Japan is known for, among other things, it’s food. But there’s a dark side to that: American food isn’t as readily available! Other foods are scarce, too, such as Mexican food, and some things you’d find at the grocery store in the US. (And in France and Spain, from having been over the past couple of years.) The recipe for peanut chicken, mentioned, in the episode, is available only to Patreon subscribers at the $10 or more level.

**Content Notes**

The entire thing is food talk. Skip this episode if that bothers you.

**Transcript**

K: So, lately I’ve been thinking about food in Japan. And specifically cream of mushroom soup.

C: It’s been thinking about it, too. It sent a postcard.

K: It would have to because it’s not available in Japan.

C: Right?

K: So, I feel like last year, cream of tomato soup was completely available whenever I wanted it.

C: Okay, let’s be clear, you are not talking about cream of tomato soup. That is an abomination.

K: Yeah, no, I’m not talking about cream of tomato soup, what are you talking about?

C: Right, cream of mushroom soup.

K: Yeah, what am I saying?

C: You said cream of tomato.

K: I’m saying of cream of tomato?

C: Yeah.

K: What are you talking about? Did I really say cream of tomato?

C: You really did.

K: (laughs) I thought the cream of mushroom sounded weird when I said it, but I couldn’t figure out what was weird about it.

C: Around the world, a thousand mushrooms cried out “nooooo”

K: Do they even make cream of tomato soup?

C: I don’t actually know. Because I would think the oxalic acid in the tomato would curdle the cream. It just wouldn’t taste very good, but I’m guessing they probably do… I think you just make tomato soup, it has no cream in it.

K: Isn’t there a tomato bisque soup that has cream in it?

C: Yeah, tomato bisque would have cream in it, but it wouldn’t be called cream of tomato, it’d be called tomato bisque because that way it hides how gross it would be.

K: Yeah. And bisques are served cold, right?

C: Some of them are. Yeah, I think bisque is usually served cold. I mean, there’s like… what was it? Jambalaya.

K: Mhmm.

C: Which you could have… no, that doesn’t have tomato in it does it?

K: Some jambalaya has tomato in it, some don’t. Jambalaya recipes are vast and varies.

C: I’m just thinking of your family’s jambalaya that I’ve had.

K: Yeah, no tomato in my family’s jambalaya.

C: Because my family never did that. From my family, like,

K: Surprise. Quelle Surprise.

C: Cream of mushroom soup was what you put on toast if you wanted a tuna melt.

K: Oh wow.

C: You used, like, cream of mushroom soup and…

K: That just sounds so wrong to me, but then cream of mushroom soup is the foundation for all of my casseroles.

C: So that sounds so wrong to you, okay, how about Spanish rice?

K: Oh god no, I think that’s just… ugh

C: Rice plus ketchup.

K: Yeah, yuck, yuck. So I made you Spanish rice once because when you told me that, I was like “no, you’ve gotta try real Spanish rice.” And I made it for you once.

C: And real Spanish rice is good.

K: Thank you.

C: I like it.

K: Thank you. So, for me, lately, like, for the past six months, I’ve been craving a tuna casserole. That’s really the only casserole I make, and I have like… several variations. Like tuna with peas and corns, creamy tuna casserole, cheesy tuna casserole, dry tuna casserole, crispy tuna casserole, so

C: Well, you have noodle-based casserole, rice-based casserole.

K: Oh yeah, noodle-based casserole, rice-based casserole. So, rice-based casserole is a discovery in Japan.

C: Yes.

K: Because rice, so I think it’s weird that I hardly ever…. So, before I met you, I loved boil-in-a-bag fifteen minute rice, and you were just so appalled by that. You would just like

C: Oh, instant rice?

K: Yeah. You were so appalled by it, but I don’t know, without using a rice cooker, I don’t know how to make rice. I know other people use a pan and boil it, but it’s a complete mystery to me. How long do you boil it? How do you get all the water out? I just don’t get it, and I’ve seen you make it, and it’s still just a complete mystery to me.

C: Well, and I use a rice cooker. I just didn’t have a rice cooker.

K: Well, now we use a rice cooker. Speaking of which, did you put on rice for today?

C: Yes, I did.

K: Okay, thank you. Because I want to eat after this.

C: Like most Japanese households, we keep a pot of rice going most of the time.

K: Yeah. And I’m super hungry, so after this I want to make sure there’s something to eat. But now I’m super craving rice-based tuna casserole, but there’s no cream of mushroom soup. And like… I… I’m kind of ashamed but kind of not ashamed, so I’m super defensive about the fact that there’s certain things that I import from the United States that I just have to have. Like Dennison’s chili. The only chili brand I like, and I don’t think it’s high-quality chili or the best chili in the world, but the only canned chili brand I like is Dennison’s Original Chili. And I pick out all of the meat, so I have to, in my mind, “clean” it first. So I have to pick out all of the meat and then strain it, but I really love the beans and the sauce that’s in Dennison’s chili, so I can’t eat Hormel because the sauce is wrong. So I do import, maybe once or twice a year, a case of Dennison’s chili.

C: Yeah.

K: And I also import Rosarita refried beans.

C: Yes.

K: Because I know how to make refried beans from scratch, but ain’t nobody trying to do all that.

C: (laughs) Especially not in a Japanese kitchen.

K: Right? Because you have to boil the beans first to cook them, and then actually refry them, so you have to mash them up…

C: Is that why they get called refried beans? Because they get cooked twice? Like are twice-baked potatoes actually baked twice?

K: You know they are. So, for me, I found that when we moved from the United States to Japan, one we stopped eating soup, because I loved canned soup. We had a plethora of caned soup. And I would make a bunch of homemade soups. I still make bean soup.

C: Yes. In a slow cooker, of course.

K: Yeah. And… no, I make mine just in a pan on the stove. I rarely use, every once in a while I use the slow cooker. I guess in Japan I started using the slow cooker, but in the U.S. I didn’t.

C: No, in the U.S. you didn’t but here you use the slow cooker.

K: Yeah, I do. It’s been a while since I’ve made bean soup, obviously.

C: Yeah.

K: So, I don’t cook elaborate meals as much. But I don’t know if that’s a matter of us being in Japan or my kitchen being so small.

C: I really think it’s a matter of counter space. Because the amount of counter space we have for food prep is about the size of a cutting board and that’s it.

K: Yeah, like you can’t have your strainer for your dishes to dry and still have…

C: You can’t have two cutting boards.

K: Yeah, and we had an island. We had a cook’s dream for a kitchen.

C: Yes.

K: And I miss Brussel sprouts, I miss zucchini, there’s some vegetables I miss. So food, I think in the United States, I had a pasta-based diet. So I made lots of pasta.

C: Yes.

K: And in Japan I feel like I have a rice-based diet.

C: Yeah. And that fits with most people.

K: Yeah and I eat bread a lot less. Like, in the U.S. I ate a lot of sandwiches, but here I don’t really… because there’s no deli meat. Okay. Let’s just talk about that for a minute. There’s no deli meat. Like, are you kidding me?

C: So in Japan, it’s hard to find deli meat, and I know how you define deli meat.

K: No, there is no thin-sliced sandwich meat. Like, there’s thin-sliced shabu shabu meat. So shabu shabu is a dish where you take meat and you dip it in the water twice, it’s like “shabu shabu” like that.

C: Boiling water.

K: Yeah, boiling water. You just dip it in and the meat’s cut so thin that two dips in the water… “shabushabu” and it’s cooked.

C: (laughs)

K: I don’t like… for me, that’s how shabu shabu was explained to me by a really dear friend. I have not investigated the history of shabu shabu. Please do not inundate us with messages about shabu shabu because I won’t change my mind about it. I like the idea of “shabu shabu” and I always make the hand motion of making my hands into chopsticks and dunking the meat in water even though we’ve never done shabu shabu.

C: We have not. And for the most part, I’m the one who gets the messages first, so I’m just going to be like “yes, I know she’s wrong.”

K: (laughs)

C: I haven’t looked it up, so I’d have to look it up first to see if you’re wrong. And then I’d either be like you’re wrong, or yes, I know she’s wrong. And then it’d be a whole thing. It’d be a social media fight. We’d have to start creating alternative twitter accounts.

K: The shabu shabu effect.

C: Yeah.

K: So some people might get, like, some people might be so for real about their shabu shabu. I don’t know.

C: And you could just give them a pika-pika smile.

K: (laughs) Yeah, you know I love “pika-pika” and I always do like, the index finger and the cheek rocking back and forth when I do that. “Pika-pika” is like “bling.”

C: Japan has a lot of onomatopoeia, words that are supposed to sound like what they are, and also a lot of words that are double. Like “todi-doki” is sometimes. “Giri-giri” is I think nauseated.

K: Yeah. “Iro-iro” is various.

C: Yeah. So “pika-pika” is the sound that your teeth supposedly make if they’re super-white when you smile.

K: Or when something’s really clean and shiny.

C: Yeah, like “cha-ching”

K: Yeah, that was good. So, for me, we have to get back to the lunch meat discussion.

C: Okay.

K: Japan does not have thin-sliced deli meat.

C: It does not because Japan does not do that kind of sandwich for lunch. They do sandwiches for lunch. You can go to any convenience store and find tons of sandwiches, but…

K: But I find you can’t find like… so, turkey. I don’t think I have ever seen turkey meat in Japan. I’m sure it exists, but I have never seen turkey meat in Japan.

C: I’ve seen turkey meat around thanksgiving.

K: Really?

C: Yeah, Japanese thanksgiving and American thanksgiving…

K: So, turkey meat, like you can order a whole turkey for thanksgiving because people are catering to Americans in Japan is different for me than seeing turkey meat. I’m talking pressed and processed honey-glaze turkey meat. Like the deli-select honey glazed turkey meat. Man I’m craving honey glazed turkey meat. I’m so hungry.

C: So the one place I know of to get that is Subway because there are some branches of Subway the restaurant here.

K: Yeah, but they don’t have the honey-glazed smoked turkey meat.

C: Well, the subway near our apartment closed. So I saw a Subway, I forget where I was, it was downtown or maybe even… no, I was downtown coming back from a trip. And I saw a Subway, and I was like “Subway, I should get that” and I thought “I’m not hungry, don’t get that Chad. This is how you ended up fat.”

K: Well, and you know I’m a Togos girl, not a Subway girl.

C: Yeah, and there’s no Togos in Japan.

K: Yeah.

C: I hadn’t encountered Togos until I moved to California.

K: And when I mentioned Togos, now I’m craving a French loaf. A cheese sandwich made on a French loaf.

C: Well, and Togos is special. Togos is the first place we ever had a meal together.

K: Yes, it is. And you were not a Togos fan, and you thought…

C: It was the first time I’d ever been.

K: Yeah, and you thought it was so weird because for me I would get a turkey Togos sandwich and then take off three fourths of the turkey.

C: That was interesting. And I…

K: Because I only like one slice of turkey, one slice of cheese, a ton of lettuce, and a ton of mayonnaise.

C: And I got a barbeque pork sandwich. And man, like, talking about this… now I’m hungry. Thanks a lot.

K: (laughs) That’s why I had you put on rice before we started because I knew today we were talking about food. And when I talk about food it makes me hungry.

C: Okay, so the point is, Japan doesn’t have a lot of the things we consider staples in the United States.

K: Yeah, like P.F. Changs.

C: Like P.F. Changs. I was in Boston earlier this year, and I was staying two blocks away from a P.F. Changs.

K: And you didn’t have P.F. Changs?

C: I did not have P.F. Changs.

K: Why not?

C: I thought “I’m not going to betray my honey like that. I’m not stepping out on my wife.”

K: Aww, that’s so sweet. Because their Szechuan beef, man, and their egg rolls. I could jack both those up today.

C: Yeah, I thought “I’m not going to step out on my honey, I won’t do that.”

K: But something we’re fortunate to have, so here’s an interesting thing. I think that we’re fortunate to have an Outback here in Nagoya, in Sakae. But in the United States, I didn’t like Outback.

C: There were other options.

K: Yeah, and so…. And then, they had, I don’t know if they still have it, but they had a TGIF, Thank God It’s Friday, down near Nagoya Station, I think like a hot minute… when we went there I know it was nothing like the American TGIF. It’s so bizarre, like they shouldn’t even be allowed to use the name, it was so bizarre.

C: I do think they went out of business a while ago.

K: And I think probably because they weren’t like a TGIF. Because, like the… so for me, I was like “yay, we can finally go get some mozzarella sticks,” and the mozzarella sticks were weird.

C: They were. They were like, imagine frozen mozzarella sticks, and you put them in the microwave, but the microwave was broken. So you just kind of dump some warm water over them and then patted them dry with paper towels.

K: Yeah, thank you. Because they didn’t taste deep fried at all.

C: No.

K: And so I was just like “this is weird” so the thing I love about Outback is because I can get ranch dressing. Now I want some Aussie Fries. Fries with cheese and bacon on them that I dip in ranch dressing. I have no idea why I’m so big and fluffy.

(laughter)

C: Yeah, so Japan doesn’t really believe in ranch dressing. They think buttermilk dressing and ranch dressing are the same thing.

K: Yeah. Sacrilege.

C: I like buttermilk dressing, but it is not ranch dressing.

K: So something I do love, love, love about Japan is that tempura is fast food and curry rice is fast food. So tempura is basically breaded and deep fried, the way I eat it, it’s all vegetables.

C: Yeah.

K: So it’s like thin sliced breading, deep-fried really quickly, and it’s so delicious man. So good.

C: Right. So, for our listeners who don’t speak Japanese, the English word for tempura is tempura.

K: (laughs) And curry rice is curry sauce, um, I think of it as Indian inspired curry sauce because I don’t feel like it’s authentic. Well, I don’t know because… growing up in California, I had what I considered to be “authentic Indian food” and the curry here in Japan doesn’t taste like the curry in California, but in California, I think I ate green curry more than brown curry. I don’t think I ever ate brown curry before coming to Japan.

C: I did, and the Indian food in California was authentic because there’s a large Indian population there. And most of the Indian restaurants, I think all of the Indian restaurants we went to were Indian owned.

K: Yeah.

C: So… people in Japan don’t think that Japanese curry is Indian curry. If you want Indian curry, then you go to an “Indo”

K: Masala.

C: Well, masala is different. But there is Indian curry shops in Japan.

K: No, the restaurant chain named Masala, which is an Indian-owned restaurant chain with fabu-, their naan is so good, oh my god, and their chicken is so good. Their tandori chicken is so good. But we haven’t eaten there in a really long time because we don’t really go out to eat.

C: Oh, you’re thinking of Maharaja.

K: Oh yeah, okay. So what is it with me? First, it’s tomato cream sup, and next it’s masala. Man, I can’t get any names right today.

C: Yeah.

K: I think it’s the hunger. I’m so hungry. Everyone’s going to be like clacking on their typewriters “Stop talking about being hungry,” but I’m hungry.

C: Well, and we put content notes, so people, you know, if you checked the content notes before this episode you knew we were going to be talking about food.

K: Yeah. So, I really love one of my favorite restaurants in Japan is Ton Galiano, which is down the street from us. And it’s an Italian restaurant, and it’s sort of… I don’t it consider to be fine dining, but maybe upmarket or upscale? Expensive.

C: Yeah, it’s not fine dining, it’s not that expensive. It’s P.F. Changs expensive.

K: To me, it’s expensive. And P.F. Changs is expensive to me for going out. And the Outback is super expensive.

C: Yeah.

K: Because I feel like we… I can’t go to the Outback for less than fifty bucks, and if the three of us go, me, you and Rasta, it’s usually around a hundred dollars for the meal.

C: That’s right.

K: And that’s a lot of money to spend on a meal.

C: Yeah. Well, and that’s just with you having one drink and me having no drinks and Rasta having no drinks.

K: Well, and that’s with me and Rasta two of those, so we get seltzer water with, it’s not a Shirley Temple, I forget what flavor… it’s like an Italian soda basically.

C: Yeah.

K: We get two Italian sodas.

C: Right.

K: So it’s not like we’re drinking shots or anything like that.

C: Yeah, no, it’s like eighty bucks of food and twenty bucks of drinks.

K: Yeah. For four sodas. Twenty dollars for four sodas. So that’s one of the reasons we don’t go out to eat very often is because the restaurants are super expensive, but the tempura fast food shops are not that expensive.

C: Okay, so, but what I want to say about that is… tipping.

K: Oh yeah.

C: Because we haven’t talked about that.

K: Yeah, we haven’t talked about that.

C: You don’t tip in Japan. Now, one exception is that if you are staying at a hotel that caters primarily to foreigners and you go to the bar, sometimes tipping is expected at the bar.

K: But then if it is expected, it is included in the price, so they don’t leave it up to you to decide the tip.

C: It’s included in the price for room service, but it’s not included in the price at the bar. So like we went to the Hyatt Weston I don’t know, five or six years ago in Tokyo.

K: Uh-huh.

C: It was not included in the price, but there was a thing for it, and there was a sign saying we accept tips.

K: I don’t remember that.

C: It’s specifically like… tourist bars accept tips in high end hotels. Like in Lost in Translation, the bar he goes in you’d be expected to tip. And I think we actually went to that bar, not because it was from Lost in Translation, just because…

K: Yeah. So tipping is like seriously not done. Like, even at drag shows, you can’t tip the drag queens.

C: Yeah.

K: So… (laughs) So for me, that’s like clutch my pearls. And so… Rasta, that’s our son, Rasta’s our son, he’s 25. Rasta and I were talking about it, and I think it’s because in Japan the hundred yen is a coin and the five hundred yen is a coin. And so the hundred yen is equivalent to about 95 cents and the five hundred yen is equivalent to about 4.50 at the current exchange. I don’t know, I’m just making up the currency exchange rate.

C: You are just making it up.

K: So it’s between 4 to 5 dollars, the five hundred yen coin.

C: Yes.

K: And the hundred yen coin is between I don’t know, fifty cents to a dollar. But probably never as bad as fifty cents.

C: Not likely.

K: Yeah.

C: Not since the 1970s when they deregulated the exchange rate.

K: Yeah, and so the first bill in Japanese money is a thousand-yen bill, which is the equivalent of like ten dollars. And I’m not trying to tip ten dollars all the time. And I feel like tipping… you can’t throw coins at someone. That’s just rude. That’s rude.

C: So, for the purists out there, there are five hundred yen notes, but they’re very rare.

K: Are there? I’ve never seen one in over twelve years of being here.

C: Yeah. I’ve seen one. There are five hundred yen notes. They’re not printed anymore, so you can’t get new ones.

K: So, I don’t know. I’m not one hundred percent sure that you’re on to something here.

C: Oh, I’m on to something here.

K: But I’m not convinced. You don’t have my buy-in.

C: There’s five hundred yen notes, there’s also two thousand yen notes. Did you know?

K: I will so be googling this afterwards.

C: You should because there are two thousand yen notes.

K: I am so going to be Googling this afterwards.

C: When the new era started, they announced they were going to redesign all the money, and they said well… except for the two thousand yen notes because we don’t use enough of those.

K: What do you mean they’re going to redesign the money?

C: They redesign the money like every twenty years. Like the U.S. money gets redesigned.

K: Okay. I’m not down for that. I just got used to the money now. But whatever. Digression. I want to get back to talking about food.

C: Okay.

K: What’s your favorite restaurant in Japan because you like ramen, and I’ve never eaten ramen. I have eaten soba, and I have eaten like… these I think it’s like kimochi noodles? I don’t know. They’re kind of like the width and consistency of spaghetti but the flavor more akin to ramen, and I had them cold. And they weren’t ramen noodles, so…

C: Oh, yeah.

K: I don’t know the name of them, but they’re really really good.

C: Yeah. I, I… it’s on the tip of my tongue because I see it all the time, but I can’t remember. I can’t believe that I’m forgetting it now, but…. It’ll probably come to me later. [Note: we were thinking of kishimen]

K: Yeah.

C: So my favorite restaurant is eating at home, but second to that, I don’t know… probably Coco Ichiban curry.

K: Mmm. Yeah, that’s good.

C: It’s like a cheap curry place, and you can buy the curry packs separately, so sometimes we buy the curry packs and just bring home a bunch of curry packs so that when we feel like having curry, we can make rice, heat up the curry sauce in boiling water, pour it over, and have curry at home.

K: Yeah, that’s my favorite because I’m allergic to onions, and so the Coco de Ichi has onions throughout their sauce, so anytime I get it, I have to pick out all the onions. Unless we buy the pre-package. And now I’m thinking we need to get some more curry packs, that’d be right on time because right now I’m completely on a rice tear where like I’m the only thing I eat all day is rice.

C: We should, well I mean, the shop’s down the street, so it’s easy enough to go get packs.

K: Yeah. And probably by the time we’re wrapping this up, Rasta’s D&D game would be over, so we can (laughs) we can send him to go get it for us. We did buy him a car after all, he can…. I still haven’t gotten my money’s worth of errands out of that. So, how do you feel about the fact that I don’t cook for you?

C: I feel great about that.

K: Yeah?

C: Yeah.

K: Why?

C: Because it lets us each have what we want. So there are certain things that we cook for each other. So there’s certain things, like you cook casserole and I always eat that casserole because yum casserole.

K: Thank you. But you don’t eat bean soup.

C: I don’t eat bean soup. Yeah, I usually have a bowl or two.

K: Yeah.

C: But you fill up the slow cooker, so you make enough for a week.

K: Yeah I do.

C: And because it’s a slow cooker, you can keep it for a week. And there are certain things that I make that you eat when I make them, like if I make the garlic butter shrimp, then you like that.

K: Yeah, ooh yeah I love that.

C: Or if I make peanut and pepper chicken, you like that.

K: Yeah. I could so go for that today. That sounds so yummy.

C: So maybe I’ll post a recipe for that along with the transcript.

K: Okay, if you want to do all that.

C: Yeah, I think so…

K: So I’m not ever just straight up, I’m not ever posting recipes, but if you visit our Instagram, which I don’t really post to anymore, I do have old recipes and stuff there.

C: Yeah. Just go back a couple of years through the archives.

K: (laughs) Yeah. For most of the food, I think I posted recipes. So something else that I love, love, love making is lumpia.

C: yeah.

K: And I haven’t made lumpia in a while.

C: Well, and that the ingredients are pretty much always available here because…

K: Yeah, lumpia ingredients are because it’s frozen vegetables, ground beef, and lumpia wrappers.

C: Yeah, spring roll wraps.

K: Yeah, egg-roll wrappers. So those are always available.

C: Yeah.

K: So for me the most shocking thing is that when we run out of like, when the store doesn’t sell milk or butter, like what are you saying?

C: We have talked about this before, so now on the milk and the butter, that’s a specific thing about Japan importing, like there was one Summer that Japan had…

K: It was too hot.

C: The legislature had to authorize special permission to import butter.

K: Because it was too hot for the cows to produce milk.

C: And because there are laws about how dairy is done in Japan.

K: But trip on that. It was too hot for cows to produce milk. The Japanese summers are no joke, man.

C: They are not.

K: I feel fortified every time I survive the Japanese summer. I feel like “ohh, I did something, I survived it.”

C: Mhmm.

K: I don’t know, maybe this year it’ll be better for me.

C: You get all Gloria Gainer about it.

K: Yeah, maybe. I don’t know. So, for me, I feel like in the United States, we ate out a lot more because there was just so much food I loved, like I love Jack in the Box, I love McDonald’s, there is McDonald’s here but I don’t… so there are things that I love here to eat out, one they feel more expensive than they did in the United States, and two in the United States I could seriously eat out seven days a week at different restaurants a thing that I liked. For me, there are no authentic Mexican chains. Mexican food here. Lie, I don’t know if I can get an enchilada tostada or wet burrito anywhere in Japan.

C: There’s certainly not a chain. There’s one Mexican restaurant in Japan.

K: It’s called the Mexigan and they don’t have refried beans.

C: No, not the Mexigan. I think they shut.

K: You think the Mexigan shut?

C: I think the Mexigan shut. There’s like three… in Nagoya there are three restaurants that are said to be Mexican, but one of them is Mexican and the other two are Tex-Mex, which is a different thing entirely.

K: Completely different thing.

C: But Japan doesn’t know that. So, I don’t know, if you want to go to Mexican, I’ve got a recommendation for actual Mexican that we could go to.

K: Actually Mexican restaurant with an actual Mexican chef?

C: That’s what they said.

K: Okay, so we’ll have to check that out. So, I make my own burritos, which is why I import the refried beans, and I love fajitas. I make my own fajitas. I’m too lazy to make tortilla soup, although I did once do like a tortilla soup but I completely cheated and didn’t completely do it all the way authentic. But you can’t get…

C: Flour tortillas.

K: And you can’t get Jack cheese here.

C: You can’t get Jack cheese.

K: And for me, doing Mexican food with Gouda cheese, love the Gouda cheese discovered the Gouda cheese herein Japan, it’s like shredded cheese that you sprinkle on things. I now use gouda and I love my gouda cheese toast, and I love gouda on my casseroles all those kinds of things, and I even… I don’t think I’ve ever put the gouda in one of my spaghetti recipes because I have a spaghetti recipe that has cheddar cheese and sour cream in it. Not all my spaghetti does but that’s one variation. So I think something that surprises me about my cooking is that I love, love, love lasagna, and I think I make a really great lasagna. I have lasagna noodles, and I have a pan. And we have an oven. But I just don’t have the will to make lasagna in Japan.

C: That’s interesting. I always thought of lasagna as one of your party foods. Because when we had parties you would make lasagna because you’d make two lasagnas. You’d make a meat lasagna and you’d make a vegetarian lasagna.

K: And then I just started making straight up vegetarian.

C: Because everybody liked the vegetarian. At our parties, one of our regular guests who always came was vegetarian, the whole family.

K: Not vegan.

C: Not vegan. Vegetarian. So we made vegetarian options for them.

K: Yeah, and so we had vegetarian options for their entire family. But we had quite a few guests that preferred, and then we had people that were converted to vegetarian lasagna. They were like “you can’t have a vegetarian lasagna” and I was like “try it” and then when they did they were like “Oh my god this is so good.” And I felt really really proud of myself because one of our son’s friends, his mother was from Italy, and she brought her grandmother. I was making lasagna and they came like really early. They were like an hour before everybody else, so she was there while I was making the lasagna. And she was like “do you think you can make an authentic lasagna?” and I said “yeah, my lasagna’s really good, I think you’ll like it” and then when I used cottage cheese instead of ricotta cheese she was like “nnn, I don’t know, but you are using fresh mozzarella so maybe” and then she tasted it and she was like “this was really good.” So that has always made me like, I feel like I have award-winning lasagna at this point because…

C: And made with dried lasagna noodles. You didn’t even like

K: Yeah, I didn’t use fresh. So she was like “dried lasagna noodles and using cottage cheese” I’m not into ricotta cheese, and the cottage cheese is the same as the ricotta cheese. I think the cottage cheese melts down to be an actual creamier consistency.

C: The way you cooked it, yeah.

K: Now I’m craving lasagna. I’ve craved lasagna several times, but I don’t even know: do they make cottage cheese in Japan?

C: I don’t think so.

K: I’ve seen mozzarella cheese in Japan but I haven’t seen cottage cheese.

C: Yeah, I don’t think so. So I think just like it’ be really hard to get curds and whey in the United States, it’d be really hard to get cottage cheese here.

K: I don’t think at all. I don’t think for the same reasons at all. Because in the United States, things have to be pasteurized, and curds and whey aren’t pasteurized. And cottage cheese is pasteurized, so…

C: I’m just thinking about it’s interesting the things that we think are staples, like in the United States that we thought of as staples, a lot of them end up as foreign food here. And in the United States, I didn’t pay attention to how consistent was the stock of foreign food. So I think of Japan as being really sporadic about what foods are available. But that’s really lonely on the foods that I’m used to eating in the US. So I think it’d be interesting, I’m not going to do it, but if one of our listeners wants to do it, to go to the foreign foods aisle in the US supermarket and see how consistent the stock is. Like, does it always have the same things in stock?

K: Yes, they do. This is just you not doing the grocery shopping in the US – I purchased many things in the foreign foods sections and at least, shout out to Consentine’s, at Cosentine’s

C: Cosentino’s.

K: Cosentino’s. What is it with me and names?

C: I don’t know.

K: So Cosentino’s had really really consistent stock of all the foreign stuff. Like for me, I miss being able to get… I would keep seven types of cheese in our (laughs) refrigerator. So we would have jack, pepper jack, swiss, mozzarella, we would have super sharp cheddar, which I don’t feel like they have super sharp cheddar here.

C: No, they don’t. They have one brand of cheddar that’s available.

K: Yeah, so we can’t get the, and I love, shout out to Tillamook, I love Tillamook super sharp cheddar, and I would also keep mild because sometimes we liked the mild. So like those were the staples and also the variety of fruit. I miss there being like… literally fifteen different kinds of apples.

C: Mmm.

K: I miss… I can’t remember the last time I even saw a fuji apple.

C: A fuji apple?

K: Fuji? Fiji?

C: Fuji, like the mountain. Like mount fuji. Because they are from Japan.

K: So why doesn’t Japan have Fuji apples everywhere?

C: They do. They’re just called ringo. Apple.

K: No. No. I don’t accept this at all.

C: Yes.

K: No.

C: But you have to go to a yaoya, you have to go to a green grocer, they’re not available at the grocery store.

K: Okay. And so, for me, I feel like there’s not as much fruit.

C: There’s not as much fruit. It’s much more expensive because Japan is an island country. And it’s much more seasonal. There are a few things, like bananas are available year-round because they’re mostly imported from the Philippines, they’re right on the equator, they grow there year-round, but most fruit is very seasonal.

K: And for me, like, not having a variety of fruit year-round is really hard because I’m used to having just going to the store… because the fruit never goes out of season in California. It’s always fruit season in California.

C: Right.

K: So I didn’t experience seasonal foods like I do here.

C: And I think you underestimate how much you miss vegetables because vegetables are seasonal here too…

K: No, I do not underestimate how much I miss zucchini and Brussel sprouts. I would eat zucchinis every single week. I love zucchini raw, I love it fried, I love it boiled, I love it steamed. I just love zucchini every way it comes and I can’t get it here. But I do eat more eggplant here. Which is not a fair exchange for the zucchini.

C: Well, and you eat Japanese eggplant which is different from eggplant that’s grown in America. It’s much longer and skinnier.

K: I actually think that the Japanese eggplant is shorter and fatter.

C: Mmmm. It’s not as bulbous as American eggplant.

K: Yeah, it’s not as bulbous. And I think it’s a little bit more flavorful, and I think when it cooks, it cooks down to be a bit creamier. At least, to my tastebuds. Someone else might find it to be completely the opposite.

C: I’m not a fan of either one, so.

K: Yeah, so you do not like the aubergine. For the most part, though, I find that I am feeling mostly satisfied. I feel like a question mark. I’m so confused, like… am I feeling satisfied? I don’t even know the names of apples anymore. What do I know?

C: (laughs)

K: I know nothing about food. So, I find that with Rasta being out of the house, I cook way way less.

C: Yeah.

K: Because getting that boy to eat is a mission. Because he will forget to eat. Like, he doesn’t have an eating disorder, he’s super thin, and he just doesn’t prioritize food. Something I’m super super proud of and happy for, because I don’t think he’ll ever have weight issues in his lifetime, is that we really taught him you can enjoy food, but food is for sustenance.

C: Yeah.

K: And for him, he just finds eating to be one of the more uninteresting things that he does in his day. So if he gets busy, I will have to tell him “hey dude, I know you’ve got a busy week coming, but please remember to eat” because he will go all day without eating.

C: And he goes out to eat a lot more than we do.

K: Yeah, he does.

C: He always knows all about these interesting restaurants and things.

K: Yeah, but that’s because he’s dating.

C: Mmm, yeah, there’s that.

K: I think that if we were dating, if we weren’t a couple of decades into our relationship. I think we’ve stopped trying to impress each other.

C: I think so. I think so.

K: And I have a choice of like eating at home with you naked or having the travesty of you getting dressed.

C: That’s true. So it’s like, you know…

K: I love… Naked Chad is the Best Chad.

C: Go out to a restaurant and have some kind of food or stay home and have rice and cupcakes.

K: Yeah. (laughs) Because we’re in the cupcake phase of our marriage. So, also the expense and distance, there’s really… oh, one place that we didn’t talk about, I think we’ve talked about Bikkuri Donkey before.

C: Yeah, I think so. Because the name literally means “surprise ass”.

K: Yeah.

C: And Bikkuri Donkey is almost like a Denny’s if all you could get were the worst options.

K: Yeah. So, near our home, there’s like… there’s a mall, and in the mall there’s a bunch of normal food court stuff. There’s like one place that sells French fries, so I’ve never tried it, but I’m completely fascinated by the whole concept of the restaurant. So the restaurant is they sell French fries, but they sell these powder packets with the French fries, and the bags are designed for you to throw the powder packets in the French fries and then shake it up afterwards and get flavored fries. And I’ve never done it.

C: I don’t even…

K: I’ve always been curious about it.

C: I don’t even know what you’re talking about because Subway has done that, McDonald’s has done that, the convenience stores have done it, I can’t believe you’ve never tried that.

K: Yeah, I’ve never tried it. The only thing I like on my French fries is salt.

C: And Japan is obsessed with limited time things, so a lot of these things are only available for limited times.

K: But the shaken fries is… it’s like… it’s a whole, I can’t believe you’ve not seen it but you hate sitting in the food court.

C: Yeah, I don’t go to the mall very often. The lights mess with my epilepsy, so.

K: Yeah, and then they play this really shrill fruit, flute not fruit, flute.

C: Yeah, it’s this whole sensory nightmare for me, so I try to avoid the mall.

K: But you know that shrill flute is specific to our Aeon because I went to a different Aeon and it was silent. Just like mellow music.

C: Interesting because that shrill flute, that’s the koto, which is a Japanese flute. So that I don’t actually mind, but it’s so loud.

K: Yeah, it’s really loud. Because it hurts my ears, it’s so super loud. So when I used to hang out in the mall because for a while I was studying Japanese and I’d go hang out in the mall and do my homework, I would just bring earplugs and plug my ears. So now I’m craving like everything in the world to eat. I’m craving Aussie fries, I’m craving tempura, I’m craving Bikkuri Donkey French fries, I’m craving McDonald’s, I’m craving a wet burrito, I’m craving P.F. Changs, and I’m craving Jack in the Box. I’m so hungry and so just riddled with cravings.

C: So if you want to do us a favor, go to Jack in the Box and get some eggrolls and just go ahead and mail them to us.

K: (laughs) No, not really. They wouldn’t stay because if we could….

C: The post office wouldn’t even accept them, they’d be like no.

K: Yeah, but if we could get like frozen before they were cooked, I would so import the frozen Jack in the Box food and deep fry it here.

C: Mmm.

K: I would.

C: I know you would.

K: Yea, I really would. Because I miss it, but then too, I don’t know if it’s that I miss the food r that I miss the ranch dressing. Because when ever I crave Jack in the Box and Outback, I think “ahh, I’m just craving dipping potatoes in ranch dressing” because that’s good for my health. That’s heart-smart food. (laughs) Especially if you smother it first in cheese and bacon.

C: I think too you might be missing like going out for food at 2 AM after being out.

K: I don’t miss going out. I don’t miss drinking.

C: No, I mean… not necessarily being out, but being like… up doing stuff. Because we lived down the street from a Jack in the Box when we were in California.

K: Yeah, and I would throw on my sweats and roam the night and go on a food run. So… yeah, I don’t know, maybe it’s a cultural thing. But for the most part, I’m happy with the food here, and for the most part I’m happy with not going out to eat because it’s too expensive and all of that. So you know. I’m happy.

C: Yeah, I’m happy too. That’s kind of our general state.

K: Yeah, happy. Happy here and now. Like the website says. So, thanks for listening to this week’s ramble and digression. I don’t think we digressed that much. I think we pretty much stayed on food.

C: Yeah.

K: Yeah, so good for us. Picking a topic and pretty much staying to it.

C: So if you want to see us not digress, ask us about food, we will…

K: (laughs) Yes, we will be laser focused. I won’t be able to name anything properly, but I will be laser focused.

C: (laughs) Your mouth will be too busy remembering tastes.

K: Yes. Thank you. Just watering. So, we’re going to go get something to eat now. Thanks for listening, we hope you listen again.

C: Bye-bye.

K: Bye.