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Interview with Young Choi (Zum Sushi)

Matthew Lopez

Azusa Sei

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Interviewee: Young Choi

interviewer: Matthew Lopez Azusa Sei

Date April 29, 2022

Location: at the restaurant (ZUM sushi)

Length: 9 minutes

Biography

The owner of Zum sushi, Young Choi, runs this place with his brother. He used to live in San Jose, but he and his brother decided to open a sushi restaurant in Pacific Grove. The reason why he decided to open a sushi restaurant is because sushi is loved by many people. He has wanted to be a chef since he was a high school student.

Summary of transcript

Young Choi explained how to address the problems of COVID19. He laid off all of the employees and had started "to go".

Interview transcript

Matt: What is your name sir?

Choi: Jason

Matt: Jason?

Choi: Jason

Matt: and How is your shop pronounced? Züm? <Zōōm>

Matt: How long have you managed to year?

Choi: this is our 7th year.

Matt: 7th? That is quite a while!

Choi: Yea

Matt: I was a bit curious about the name Zum

Choi: Züm?

Matt: Zum

Choi: This was just kinda like a nick name, and then we just come up with it. It was just a nick name.

Azusa: Uhh, Why did you choose this area, especially this place, Pacific grove?

Choi: Pacific grove? Um so, there was, this is like the family uh, thingy, and my brother and I, we started it. And his wife she's a nurse. Before we lived in San Jose and she found a job at the (charm?)___ so my brother, he decided to live here close to her work. And luckily we found a place that was trying to sell it, and we took it over. This was a tai restaurant before.

Matt and Azusa: ohh

Matt: This is a really nice place!

Azusa: yes! I think so! I like your place.

Matt: So uh, your family lived salinas or Pacific grove for a while?

Choi: No we are originally from San Jose

Matt: Oh! I'm sorry I thought you said Salinas.

Choi: Ever since we opened the restaurant, we, I live here now. And yea

Matt: alright

Azusa: what inspired your business? Because this place is sushi, and sushi is japanese food.'

Choi: I mean, we done it just to, you know, japanese food, so we wanted to open up a place. So as soon as found a place we decided to opened up a japanese restaurant.

Matt: Oh alright, so what kinda, is there any kinda specific influence to the type of sushi you serve here? Or is it kinda just a wide.. [Hand Gesture]

Choi: its just like, an American style sushi, and then we also have traditional style sushi and sashimi

Matt: so a bit of a fusion?

Choi: Fusion, you can say that. Cause we like, the rolls we make here are more like American [Glitch] sushi.

Azusa: I think to make sushi is a bit hard but, how do you know how to make sushi? Or how did you learn?

Choi: How did I learn? You know, experience. So, We worked at quite a few different restaurants to get the experience. And yea, we've been working in japanese restaurants. My brother has been working almost 30 years now , and then myself 15 - 20 years..so yea, Just a lot of experience you need to make good sushi.

Matt: Do you find that Pacific grove is a very umm, a very great place for like sushi restaurants or japanese restaurants. Do you think its um, prett..[Train of thought lost] Sorry, let me rephrase that.

Choi: yeah

Matt: That Pacific grove is a very great place to start these sort of restaurants?

Choi: Um, yeah I think so, because sushi is very popular now in the U.S, and there are a lot of tourists coming to town. And Now the American people who live here, the white people, they love sushi. So why not?

Matt: yeah! Do you see that sort of like.. appreciation of sushi and stuff in other aspect in the city, in some of the festivals and events, or do you think its just for the dining experience?

Choi: I dind't quite get it, what is it again?

Matt: Do you find people also show like appreciation, to this type of food or culture in other aspects in town, sorta like the festival, like the lantern festival, or do you think its more, uh just enjoying the food here

Choi: I think those festivals ,that really helps too. Yeah, I think so. it helps, a little bit.

Azusa: I know some restaurants had situation because of covid, in Japan also. I'm From japan. How did that affect your business?

Choi: Right after covid, we had to fire like every employee. It was just me and my brother, just the two of us running the restaurant. No servers because there's no people coming in dining; just the to-go before. So we do not know how it will turn out. SO just had to have everyone fired, its not fired, but just have them stay home instead of coming to work. SO it was just about a month, it just the two of us working at the restaurant.

Azusa: Did you start "To-go" Before covid or after the covid you started "To-go"?

Choi: So the state announced “Only to go”, no other like dining or nothing else. They Just stopped all the dining customers and have everyone stay home, or try to. And yea, that's when we all just did it “To go”. thats been over a year already, after the covid, only to go food

Matt: I can imagine that's been very scary time for any business owner

Choi: That's True.

Matt: Do you feel like you've made a pretty good bounce back now that things are opening up, people are starting to come back in?

Choi: We survived through the Hard time, and it's slowly going back to normal, or I guess its already back to normal. So yea, I guess, we made it through

Matt: That's great to hear! I know a lot of restaurants that served different type of asain food were particularly targeted during this era due to, you know, the paranoia. Do you feel this restaurant ever suffered from that kind of [struggles to pronounce word] Prejudice?

Choi: I think we're doing pretty well, we struggled the very first month when we opened; but we were pretty new to the town and we didn't know anyone around so. But we made it through and I think we're doing pretty good.

Matt: Alright, Alright.

Azusa: are there any people who support this place?

Choi: We have a lot of locals, we built up a lot of local customers. They are really helping. Yes

Matt: Alright. So you said that you were , you and your brother were in the food industry for a long time. Was there any particular reason you chose coo.. The food industry or cooking?

Choi: Its a fun job. This is a fun job.

Matt: Alright

Choi: Yeah, I like working in like the restaurant, making food. I enjoy that better than sitting in the desk and study, or working for the office, office work.

Matt: I can definitely agree with that.

Choi: Yeah. So I chose this one since highschool, and then, yea.

Matt: Oh! So this has been something you've been interested in since high school?

Azusa: So you asked your brother, or your brother asked you to start the business?

Choi: oh, we both been thinking about opening a japanese restaurant, and once thats happening we're gonna work together, that was what was kinda promised. So as soon as we found a place and we were ready to open, ya know, I'd come.

Azusa: So your brother was also thinking the same idea as you?

Choi: Yeah. Yeah. That's right.

Choi: Can I come right back?

[audio ends, last 2 minutes lost due to human error]