



Seniors Claim the Culinary Spotlight

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Cooking With Granny Still_Photo By Caroline Shin

Barbara Aliprantis shows Caroline Shin how to prepare octopus for Greek stew. Photo courtesy of Cooking with Granny

Eating and talking go hand in hand, so it’s not surprising that food is the springboard for good storytelling. Two video projects, both run by women, are collecting food stories from elderly immigrants in New York City and sharing them via the Web.

“I think that food inspires a lot of stories,” says Caroline Shin, creator of the “Cooking with Granny” Web series, which films immigrant women cooking a family recipe and sharing their immigration experiences and family memories.

The project was inspired by Shin’s own Korean-born grandmother, Sanok Kim, who moved to New York nearly three decades ago. Shin, a multimedia journalist formerly at New York magazine, produces short videos highlighting the experiences and home cooking of these older women—her adopted “grannies—and giving them their due as cultural torchbearers within New York’s immigrant communities.

“Gender roles skewed women toward being home cooks,” Shin says. “They don’t get the splashy spotlight.”

“Feed Me a Story,” a similar video-based cooking and storytelling project cofounded by artists Laura Nova and Theresa Loong, a former Feet in 2 Worlds reporting fellow, aims to share the experiences of elderly immigrants who are often overlooked or don’t have another outlet to express themselves.

“Just because you don’t speak English people look at you differently,” Nova says. “[Our subjects] have a distinctive opinion about how they want to cook or how things should be prepared.”

Nova and Loong also make it a point to include elderly men who have immigrated to the U.S.

“There is this romantic stereotype of learning [to cook] from their mother,” Nova says. “But that’s not always the case.”

In one video, King Phojanakong, owner of two successful New York City restaurants (Kuma Inn on the Lower East Side and Umi Nom in Brooklyn), explains that both his Thai father and Filipino mother have influenced his cooking.

As the two men make pork larb together, Phojanakong interviews his father about being orphaned and briefly homeless as a child in Thailand. When Phojanakong asks him about his favorite childhood foods, his father’s answer is blunt: “When you are hungry you like everything.”

But the stories aren’t all tragic. In one episode of Cooking with Granny, Barbara Aliprantis takes Shin shopping for octopus to make her Greek stew. Aliprantis is a natural in front of Shin’s camera, cracking jokes and telling stories about life in Greece.



“When my husband was a little boy he’d swim in the Aegean...he’d pick up an octopus and he’d beat in on the rocks, and when it was nice and soft he would eat it raw,” Aliprantis tells Shin, as the clerk at a local seafood market looks on.

“Recipes are dying out and nobody cares,” says Shin. “Nobody cooks anymore, and lots of cooks rely on intuition.”

Thanks to these two projects, immigrant family recipes and foods stories like these are finding new life online.

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About Miranda Shafer

Miranda Shafer is a media studies graduate student at the New School. She has worked for WNYC as a production assistant for Selected Shorts and as a producer for the series "Talk to Me." She likes hot media and cold weather.

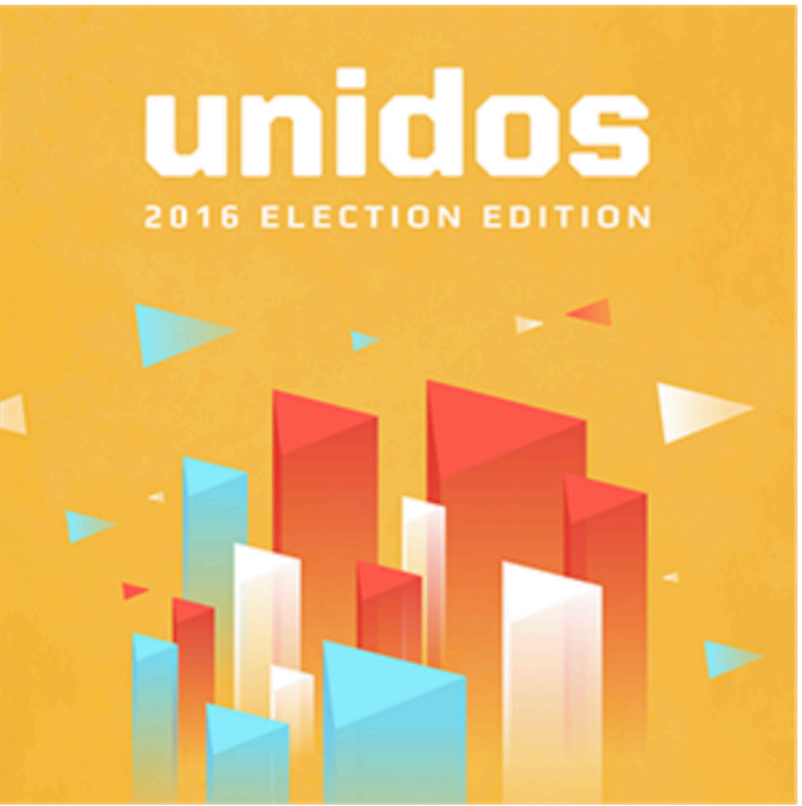
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