

J = John Paul Dela Rosa

S = Shelby

S – Can you tell me your name please?

J – John Paul Dela Rosa.

S – And remind me where you're from?

J – I am from the Philippines.

S – Great. Now can you tell me a little bit about why you chose to come to NIU as a Fulbright scholar?

J – Well NIU was my top choice, based on its credentials and its Center for Southeast Asian Studies and programs. I had also spoken with previous FLTA's who have been to NIU and liked it. My supervisor also suggested NIU which also helped for me to decide that this is where I wanted to go.

S – Okay, so is this your first time in the US?

J – Yes. I really like it so far, and I really like that DeKalb has such a tightknit Filipino community.

S – Oh, okay, I see. I wasn't familiar with that. That's great. So what is it that you do here at NIU?

J – I am an FLTA for Tagalog language.

S – What do your job duties entail?

J – I prep instruction for classes and help tutor students. I also do some of the grading. I have found this to be a great way to connect with the community and give American students a better international and cultural understanding. I TA for all levels.

S – Very cool. Okay, let's transition over into food now. Can you tell me a bit about your opinions on the food here in DeKalb and at NIU?

J – Well when I came to the US I was very excited to try all of the foods at first. But after a while I got tired of eating it. There is just a lack of variety. A lot of the foods are very bland, and I don't know if that is because I am used to eating foods with more seasoning and flavor or if the food here is more adjusted to the American palate, but I think it is too bland. And the sweets are too sweet.

S – I see. That is an interesting observation. What do you find yourself eating the most here?

J – A lot of rice and noodles because it is most similar to the Southeast Asian diet. I think having rice at the dining halls helps to accommodate international students.

S – Have you eaten any places outside of the dining halls that you like?

J – I really like Panda Express because it is the closest to the foods that I am most familiar with (laughs). I also tried Portillo's which was good. In the dorms I really like the salad bar as a healthier option with all of the fresh veggies.

S – What are some foods that you miss from the Philippines?

J – Well breakfast is the most important meal in the Philippines, so I really wish there were some more equivalents to that in the dining halls.

S – What does breakfast look like in the Philippines?

J – It is usually fried rice, sunny-side up eggs, dried fish, and papaya salad with lots of dipping sauces and spices, and hot coffee.

S – Oh wow, that does sound good.

J – Yes, it is very good. I wish that the dining halls would serve rice all day versus just at nighttime.

S – Sure, I understand that. It is hard because rice just isn't seen as much of a breakfast staple here in the US.

J – Yes, I know (laughs)

S – So, have you had any negative experiences with foods here in the US – whether they have made you sick, or?

J – Yes. I actually ate a Lunchable and it didn't agree with my stomach at all. I'm not sure why, but maybe because it has something to do with how processed it is and the convenience nature of the food.

S – Sure, sure.

J – Also, one day they were serving Adobo for dinner at Neptune's dining hall, and I was really excited because that is something that I am familiar with in the Philippines. So when I went to the dining hall, it wasn't really adobo. It didn't look very appetizing either, but the taste was just okay. A lot of American students were avoiding it completely, probably because it didn't look good. I overheard a lot of them saying that it looked gross. And when I left, there was still a lot of the food left over. So I also wonder about wasted food here, where does it go? How much is wasted by the dorms every day? Does it have to do with taste maybe?

S – Wow, those are excellent questions.

J – There are a lot of signs around some of the dining halls that say students should only take as much as they think they are going to eat to limit waste, which I think is good, but I also see a lot of students throwing away a lot of food left on their plates.

S – Interesting. I wish I had a better answer for you, but I just do not know. I'm assuming it all goes into the trash, unfortunately. Due to sanitation and making sure that students do not get sick, I would assume that not a lot of leftovers are saved, if any.

J – Yeah.

S – So, do you have any suggestions for NIU or DeKalb as to what they can do to improve the quality or variety of foods for international students?

J – Well, I think having a continental side to the dining halls once a week would be good. Like, they could attempt to cook simple dishes from different countries and students could get the opportunity to learn about the food and the country while also being able to try the dish.

S – Wow, okay, great. That would be a really neat idea. I think that could help to open the minds of a lot of students who eat the same things every day.

J – Yes, and it can educate them as to where the dishes are coming from and how other cultures eat.

S – Great. Yes, well thank you so much for your time and sharing your thoughts with me. I really appreciate it.

J – Of course, I hope this helps.