**Cesar Reyes**

**Rossville, TN**

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Date: July 25, 2017

Location: El Sol Azteca Restaurant

Interviewer: Simone Delerme

Transcription:

Length: (37 minutes)

Project: (El Sur Latino: Greater Memphis)

Delerme: This is Simone Delerme with the Southern Foodways Alliance, and it’s Tuesday, July 25th, 2017, and I’m at El Sol Azteca Mexican restaurant to learn about the cuisine and, more importantly, about the stories behind the food.

So, to start, would you just introduce yourself by saying your name? And tell us a little more about the restaurant.

[0:00:21.4]

Reyes: Okay. My name is Cesar Reyes. I’m thirty-three years old. I’m from Mexico. This is a small restaurant, Mexican restaurant, and the food, it’s trying to be more authentic. It’s like—well, I’m trying to be more authentic, but most of the food is American, like Tex-Mex style.

[0:00:48.7]

Delerme: Okay. Tex-Mex.

[0:00:49.8]

Reyes: Yeah.

[0:00:50.9]

Delerme: And where in Mexico were you born? What part of Mexico?

[0:00:55.2]

Reyes: Oaxaca, Mexico.

[0:00:56.8]

Delerme: Okay, okay. And what were you doing prior to opening the restaurant? How long has it been open?

[0:01:02.2]

Reyes: It’s been open almost three years ago.

[0:01:04.5]

Delerme: Three years ago?

[0:01:05.0]

Reyes: Yes.

[0:01:05.5]

Delerme: Okay.

[0:01:06.5]

Reyes: It was open before, but the other people sold it, so we just took over almost three years ago, and before I opened this one, I used to working on a restaurant being a store manager, and I was there for five years.

[0:01:20.6]

Delerme: So you have history in the industry.

[0:01:23.2]

Reyes: Yes, I’ve been over ten years in the restaurant business.

[0:01:27.0]

Delerme: And have you always lived in this area or in Memphis?

[0:01:30.4]

Reyes: No. Actually, I live in Southaven.

[0:01:32.0]

Delerme: Southaven?

[0:01:33.0]

Reyes: Yes.

[0:01:33.5]

Delerme: And commute here?

[0:01:35.9]

Reyes: I haven’t move here. I still live Southaven.

[0:01:38.6]

Delerme: Southaven.

[0:01:39.1]

Reyes: Yes, for now, but maybe eventually we’ll probably move closer, because it’s, like, thirty-five, forty minutes’ driving.

[0:01:48.2]

Delerme: How did you select this location?

[0:01:50.8]

Reyes: I select just to have a partner, and he was the one who saw it, and we decided to take over, so that’s why we end up on this small little town.

[0:02:02.4]

Delerme: Okay. And there was another restaurant here beforehand.

[0:02:05.0]

Reyes: Yes.

[0:02:05.5]

Delerme: Was it a Mexican restaurant also?

[0:02:06.5]

Reyes: Yeah, it was the same.

[0:02:07.3]

Delerme: Okay. How have you changed it from what was here before?

[0:02:11.0]

Reyes: The food, service, appearance, everything trying to change. Trying to change everything. So far, still a lot of things to do, like renovations and stuff. But it takes a little while to do all that.

[0:02:32.7]

Delerme: Tell me a little bit more about the food. You said it’s authentic, but you also have Tex-Mex.

[0:02:37.8]

Reyes: Yeah. Actually, yeah, it’s like both, more authentic, because a lot of people—you know, the more authentic Mexican food, it’s, like, spicy, you know, a lot of dishes, like, really spicy. So some of them are spicy, some of them, they don’t, because a lot of people, they don’t like it really, really spicy food, like really, really hot. So we’re trying to get like not really spicy, but kind of in the middle, and a lot of people like it, actually.

[0:03:12.4]

Delerme: Who are your clientele here? Is it a lot of Latinos or Americanos or a combination?

[0:03:17.8]

Reyes: I can say 90 percent, it’s American.

[0:03:25.4]

Delerme: Okay.

[0:03:26.3]

Reyes: The other 10 percent is Latinos, like Mexicans, yeah.

[0:03:29.7]

Delerme: And who does the cooking? The chef?

[0:03:32.5]

Reyes: I have another partner, yeah, and sometimes I do the cook too.

[0:03:36.8]

Delerme: Oh, so you do the cooking as well?

[0:03:38.1]

Reyes: Yes, yes. I have to do both.

[0:03:39.8]

Delerme: Okay. Where do those recipes come from? Are they yours and family?

[0:03:45.8]

Reyes: No. Most of the recipes, they come from another cook. When we just start, when we just reopened the business, he gave us most of the recipes, because we change everything there the way they used to have, the other owners, so we brought our own recipes. So he leave those recipes, and that’s what we’re trying to keep.

[0:04:13.2]

Delerme: So what are some of these authentic dishes that you offer in the menu?

[0:04:17.3]

Reyes: We have this—it’s called molcajete. It’s comes in like a volcanic stone, and it comes with cactus leaves, onions, it’s a grilled chicken breast, chorizo, is a Mexican sausage, a slice of ribeye steak, and Mexican cheese, like queso fresco. It’s a different type of cheese, really good, and also we add, like, a green salsa to it, and you have rice and beans and tortillas on the side. So it’s really good. You can fix your own tacos with.

[0:04:53.1]

Delerme: Any other authentic dishes that you offer?

[0:04:56.8]

Reyes: Ceviche, like shrimp or fish. It’s cook with lime juice, and you add onions, tomatoes, jalapeños, cilantro, or either you can serve it in a bowl and you can add, like, mayo and avocado, and you can get, like, crackers or chips on the side, or also we can fix the tostadas. You know the tostada, a flat, crispy tortilla. We top it with mayo and the ceviche and also avocado, and you can add lime juice to it and hot sauce too. They’re really good.

[0:05:35.4]

Delerme: Okay. Are those dishes popular?

[0:05:35.6]

Reyes: Yeah. They’re really good. They’re very popular. Shrimp cocktail too, is like a shrimp soup, but it’s cold. It’s tomato base, and it’s really good.

[0:05:45.7]

Delerme: So what have been some of the challenges having this business? Have there been challenges or difficulties?

[0:05:52.1]

Reyes: Oh, yeah. Yeah, since we started, the challenge was to pick it up and make it grow, because it was—at the beginning, it was really, really hard, super slow. So the first challenge was to make people come and try it once, and then once they try it, keep them coming back. And the challenge was the service, food, quality of everything, you know, keep the restaurant clean, because, you know, that’s very important in the restaurant business, to keep everything clean, dishes, food, restrooms, everything around it. So that was the first challenge.

[0:06:41.0]

Delerme: How about finding staff? Has it been a challenge or has that been—

[0:06:45.0]

Reyes: At the beginning—well, before we decided to cover, we already had the people, so it wasn’t too hard at the beginning, but now it’s getting really hard to hire people around, mostly in the kitchen.

[0:07:03.2]

Delerme: In the kitchen.

[0:07:04.5]

Reyes: Yeah, in the kitchen, staff is kind of hard to find right now.

[0:07:07.7]

Delerme: How about the positives, the most memorable experiences, successes here?

[0:07:12.6]

Reyes: Customers, they are really, really super nice around here. They are really positive. They cheer you up, and they talk to you and say, “You’re doing a good job.” And that’s a really good thing, you know. That make you keep it up and trying to do better.

[0:07:37.4]

Delerme: What is this area like? What is it considered? We’re outside of Memphis? Or is this part of Memphis?

[0:07:44.8]

Reyes: It’s not Memphis. Honestly, I don’t know which you consider this part, but it’s far from Memphis. It’s like maybe twenty minutes from Memphis, so it’s closer to Collierville, so that’s an area. So I would say probably more Collierville than Memphis.

[0:08:06.8]

Delerme: How about your family? Is your family involved at all with the restaurant?

[0:08:11.3]

Reyes: Just my wife and kids.

[0:08:12.8]

Delerme: Okay.

[0:08:13.7]

Reyes: I have another two brothers, but they also work in the Mexican restaurant business, too, so they don’t have the time for to help me out.

[0:08:22.3]

Delerme: Ah, so you have a family history in the restaurant industry.

[0:08:24.7]

Reyes: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I have two brothers, and cousins, you know.

[0:08:29.4]

Delerme: How far back does that go? How about were your parents involved in the food industry as well?

[0:08:34.2]

Reyes: No. Actually, no. They don’t have nothing to do with restaurant business.

[0:08:37.7]

Delerme: So just your wife and children?

[0:08:39.8]

Reyes: Yeah, she’s the one who help me out. The children, they’re still little. They just come here and help around some with whatever they can.

[0:08:50.3]

Delerme: Okay, okay. So just want to switch gears and ask a few more questions about you so I can kind of feature and highlight you. So what were you saying is your date of birth? When were you born?

[0:09:01.1]

Reyes: February 6, 1979.

[0:09:03.3]

Delerme: Okay. And when did you leave Mexico to come here to the U.S.?

[0:09:07.8]

Reyes: It was in 2004, almost thirteen years ago.

[0:09:12.0]

Delerme: Why this area? Why Southaven? Is that where you first moved, to Mississippi?

[0:09:18.4]

Reyes: Yes. Yeah, like I say, most of my family on my mother’s side, they work here in the restaurant business, so whenever I come down here, they already have—I have a couple brothers, the ones I already told you. So they are working the restaurant business before me, so when I got here, that’s where I decided to start working, too, in the restaurant.

[0:09:50.2]

Delerme: And what type of work did you do for the other restaurants?

[0:09:52.8]

Reyes: Actually, when I just started, I was doing dishwashing, so I started at the bottom.

[0:09:59.0]

Delerme: And where did you go from that? What was the progress, and how long did it take you?

[0:10:03.6]

Reyes: Started dishwasher for a month or so, and then it was a chance to go out and be like a busboy, cleaning tables and all that. And then from that, a few months later, I start being a runner, the people who take the food out. And then probably a year after, I start being a server, and then I was a server for probably five years.

[0:10:34.3]

Delerme: Did you learn what you needed to know in this business there?

[0:10:38.0]

Reyes: Yeah. To run the business? Yeah, I learned more about running a business when I worked as a store manager, like seven, almost eight years ago. That’s when I learned more about running a business.

[0:10:55.3]

Delerme: And where was that store located? Was it in Mississippi?

[0:10:57.7]

Reyes: Yeah, Southaven.

[0:10:59.1]

Delerme: Southaven?

[0:10:59.9]

Reyes: The name was Casa Mexicana, in Southaven.

[0:11:03.0]

Delerme: Yes, Casa Mexicana. Okay, okay. So that’s where you got your start.

[0:11:06.0]

Reyes: Yes.

[0:11:06.5]

Delerme: What did you know about this area, about Mississippi, before you moved here? Did you know anything about it?

[0:11:14.8]

Reyes: Honestly, no, nothing at all.

[0:11:17.3]

Delerme: And why, again, here? Was it family that was here already?

[0:11:20.9]

Reyes: Yeah, family, mm-hmm.

[0:11:22.0]

Delerme: So you just came because they were here?

[0:11:23.1]

Reyes: Mm-hmm, because they were here.

[0:11:24.2]

Delerme: How does it compare to life in Mexico, from what you remember? If you go back and think about your childhood, growing up in Mexico, what was life like?

[0:11:33.3]

Reyes: It’s really different. It was really fun in Mexico. The big difference from Mexico and here is just opportunities you have. You have more opportunities in here than in Mexico. Mexico is really, really hard for you to grow as a person. If you want to do or get your own business, it’s really, really hard, and also you need to be education, too, because if you don’t, it’s really hard for you to find a really good job, to make good money, and then grow and, you know, try to do something. It’s really, really hard. But, yeah, my childhood was really, really fun.

[0:12:20.0]

Delerme: And what jobs have you had when you were in Mexico? Were you in the food industry ever?

[0:12:25.0]

Reyes: No, I never was. I used to work with my dad. My dad used to have a—he still have a, like, a glass store and make windows and put up windows and all that, but basically it’s just working with glass all the time, and I used to work with him before then I come over here.

[0:12:47.6]

Delerme: How about your mother and your other family members, your brothers? What was it like going to school? Were there certain traditions or holidays that you remember that were very special to you?

[0:12:57.4]

Reyes: The holidays I remember was special was Christmas because all the family used to get together, cousins and uncles, and everybody get together my grandma’s house. Everybody get together, so I really enjoy that because, you know, we always have fun.

[0:13:16.8]

Delerme: Tell me about the food. What were the types of things you would eat at a Christmas?

[0:13:20.9]

Reyes: My grandma used to cook, like, turkey just almost the same way like here, you know, with the filling, you know the bunuelos, it’s like a dessert, and also ensalada. It’s like a—I can’t say it’s a soup, but it’s some kind of juice with a lot of ingredients, like peanuts, radish, raisins, apples. It’s a lot of fruits. It was really good. It was sweet but good. Also tamales. They used to make tamales on Christmas. Yeah, yeah, very good food.

[0:14:16.7]

Delerme: How about school? What was it like going to school in Mexico? You said it’s challenging; you need to have an education.

[0:14:22.9]

Reyes: Yeah. It was not—I can’t say hard, but it was just—sometimes or most of the times, you don’t have the money to go really, really—to good school, so I didn’t finish school, because it wasn’t because of me. I was, I guess—I can say lazy, because I didn’t get back. I took a couple years off of school, and then I start working, so I guess money made me not come back, but not because my parents didn’t help me or didn’t want me to, because they always do. They always support me, and they always tell me, “Go to school, go to school,” and I was like, “Yeah, yeah. Later, later.” But that later never came.

[0:15:25.4]

Delerme: So when you came and migrated to Southaven, what was it like trying to adjust and adapt to the Deep South?

[0:15:32.4]

Reyes: It was really, really hard. First of all, the language.

[0:15:35.6]

Delerme: Did you speak any English when you came here?

[0:15:38.1]

Reyes: Just a little bit, no. I knew some because of school. I always like the language. I like music in English, movies. I watched movies in English, everything in English, so I can learn, because I really like it. So when I come here, I knew a little bit, I can say maybe 10 percent, so I can understand what people will say, just a few words, but it was really, really hard, the language.

The culture is really different, and also the big difference from here and Mexico, if you don’t have a car in here, you can go nowhere, and in Mexico, you don’t need a car because you can just walk wherever you need to go, just walk. It’s around the corner. You need to go to the store, to the market, you can walk, and it’s really, really close. So it’s a really big difference.

[0:16:37.6]

Delerme: So when you came here, you didn’t have a car?

[0:16:39.3]

Reyes: No.

[0:16:40.4]

Delerme: How did you work? How did you get around?

[0:16:42.8]

Reyes: My brother and his friends, they give me a ride, you know, just take me wherever I needed to go.

[0:16:51.2]

Delerme: And how about learning English? How did you learn the language?

[0:16:55.1]

Reyes: Practicing. I took some classes when I—probably around 2006, I went to a church where they offering English classes every week, so I took English classes for about maybe two months, three months, and then that help me more. And then, you know, being around people when I work and listen. I always like to be close and listen what they say and ask, you know, the people who knows, like my friends or whoever, like what they say, so I will learn and, you know, keep practicing, because I really like it, and that’s how I learn. And I keep practicing.

[0:17:39.2]

Delerme: And when you first moved here, were there a lot of other Latinos in Southaven?

[0:17:43.9]

Reyes: Yeah.

[0:17:44.6]

Delerme: There were?

[0:17:45.2]

Reyes: Mm-hmm.

[0:17:45.9]

Delerme: Okay.

[0:17:47.0]

Reyes: And also it’s really close to Memphis, like just maybe ten or fifteen minutes to Memphis, so it’s a lot of Latinos around.

[0:17:54.8]

Delerme: Did you find services that would help Latino people in Mississippi, things like healthcare or churches or if you needed translation? Or did people have to go to Memphis?

[0:18:07.5]

Reyes: Mostly in Memphis.

[0:18:09.1]

Delerme: Okay.

[0:18:10.0]

Reyes: But the church that I went to to take English classes, it was in Mississippi, so they help a lot too. They offer English classes for a while.

[0:18:19.7]

Delerme: Do you remember what type of church it was or the name of the church?

[0:18:23.4]

Reyes: It was a Baptist church, I believe. I don’t remember the name. I’m sorry. I drove by every day, but I just can’t remember.

[0:18:34.9]

Delerme: Did they have Spanish services as well or just—

[0:18:37.6]

Reyes: No, just the English.

[0:18:39.3]

Delerme: English classes.

[0:18:39.7]

Reyes: Mm-hmm.

[0:18:40.1]

Delerme: Okay. Are there churches in the area, Southaven, Horn Lake that have Spanish-language services?

[0:18:45.1]

Reyes: Yeah, in Southaven and Memphis.

[0:18:47.3]

Delerme: And do you see that the community goes or has events or comes together, or is everyone kind of separate?

[0:18:54.7]

Reyes: No, actually, they do, but the thing is, like, I can notice that they get together and everything, because after they go to church, they come to the restaurant, so you can see the Hispanic people and Latinos come to eat after they went to church.

[0:19:12.1]

Delerme: So what were the signs? Have you seen that the population since you first moved and then now, has it grown? Are there more Latinos or is it going down?

[0:19:20.4]

Reyes: No, it’s growing.

[0:19:21.5]

Delerme: It’s growing.

[0:19:22.0]

Reyes: Yes.

[0:19:22.5]

Delerme: And how can you tell? Are there certain signs or things you see?

[0:19:26.4]

Reyes: You can see it more often a lot of people around wherever you go. In the grocery store, when you go to shopping, you know, to the mall, I know that you see a lot of more Latino.

[0:19:39.7]

Delerme: Do you see any similarities between, say, southern culture and the Mexican culture that you grew up with?

[0:19:47.6]

Reyes: No, they’re so different.

[0:19:52.7]

Delerme: So different?

[0:19:53.8]

Reyes: Yeah. It’s so different.

[0:19:57.3]

Delerme: Okay. Has it been challenging? Memphis, Mississippi, historically was very black and white, and Latinos coming are something a little bit newer. Have you ever heard of or experienced discrimination or challenges because of race here?

[0:20:12.4]

Reyes: Sometimes, yeah, I remember. The people who used to treat you and talk to you, yeah, you can tell they’re kind of—they discriminate you.

[0:20:22.1]

Delerme: Okay, so there have been incidents?

[0:20:23.4]

Reyes: Mm-hmm.

[0:20:24.5]

Delerme: And other people in the Latino community? Do you hear about other people having challenges or problems with discrimination?

[0:20:30.9]

Reyes: Yeah, they’re the same.

[0:20:33.2]

Delerme: The same?

[0:20:33.3]

Reyes: Mm-hmm.

[0:20:34.2]

Delerme: Okay. Has it gotten worse, do you think, more recently?

[0:20:38.4]

Reyes: Yes, after the new administration. Yeah, it’s getting worse.

[0:20:41.2]

Delerme: Okay, you do see a difference.

[0:20:41.9]

Reyes: Before, I guess a lot of people just don’t to say it. They don’t want to say anything because it was kind of punished, in way, but now seems the new administration is really open and clear about how they feel about immigrants, so it’s more open now. All the people’s, like, saying what they really feel and think about it.

[0:21:07.5]

Delerme: Has it impacted the restaurant industry at all, Mexican restaurants?

[0:21:11.5]

Reyes: It has on staff people.

[0:21:19.5]

Delerme: Okay, the staff. How so?

[0:21:23.6]

Reyes: Because there is no more—I used to remember we have lots of applications, a lot of people looking for a job in the Mexican—I mean restaurant business, and you have a bunch applications. Now there is none. Like I said before, it’s really hard to find people who like to work in restaurant business because there is not a lot.

[0:21:45.8]

Delerme: Okay. And is that because you think those applications were from people that were undocumented, or people are just leaving? Why do you think people don’t want to work—

[0:21:53.9]

Reyes: They probably—they’re moving to the different places.

[0:21:57.6]

Delerme: Okay, okay. So people are starting to leave. Okay. Do you find that there’s a lot of differences between the Mexican restaurants you used to work at, Casa Mexicana, for instance, and what you’re doing here? Have you done things—

[0:22:12.6]

Reyes: Differently?

[0:22:14.3]

Delerme: Or differently, or have you taken what you learned there?

[0:22:16.8]

Reyes: Actually, I took what I learned there and tried to make it a little bit better on some things, you know. I wasn’t agreeing with it, but mostly, yeah, it’s what I learned from there.

[0:22:33.6]

Delerme: And have you seen the competition grow within the Mexican restaurant industry—

[0:22:39.6]

Reyes: Oh, yeah, a lot.

[0:22:40.7]

Delerme: —since you moved here first?

[0:22:42.3]

Reyes: Down there, yes, because now you can see probably every—I mean, one Mexican restaurant around the corner, so it’s a lot of competition right now.

[0:22:54.6]

Delerme: How about this area? Is it a little different?

[0:22:56.7]

Reyes: Since this is really small town, not yet, but it’s growing. Roseville, it’s growing. They building another houses around and all that, so I believe maybe next couple years probably the competition is going to grow.

[0:23:13.9]

Delerme: You said you have children. How old are your children?

[0:23:16.1]

Reyes: Sixteen and eleven.

[0:23:21.6]

Delerme: What has it been like for them growing up in the South?

[0:23:24.0]

Reyes: Actually, they are stepchildren.

[0:23:26.6]

Delerme: Okay, okay.

[0:23:28.2]

Reyes: I guess they like it.

[0:23:32.2]

Delerme: They like the South?

[0:23:33.3]

Reyes: Yeah. They always been living here, so—

[0:23:36.0]

Delerme: Okay, okay. Have they embraced parts of Mexican culture that you’ve introduced them to?

[0:23:41.4]

Reyes: Some. The language, yeah.

[0:23:44.7]

Delerme: Yes, okay.

[0:23:46.2]

Reyes: Food.

[0:23:47.7]

Delerme: What types of food?

[0:23:48.4]

Reyes: Like the cactus leaves, some of them like them, a little spicy, like the jalapeños and all that. Or some like fresh water, like cantaloupe water. They like it really, really much, even my wife.

[0:24:03.3]

Delerme: How do you make cantaloupe water, for people who’ve never heard of it or don’t know?

[0:24:07.3]

Reyes: Really, it’s really good. You get a fresh cantaloupe and you add water, sugar, and you can add some condensed milk, and then just blend it. It’s really good.

[0:24:24.9]

Delerme: Was that something you had back in Mexico as well?

[0:24:27.4]

Reyes: Oh, yeah. In Mexico, it’s very popular that you have, like, those kind of waters. Like the rice water, it’s called horchata. It’s very popular. Even we—actually, we make that kind of water for the Latinos because it’s very popular.

[0:24:41.9]

Delerme: You make it here in this restaurant?

[0:24:42.9]

Reyes: Mm-hmm, yes.

[0:24:43.5]

Delerme: How do you make that?

[0:24:44.3]

Reyes: Make it with rice, water, condensed milk, cinnamon, and vanilla. It’s really good.

[0:24:56.4]

Delerme: Are there any other beverages you make here that are authentic to Mexico?

[0:25:00.6]

Reyes: That’s the only one. There is some more, but, I mean, we don’t make it. We might later, but not right now.

[0:25:07.9]

Delerme: Okay. Do you get to enjoy these things at home?

[0:25:10.1]

Reyes: Yeah. Like the cantaloupe water, yeah, I take sometimes when home.

[0:25:14.1]

Delerme: Do you cook for yourself at home Mexican cuisine or not so much because you’re here?

[0:25:17.5]

Reyes: Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes I do. When I’m off, when I feel like it, yeah, I cook some more authentic. My wife like it and the kids like it.

[0:25:29.2]

Delerme: Okay, okay, okay. Has it been a challenge living in the South and trying to preserve your traditions, your culture, your heritage from Mexico?

[0:25:39.7]

Reyes: Yeah, it has. It’s really hard because, you know, people, you’re trying to do your culture, whatever, they look at you, like, different, like, “What are you doing?” The way you dress, maybe, or what kind of music you listen, and all that. Yeah, it’s been a challenge.

[0:26:04.4]

Delerme: Okay. And have you befriended or found a Latino community that you’re a part of or do you stick mostly with your immediate family and stay busy working?

[0:26:15.6]

Reyes: Actually, most of my friends that I used to work, that’s what I’m close to, and my couple brothers. But other than that—because you make a lot of friends. When you work in the restaurant business, you meet a lot of people, even, like, that you work with and the people, the customers. So most of my friends are in the restaurant business that I used to work or in other places or I have met.

[0:26:45.5]

Delerme: Okay. And what was it like, that experience, when you first started working in the restaurants? Started from dishwasher; you worked your way up. What was the everyday life?

[0:26:55.9]

Reyes: It was hard. It’s real, real, real different, and it was a new learning every day, because I never worked in a restaurant business and I never was dishwasher or anything like that. So it was hard because it’s a lot of stuff to do.

[0:27:16.9]

Delerme: What were the hours like? Are they long hours?

[0:27:18.8]

Reyes: Yeah, like eight, maybe ten hours a day. You have a lunch break in between, but, still, mostly you spend all your day at the restaurant.

[0:27:32.1]

Delerme: Let’s see if there’s any memories you can share that are from Mexico surrounding either food or culture or traditions, things that you remember from your childhood or as you were growing up that were special, that were memorable to you.

[0:28:01.3]

Reyes: I remember a whole lot, but mostly, like I say, once again, Christmas, because it was really special. We do the singing and we do piñatas. You know what piñatas, the one you hit it really, really—like that kind?

[0:28:20.3]

Delerme: Mm-hmm.

[0:28:21.2]

Reyes: Yeah, we do that. And when you break the piñatas, they have, like, a prize, like a balloon, and you have to break it, and they put like a little small piece of paper with a number, so as many you get, you can go—well, with my aunt, they give you a prize the number was.

[0:28:43.0]

Delerme: What type of prizes did they give you? I always thought it was candy that was in the piñatas.

[0:28:46.7]

Reyes: Yeah, it was candy mostly, sometimes fruit, but also toys. So that was the mix that they used to do, so that’s what I like.

[0:28:58.2]

Delerme: Have you seen that same tradition get carried over here?

[0:29:00.6]

Reyes: No really. Well, the piñatas, yes. They normally do, like on birthday parties now, that’s what they do now on birthday parties, they have the piñatas, because the kids like that.

[0:29:15.6]

Delerme: Any other positive memories from Mexico? Family, friends, traditions?

[0:29:23.7]

Reyes: Spending time with my mom. It was really, really—seeing her cook, talking to her.

[0:29:33.7]

Delerme: Would you watch her cook?

[0:29:35.8]

Reyes: Yeah, sometimes.

[0:29:36.8]

Delerme: Would you help?

[0:29:37.5]

Reyes: Yeah. When I was younger and when she asked me to help her, I didn’t like it, you know, because I was young, and I would go, “Oh, my god,” but I would help her because I have to, you know. But it was fun. I really enjoy it. Now, yeah, I really enjoy it.

[0:29:56.7]

Delerme: Okay. What types of things when you were a child did you help cook and learn at such an early age?

[0:30:02.5]

Reyes: Like help me to peel tomatoes or help me with the beans, like take—you know, because most of the beans, they have, like, rocks or something, so you have to pick them out. With the breads, help me to put out the plates on the table, set the table and clean this—or wash this—or ask me to go with her to the market and, you know, grab the bag.

[0:30:42.7]

Delerme: Okay. And have you brought some of that here with you, those memories, those experiences of how to cook? Is anything inspired by your mom’s recipes, for instance?

[0:30:53.4]

Reyes: On the recipes, I don’t think so, because only save it and not what was on it. I was just watching her, but I never learned, like, oh, this recipe of this comes with this and this, you have to add this, because like I say, I was really young, so I didn’t really care about what was on it, but I really just enjoyed watching her cook and all that. I wish—honestly, I wish I could get the recipes from her, because she used to cook really, really good.

[0:31:26.3]

Delerme: Were there any things that she cooked that were very special, favorites of yours?

[0:31:30.9]

Reyes: A lot.

[0:31:32.9]

Delerme: What were some of the names of the dishes?

[0:31:34.3]

Reyes: Actually, most of her food always was really, really good, like enchiladas verdes, papas con chorizo. What’s the name of the—entomatadas.

[0:31:56.7]

Delerme: What are those?

[0:31:59.3]

Reyes: It’s like some kind of type of enchiladas, but it’s like a tomato base, and you add, like, Mexican cheese and sour cream and avocado. They’re really good. Or quesadillas, like her potato quesadillas. It was a lot, a lot of dishes.

[0:32:18.8]

Delerme: Can you find equal quality food like your mother made here?

[0:32:23.8]

Reyes: No.

[0:32:25.1]

Delerme: No?

[0:32:25.7]

Reyes: Nuh-uh.

[0:32:26.3]

Delerme: Okay.

[0:32:27.6]

Reyes: I haven’t, and I don’t think I ever will.

[0:32:30.5]

Delerme: Okay, okay. Been a challenge, then.

[0:32:33.9]

Reyes: Yes, yes.

[0:32:36.0]

Delerme: When you first moved, was it difficult to find authentic Mexican food? When you first moved here, was it all Tex-Mex or a combination?

[0:32:43.3]

Reyes: Yeah, mostly, yeah, Tex-Mex—

[0:32:45.7]

Delerme: It was mostly Tex-Mex.

[0:32:45.7]

Reyes: —because every Mexican restaurant is about the same. You always have the same dishes, mostly, well, I can say, all over. There’s just a few have maybe different dishes, but mostly the same.

[0:33:03.6]

Delerme: Why? Do you have any sense of why the repetition?

[0:33:07.1]

Reyes: Because I guess that’s what people like, and if you try to go different, maybe your business won’t work.

[0:33:16.3]

Delerme: So some of the authentic dishes you serve here, are people open to them, trying them?

[0:33:22.3]

Reyes: Yes, mm-hmm.

[0:33:23.0]

Delerme: They are? And they like—

[0:33:24.4]

Reyes: They really like it, yes.

[0:33:26.1]

Delerme: Okay. So you do see a market to expand the authentic Mexican cuisine here?

[0:33:29.1]

Reyes: Yes, mm-hmm.

[0:33:30.5]

Delerme: Okay. So it’s not just Tex-Mex that you’re limited to?

[0:33:34.2]

Reyes: Yeah.

[0:33:35.5]

Delerme: Okay, okay. Any other memorable or positive experiences since you’ve been here with the restaurant? Any other challenges or things that you’re working on for the future that you see?

[0:33:48.3]

Reyes: The challenge is to keep the business up. To keep it up is, you know, it’s a really challenge. Like I said, this is a real small town, and you have to—in order to keep your business up, you have to keep people happy, and that’s my challenge every day, because, you know, every day different, so every day is different people. We have regulars, but, still, I have to make sure we keep them happy so they come back, so it’s an everyday challenge.

[0:34:33.1]

Delerme: Okay. Is there anything else that you’ve experienced living here in the South that you can share? Anything about the culture that has stuck with you? Anything about the southern culture that’s been very difficult for you to adjust to?

[0:34:49.0]

Reyes: It was kind of adjustment for me because my wife is American. She’s an American citizen, too, so we disagree on some things, like culture and traditions, and this, that, so we’re trying to make a balance. So, yeah, it’s been a challenge, too, but, you know, we’re making our way.

[0:35:16.0]

Delerme: Okay. What are some of the things she’s embraced, some of the positive—

[0:35:19.5]

Reyes: Food, traditions, too, like what we do on the Day of the Dead.

[0:35:25.1]

Delerme: What do you do on the Day of the Dead?

[0:35:27.6]

Reyes: In Mexico, we used to do—like Day of the Dead’s November the 2nd. The night before, like the 1st go to the 2nd, you set up, like, an altar with food and the drinks that your loved ones used to like whenever they were alive. So we set up everything, candles, and all that.

[0:35:57.0]

Delerme: And you do that now here as well?

[0:35:58.6]

Reyes: Yeah. She helps me sometimes do that, because I’m working most of the time, so I just ask her, and she has done it for me.

[0:36:06.8]

Delerme: Fantastic. Any other traditions or things she’s embraced or that the kids have embraced?

[0:36:13.9]

Reyes: The music.

[0:36:14.5]

Delerme: Really?

[0:36:15.6]

Reyes: She likes to dance, music, the Mexican music.

[0:36:18.0]

Delerme: What kind of music?

[0:36:18.3]

Reyes: Salsa.

[0:36:19.8]

Delerme: Salsa.

[0:36:20.2]

Reyes: Mm-hmm.

[0:36:21.0]

Delerme: Okay.

[0:36:21.3]

Reyes: Salsa and banda. That’s what she likes. She’s learning. She’s learn, but she really likes to dance.

[0:36:29.6]

Delerme: Fantastic, fantastic. Those were all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else you’d like to say about the restaurant or about your experiences here that the people at home should know?

[0:36:44.2]

Reyes: Just come try and check us out.

[0:36:45.7]

Delerme: Okay, okay.

[0:36:47.2]

Reyes: That’s what I can say, you know. I’m trying really, really hard to keep this going.

[0:36:56.2]

Delerme: Okay, okay.

[0:36:58.0]

Reyes: So I’m doing my best.

[0:36:58.7]

Delerme: Okay. Well, thank you so much for your time.

[0:37:01.3]

Reyes: No, thank you.

[0:37:02.0]

Delerme: I appreciate it.

[0:37:02.5]

Reyes: No problem. Thank you, thank you for--

[End of interview]