

ANAMARIS COUSINS PRICE

Chef - Houston, TX

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FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW

DATE: October 8, 2021

LOCATION: Online via Zoom.com

INTERVIEWER: Amy C. Evans

TRANSCRIPTION: Amy C. Evans

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PROJECT: Houston in 2020: Self-Employed Black Artists

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Amy Evans [00:00:03]: Okay. This is Amy Evans on October 8, 2021, and I am sitting down with Chef Anamaris Cousins Price, who is our chef from the Houston in 2020: Self-Employed Black Artists multimedia documentary project. I am here with her [on Zoom] to do a follow-up interview one year later. So Anamaris, I originally interviewed you in August of 2020.

Anamaris Cousins Price [00:00:31]: Yeah.

AE: When the whole world was a dumpster fire for—

ACP: [*Laughter*]

AE: —a million different reasons. It's so crazy to think about how we all came through that.

[*Laughs*] And we're almost on the other side. Covid is still a reality. But I have just a few follow-up questions for you to kind of see what's happened in the past year. So my first question for you is: How has Covid and/or the Black Lives Matter movement, which was really intense last summer with the murder of George Floyd—how have those things impacted or influenced the work that you're doing today?

ACP: [01:10] So I would say—I mean, you know, like we discussed last year, it got my business started, so that was good and interesting. It was pretty busy last year because it was so uncertain for everybody. Now that things have started to kind of normalize somewhat, Covid is—we have a little bit of a better handle on it. Not completely but, some. Things kind of slowed down because, you know, I think people had been cooped up in their homes [*Laughs*] for a bit. So the business I was doing, offering the weekly meals [for pick-up or delivery] that kind of slowed

down, significantly, if I compare it to last year. But that gave me the opportunity to do other things. So I started doing a pop-up at a bar. So every week I go to this bar [Star Sailor] in the Heights [neighborhood] and serve a couple of dishes. And that's been really great because it gave me a completely different audience. And then people started celebrating again, so I've been able to go back to offering the dinner parties at home, which is where my heart lives. So that's been really, really great. And now it's just more about getting my name out there. I can see more hits on my website. You know, people are reaching out to me a little more often, so I'm really encouraged to see, you know, what the last quarter of 2021 brings. See if—though we all thought it was going to be better than 2020, and it just seemed like a continuation of 2020! **[Laughs]** But with completely different issues. **[Laughs]**

AE: [02:52] Yes, it has been a slog. But I wonder if—how things changed and, opening back up, you know, everybody's still wearing masks and being a little tentative about big groups and things, but has your cooking changed at all or what you're making or what people are asking for?

ACP: [03:08] My cooking hasn't really changed that much. It's allowed me to be a little more—intentional, I guess. So I'm looking for—you know, people were looking for comfort for a while there, so I was giving them a lot of that in 2020. In 2021, you know, we all figured out we had the Covid fifty pounds, people started wanting lighter meals, so then I had to kind of shift a little bit to kind of lighten my dishes up a little bit, while still keeping them comforting. And I'm also more intentional on my social media activity, just to try to be a source of information for people. Not just showing them a pretty picture of something I made, but actually kind of walking them through the process to get that. So I have a lot more videos on my page that I'm putting up. So it's been really interesting. And then I—because of Covid—I got an opportunity to do an

online demo for a major corporation as they celebrated Hispanic Heritage Month [September 15 to October 15] or, you know, brought awareness to their employees. So I was able to do that, actually, last week. And that was fun. I—I mean I've done the virtual dinners, and I've done the virtual cooking classes, but being able to just be a part of a group of people and talk to them about my background and the place that I grew up eating and then showing them a few things for them to get acquainted with and maybe try at home, that was a lot of fun and made me consider that that's a market that I haven't really considered before. So.

AE: [05:01] Yeah, and that was a virtual thing—

ACP: Yeah.

AE: —where you like Zoomed into the corporate audience?

ACP: Yep.

AE: Because that is a good segue to my next question, which is: what are some changes to your art practice or creative practice that you experienced as a result of Covid that you might choose to maintain? And it seems—

APC: [05:17] Yeah, so I think doing virtual events really opened my eyes to how much can be done that way. I haven't done a whole lot of it other than the dinners I was doing in 2020, [*phone notification sound in background*] but it did allow me to understand that there's a lot of opportunity there. And so it's got me thinking about other ways I can do things. And then the other part is, it made me realize is, I used to, before Covid, I used to say it wasn't worth my time to do a dinner with less than eight people, just because of the amount of effort that goes into it

and just so that costs could even out. But then I started doing date nights for people. And so—just a couple. And I—one, because people are not wanting to leave their home and, two, because they still want to be pampered but not have to worry about a babysitter. So it's been fun doing that. And I've been doing it both virtually and in person. So for a couple of them, I actually went and prepared the meal there [at their home], and then I've done a couple where I kind of did kind of the same set-up I do for the virtually dinners: prepare everything, delivered, and then jumped on Zoom with them as they put it all together. And those have been really, really fun. So it's helped me to realize that I can still figure out how to price things just for, you know, very small groups as opposed to needing to have eight guests at a table.

AE: [06:55] Wow. That is something.

ACP: Yeah. [*Laughs*] That was fun.

AE: That is really something. I was also thinking, too, about your presentation to your—

ACP: Yeah.

AE: —to the corporate clients and how that is kind of an unexpected, maybe, and surprising reach back to your former life—

ACP: Yeah.

AE: —in corporate America, and you're kind of merging the two—

ACP: Yeah.

AE: —types of business.

ACP: Yeah.

AE: That's incredible. Okay, so I mentioned in my email to you in preparation for this follow-up interview that the review of the [recent] Netflix show *High on the Hog: How African American Food Transformed America*—

ACP: Um-hmm.

AE: —that as written—*The New York Times* review was written by Osayi Endolyn, and have you seen *High on the Hog*?

ACP: [07:37] I've seen it, I think, half of it. I haven't seen the full series. I started it and then got distracted, but I've—it's really interesting. I love the way they laid it out. I think I've seen the one where they went to Ghana, I believe. And then there's another one somewhere in the South. I think I've seen two, maybe three of the episodes.

AE: They came to Houston!

ACP: Oh, did they really? Oh no, I haven't seen that one.

AE: That might be the last episode. Yes.

ACP: Okay.

AE: I won't ruin that for you, but they came to Houston. It's great.

ACP: Oh, awesome. I'll have to—

AE: The last—

ACP: —watch that one.

AE: —like, after the credits, the last, just like twenty seconds that are—

ACP: Um-hmm.

AE: —that are my favorite kind of television. We'll just have to talk about that later. But so I reference that because so, actually, the, you know, it talks about the influence of Africa on American food, specifically Southern food, but I loved Osayi's review in *The New York Times* because there are these quotes that I shared with you. One from the [show's] host Steven Satterfield [*short pause*] that I might be —I don't want to waste your time but, anyway, but how it's not just the hardship story when we're talking about stories about Black Americans and African Americans. That—

ACP: [*Speaking to her dog*] Get down.

AE: [*Reading from the NYT article*] “I mean look at all of these beautiful Black people in a centuries-long tradition of how we shape culture, celebrate, and make a living.” [*Back in conversation*] So my question for you, inspired by that, is what is—how do you feel about the idea that Black artists are not just celebrating resistance but shaping culture after the year we've had?

ACP: [09:18] Yeah, I—I mean, I think that there’s something that happens when you value your background and your own heritage and culture. So I’ll give you my personal example. Like, for me, it’s very easy to downplay things that are an everyday occurrence for me or my family when I was growing up in Panama, right? So, it wasn’t until I started thinking about how I felt when my mom hosted those dinner parties and how that hole that I felt when I moved over here and was doing that[, it] was because I missed that tradition. And, if I missed it, somebody else might be missing it or needing to experience it, right? So then I started evaluating that. Then, for me, you know, my husband always tells me, “You need to kind of drop more Spanish in your conversation because you don’t sound like you’re not from here.” *[Laughs]* “And so if you’re telling people you’re cooking Latin food, they’re just assuming that you learned from somebody to cook this food. They don’t understand that it’s *your* food.” So just being more and thinking more connected to my roots has been very interesting. I’ve joined a few groups of Panamanians like on different social media, and it has really brought up like a lot of longing, too, right? Because it reminds me of things I don’t have now. But then it also allows me to realize that these are things that people are potentially interested in, if they haven’t had the opportunity to have it before. So I—I do think—I mean, yeah, there’s hardship, you know, like life in Central America is different than life in the U.S., and the poorest person in the U.S. has a lot more than, you know, a poor person in, say, Panama. But having things is not what makes us happy or better. It’s the things that we get to share and experience with others. Whether it’s, you know, a million dollars worth or it costs twenty-five cents. So I—I do think that, you know, this is happening with Black culture, I think, but also with other cultures where we’re starting to kind of appreciate that our

cultures are valuable as well, and there's a lot of them that could be beneficial for other people. Or at least interesting, if nothing else.

AE: [12:18] Yes. Yes to all that. So, also referencing *The New York Times* piece on *High on the Hog*, Dr. Jessie B—Jessica B. Harris is featured prominently in the first episode, and she is quoted as saying, “Our joy is enduring. It is the thing that most defines us.” And then in Osayi’s *New York Times* piece she says, “*High on the Hog* is ultimately a show about unbridled joy.” Which I love. So I wanted to see—because self-care has been a very big thing for everyone this past year—but I wanted to see how you have claimed your joy this year.

ACP: [12:54] I decided that it’s okay to watch Hallmark movies. *[Laughter]* Especially early on in 2020 when everything was so tough, that was kind of the way I escaped. You know, they have no rhyme or reason, you know how they’re going to play out, but it’s, you know, ninety minutes of not having to think about it or cry about it. Well, you cry because, you know, the movie, it makes you cry. But it’s just a way to not have to be in the depressed 2020.

AE: Um-hmm.

ACP: So that’s —that’s one thing I do for myself. And then I’ve taken more time to do just some introspection and just spend a little time, a little quiet time with myself. I don’t do it as often as I should, but I do it as often as I remember or need to, just to be okay with it and, you know, I’ve stopped doing things I don’t want to do anymore. And, you know, given me —given myself permission to do that and not feel guilty about anything at all. So that’s been pretty awesome.

AE: Yes to that. And so since cooking is your creative expression—

ACP: Um-hmm.

AE: —and you've started this business during this crazy time, cooking, I hope, still brings you joy.

ACP: Oh, yeah. It still does. It still does. It's a lot more intense than it was before. And then I don't—I —I actually stopped doing things when I'm not feeling that love. And I've come to recognize that if —if I'm not in the moment, I don't cook as well. And I would rather not make it than force myself to do it. So sometimes I've just said, you know, I need an hour to just stop. Or, I can't do anything else this afternoon; I'll just have to wake up early in the morning and, you know, restart. But that's okay. You know, I just —I don't want to put anything on somebody's plate that wasn't done with love and intention when I prepared it.

AE: Yeah, I think you said the magic word. I think intention is something that we're all much more conscious of now and how powerful that is. So. And my last question is just —any reflections on being a part of this effort, this project to document things that were happening a year ago in real time and then now things have changed, but this group of people that I think are part of Houston in 2020, I've, you know, it's been a joy for me to get to know everyone better and—and—and have a chance to kind of document what was going on in real time and see how what y'all are doing affects, you know, each other and everyone else and having this being a historical document of a specific moment in time. How does it feel to be a part of it and what —what —

ACP: [16:04] Yeah. I—I think it was—it was really interesting for me to know that other people were taking an unfortunate situation and, even though it was nothing we had dealt with before in our generation, we were coming up with creative ways to solve problems and continue to have some semblance of normalcy. And I know that we will probably never go back all the way to the way things were before. I don't know. But that's okay because we found so many new ways to be. You know, when I think about all of the corporations that don't have offices anymore because everyone is working from home—I mean not everybody, but a lot of people are working from home. You know, I—the company that I used to work for didn't believe in telecommuting, and most of the employees are now telecommuting because that's the way it is. So sometimes you say no to things before you actually investigate if they'll work or, you know, give it a try. So it's made me more nimble, for one thing. But it's also made me more—I don't believe I'd say daring but less apprehensive of, you know, trying something new. And more willing to—like my husband is more apprehensive than like—he's very risk averse. And I just start off my idea with, “Don't come from a place of no.” *[Laughs]* And then we go from there. So I try—that's what I try to do. I try not to come from a place of no, unless I know it's a nonstarter for me.

AE: Yes, well, and I hope that, you know I'm sharing the products of your participation in this project with you when everything's done and compiled, which will happen. I have a promise for that. And we already have things online. But I hope and I'm also really curious to see, like, in ten years when we look back—

ACP: *[Chuckles]*

AE: —on these interviews, like where everyone will be.

ACP: Yeah.

AE: And what Covid will be when it's really in the rearview mirror, you know, how we think about things and approach life decades from now. So anyway, thank you so much—

ACP: Thank you!

AE: —for being a part of it. And it's been really cool for me, and I cannot wait to get us all together. So we were talking and we were brainstorming before we started recording how we're going to do that.

ACP: Yeah.

AE: So we're going to get the whole group together for a brunch or a little event sometime soon. So. Anamaris, thank you so much.

ACP: Thank you, Have a good one.

AE: Thank you. And we'll be seeing each other.

ACP: *[Chuckles]*

[18:59]

[END]

