mint.



* JAPANESE-STYLE *

PICKLED VEGGIES

かいたりの
ピクルズ

SUBMISSION

BY:

RINO
FUJIMOTO
(IG: @rinofuji)

I decided to share this recipe because other than the fact that it is one of my favorite dishes that my mom makes, I think it reflects how our family's cuisine has adapted to our surroundings as we immigrated. I grew up in Houston, TX, where there are diverse groups of people and cuisines. However, growing up in the early 2000's in Houston, I remember how hard it was for us to get our hands on certain ingredients. I remember my mom being so happy receiving Japanese ingredients when our family in Japan would send us packages. Only recently, have Japanese grocery markets with imported produce, spices, and snacks opened. I didn't realize it growing up, but my mom went lengths for substitutions just so my brother and I could experience 'authentic' Japanese food growing up. Dishes like this --which may not strike you as "JAPANESE" when you first read the ingredients-- are probably some of my favorite!

INGREDIENTS

- Veggies of your liking: cauliflower, celery, cucumber, carrots, red bell peppers
- 500cc water
- 200cc white vinegar
- 50g sugar
- 2tbsp salt
- 2 dried laurel (bay) leaves
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 taka-no-tsume (dried hawk claw chili pepper)
- salt and pepper to your liking
- 1 drizzle of olive oil



INSTRUCTIONS!

1. Cut your veggies to bite size pieces. Arrange in pickling jar.
2. Boil your pickling juice (water, vinegar, sugar, salt, spices) for 5 minutes.
3. Pour hot pickling juice over veggies.
4. Cool and refrigerate.

VEGAN
GLUTEN
&
DAIRY
FREE



BONUS
RECIPE

きゅうりの醤油漬け
SHOYU ZUKE
 SOY SAUCE PICKLING
CUCUMBER

As a bonus recipe, I'm including pickled cucumbers! Japanese 'zuke' pickling is an easy way to get into pickling at home because it requires so few ingredients and time. I make 'tsukemono' (pickled side dishes) when I have produce left on hand. Enjoy with hot white rice, congee, ochazuke, and more!

- ### INGREDIENTS
- Japanese kyuri cucumbers (or Persian cucumbers)
 - 3tbsp soy sauce
 - 1tbsp mirin
 - 0.5tbsp sesame oil
 - 1 clove of garlic (optional: sugar, rice vinegar, red chili pepper to your liking)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Smash your cucumbers! This will help the cucumbers soak up all the flavors.
2. Arrange your cucumbers in a glass container and pour the shoyu zuke liquid on top. Let them sit (the longer, the more flavor absorbed).
3. Enjoy with your meal as a side dish. Tsukemono are perfect for eating with your rice, as an okazu, or as a otsumami with a drink of your choice!

SAGO 西米露 SOUP *w/taro*

SUBMISSION

BY:

ALLISON
JIANG

My mom would make this a lot when I was younger and a lot more recently. I like how subtle yet distinct a lot of Cantonese dishes can be (since they tend to utilize the natural flavor of seasonal ingredients). I always add more rock sugar than my mom since she doesn't like sweet desserts, but I can tell she always adds a little extra because she knows I like it. Tastes like a warm hug <3
My mom would make this a lot when I was younger and a lot more recently. I like how subtle yet distinct a lot of Cantonese dishes can be (since they tend to utilize the natural flavor of seasonal ingredients). I always add more rock sugar than my mom since she doesn't like sweet desserts, but I can tell she always adds a little extra because she knows I like it. Tastes like a warm hug <3

INGREDIENTS

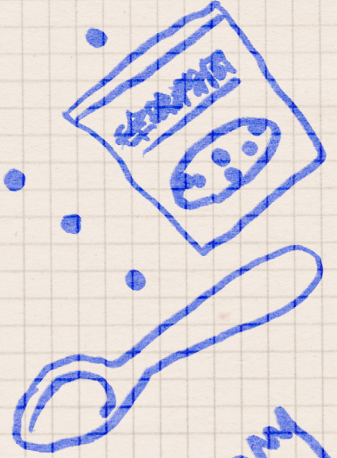
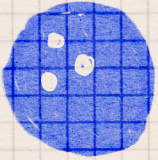
- 3.5 cups of chopped taro
- 5 cups of water
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of tapioca pearls (mini pearls are ideal)
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of rock sugar (can be substituted with any sweetener you may have on hand)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ can of coconut milk



INSTRUCTIONS!

1. Chop up about half a taro root into $\frac{1}{2}$ inch cubes.
2. Boil the taro in 5 cups of water for about 30 minutes or until it reaches a mashable texture.
3. Add the rock sugar, and stir until it dissolves.
4. Turn the heat to low, and mash up the taro. Note: depending on the texture you prefer, you can leave some larger taro pieces or mash it until it is completely smooth with the water.
5. Add the tapioca pearls, and bring to a boil for 10 minutes.
6. Turn the heat to low, and stir in the coconut milk.

VEGETARIAN
DAIRY FREE



MANTI

*AMERICAN
STYLE*

SUBMISSION
BY: **ROJIN**

Turkish manti is a type of dumpling dish usually with ground beef. It take a good amount of time to individually make the manti and prepare it. Because there are no frozen versions of it accessible near me growing up, I decided to convert the recipe into ingredients I had access to in America. Being a college student, I don't have the time or skills to make the manti fresh by hand, but I managed to substitute it for tortellini which is bigger than the manti and with cheese (since I was vegetarian when I made this). Although it's not the same as the dumpling, the garlic yogurt and tomato sauce are the exact same and still transport me back to the kitchen when my aunt would make this. It's a super fast and easy meal to make while still in some aspects sticks to its Turkish roots.

INGREDIENTS

- one package of cheese tortellini
- 4 tablespoons of greek yogurt
- 2 cloves of fresh crushed garlic
- 2 teaspoons of garlic powder (if you want an extra garlicy yogurt)
- 2 tablespoons of tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon of dried oregano
- 1/2 tablespoon of dried mint
- 1/2 tablespoon of paprika
- dash of black pepper
- 1/3 tablespoon of basil or reyhan (persian basil)
- 1/3 tablespoon of rosemary
- salt according to taste



INSTRUCTIONS!

VEGETARIAN
KOSHER

1. Prepare the tortellini according to the package instructions
2. In a bowl, place the garlic, garlic powder, and greek yogurt. Mix well and add a dash of salt according to taste.
3. In a small bowl or cup, place your tomato paste and a bit of warm water (around 1 tablespoon) and stir well together until the paste becomes smoother and more of a liquid/saucy consistency.
4. In a small saucepan, place a tablespoon of olive oil and the tomato paste + water mixture. Place the saucepan on medium heat until it starts to bubble and sizzle.
5. While the tomato paste is bubbling, place the oregano, mint, paprika, black pepper, basil, and rosemary. Stir well until all spice are incorporated into the sauce. Reduce to the heat to a simmer and let the sauce simmer for around 2 minutes.
6. Once your tortellini is done, drain the tortellini and save around 2 tablespoons of the pasta water.
7. In a new bowl, place your tortellini and scoop your garlic yogurt on top. If you want a more liquidly sauce add some pasta water, if you like the consistency of the yogurt as is do not add pasta water.
8. Then on top of the garlic yogurt and tortellini add your tomato paste sauce from the saucepan. Add garlic powder, salt and pepper to taste.
9. Mix it all up and enjoy!



COCONUT SODA BRAISED FISH/ CHICKEN

SUBMISSION
BY: GINA
LUU

I started making this recipe after seeing Vietnamese American social media chef Tuệ Nguyen @twaydabae make coconut soda braised catfish steaks, but the recipe also reminded me of my parent's Coke-braised chicken wings which they made occasionally. I've really enjoyed cooking a lot more food during the COVID-19 pandemic, and deeply appreciate both the content creators who choose to share and cook from their culture, as well as those who do gatekeep or make sure the history of a dish is central to its making.

INGREDIENTS

- Protein (if you're using fish I recommend a 1-2 boneless tilapia filets or 3-4 catfish steaks depending on size, and breasts, thighs, and drumsticks, any quantity, work fine for chicken)
- One can of coconut soda (I use the Rico-Rico brand), Coke, or sparkling water (if you use non sweetened sparkling water you will have to add more sugar)
- 5 tbsp fish sauce
- 2 tbsp sugar
- 3+ gloves of garlic
- 1 tbsp Ginger
- 1 shallot or a red onion
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- Optional: lemongrass



INSTRUCTIONS!



1. Peel and mince your garlic, ginger, shallot/red onion, and lemongrass. Reserve some garlic in a separate bowl.

2. Marinate the protein in about 2-3 tbsp of fish sauce, some salt to season, and the minced garlic, ginger, shallot, and lemongrass for at least 30 minutes in the fridge. Best if marinated for a few hours!

3. When you're ready to start cooking, pour about 2 tbsp of sugar into a Dutch Oven or any pot at medium heat. Wait until the sugar starts melting and make sure to keep moving it around so it doesn't burn. When the sugar starts getting caramel-colored brown, pour the meat and the marinade into the pot.

4. Flip the meat over after a few minutes, still on medium heat, and then your soda of choice.

5. Crank up the heat to medium-high so that the liquid is at a simmer. If cooking wings, I recommend you add more soda and cook mostly covered because wings are not as flat.

6. Simmer for about 15-20 minutes at least, or until the meat is fully cooked. Most of the liquid simmering should be evaporated but it also makes a great sauce. Crack black pepper onto it, salt if you like more salt. Enjoy with rice, noodles, pickled vegetables, or whatever you like!

