

go Local



Joyce Park is





It took a worldwide pandemic for Joyce to focus on making her mom's kimchee.

It's been years since Joyce Park had her mother's kimchee, something Joyce and her four siblings ate every day growing up.

Food has the ability to engage multiple senses – smell, sight and taste – that can trigger some of life's most meaningful moments.

For Joyce, no store-bought kimchee could compare, and what she tasted at authentic Korean restaurants in New York City or New Jersey was close, but not quite right.

It took a worldwide pandemic for Joyce to focus on making her mom's kimchee.

It was in sharing her family recipe kimchee with others that Joyce realized she not only brought the tradition ahead a generation in a way that honored her parents, she created a product that could start a business.

Park family history

Her parents were farmers in Korea before coming to America.

"My dad came here (to central Pennsylvania) in 1971. He worked day and night for a year to save up the money to buy a house.

"My mother, brothers and sisters were brought here in 1972. They sold everything they had to be able to come here – my parents even sold their wedding rings. They got here right before (Hurricane) Agnes and the house flooded, but they were too poor to go anywhere (else). I was born in 1973."

Her father, Sun Kyong Park, and her mother, Yang Sun Park, raised their five children: PokSun, the oldest sister, Kwang Sop, the oldest son, Pok Im, the middle sister, Kwang Hyon, the youngest brother, and Joyce, the baby, in the Camp Hill area.

"I'm the only one with an English name because I was born here," Joyce explained. "They wanted us to be American."

When the Parks came to the U.S., they brought with them the seeds of all the vegetables they grew at home and used those to grow what they needed here to make the Kimchee and feed the family, including the Napa cabbage, garlic and green onions.


"We didn't have any money. We never went out to eat. My mom was such a good cook, she made everything we ate," Joyce explained. In addition to working 40-50 hours a week at Iceland Seafood as a factory worker, Yang Sun made not just the meals, but the ingredients for the meals, including me ju, a product of fermented soybeans used as a condiment base; doenjang, a bean paste; soy sauce; and gochujang, a red chili paste.

Turning hundreds of pounds of vegetables at one time into Kimchee to feed seven people three times a day, every day, was a family project.

"We had to grow (the vegetables), harvest them, clean them, (and for the vegetables that became seasonings) dry them and remove the seeds. Everyone had a part whether you wanted it or not," Joyce said of herself and her older siblings.

"All of us kids hated making it," Joyce remembers. Instead of playing outside or being with their friends, they were in the kitchen for hours.

The Park family worked assembly line style, each having a job that contributed to the process of making Kimchee. When she grew up and went out on her own, Joyce asked her mother about sharing how to make Kimchee. Though she'd helped all



Korean food Joyce serves at the farmer's market includes a Korean pork chop with sticky rice & Kimchee, left, and the all beef hotdog topped with Kimchee.

her life, she only saw her part of it, not the whole process.

Yang Sun said 'It's too much for you to make, just buy it.'

Driving home the point of how laborious it is to make kimchee, Joyce remembers other Korean families who settled in Central PA would come to her mother to buy kimchee from her, instead of making it themselves.

Truly Authentic

"Kimchee is the national dish for Koreans. It can be a main dish or a side dish. Growing up, we ate it at every meal," Joyce said.

For those who have never heard of it, Joyce simply says "Think of it as a spicier sister of sauerkraut."

"Kimchee has four times the probiotics of Greek yogurt," Joyce said. "Americans like it because it's vegan, gluten free and the probiotics."

Traditional Kimchee is made with fermented shrimp. When Joyce was a child, she didn't like the taste of that. For a while her mother turned half a batch of Kimchee into vegan Kimchee so Joyce would eat it, and the other half was made with the traditional shrimp.

"It was too much work so she just did it all vegan," Joyce says – one of the perks of being the baby in the family!

Grocery store Kimchee wasn't comparing to what she grew up eating, and when she found people who made it, they often use an anchovy sauce, which is cheaper than shrimp, and can give it that oily fish taste.

A television and film makeup artist by trade, Joyce certainly wasn't working during the pandemic lockdown. She asked her father, now 85, to teach her how to make Kimchee like her mother made it. Yang Sun has been gone 8 years.

Joyce helped her father with the preparations, taking detailed notes. Things got a little trickier when her dad started throwing spices and seasonings in the mix.

"I have to measure these!" Joyce interrupted. Generations of familiarity with a family recipe by those who made it ended when her mother passed, and only her father was left to make it like they always had. Joyce measured the amounts her father planned to use, and her husband, Kevin Williams, filmed the whole event so the couple could review video, if necessary,



Joyce Park

continued on page 22



Joyce Park tends the grill at the farmer's market and plates the authentic Korean food. On the right she is holding a Kimchee dog and a Korean pork chop plate, both with Kimchee.

continued from page 19

to make sure they had every step in the process correct.

Each batch Joyce's family grew up making was huge, because it was eaten every day by her whole family. More than a hundred pounds of cabbage was used each time.

"Any vegetable can be made into Kimchee," Joyce explained.

Kimchee Girl currently makes three kinds of kimchee: the traditional cabbage, cucumber, and radish, made from the large Korean radish. Joyce describes the level of spiciness as "medium." "My brother makes his own and it's spicier. Some say mine could be spicier, but I'm trying for a broader appeal," Joyce explained.

Navigating the rules

Once she knew how to make it, Joyce and her husband, Kevin, started to navigate the process of making it commercially.

The standards for food sales are far different than making something for personal use. Joyce and Kevin would enter into the world of commercial kitchen use, inspections, and stepping away from some of the traditions of processing it. For example, kimchee was traditionally put in crocks and buried in the yard to be allowed to ferment.

"The department of ag won't let you bury it in the yard," Joyce said with a laugh. "I have four hours to get it from putting it in the jar to refrigeration."

"It was a big learning experience," Joyce said.

"We filed (as a) LLC in 2020 – late fall – and then everything snowballed," Kevin explained. They quickly learned about business insurance, permitting, licensing, PA SAFE certification for food handling and the ins and outs of getting approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture.

"We went blindly in and were very fortunate that everyone we talked to told us the next step," Kevin said.

At every level they received guidance, Joyce said. If they were missing something, they were told exactly what they needed and where they needed to get it.

"Everyone at the PA Department of Ag was super helpful," Joyce said.

Local chefs were also helpful to Joyce as she learned what she had to do to sell her product.

Kimcheegirl.com went online April 15, and online sales of the three varieties of kimchee started May 1.

Getting out there

To get her product on the forks of others, Joyce and Kevin worked through the proper channels to get permitted in several central PA counties so they could have a booth at events and serve Kimchee Girl kimchee with other Korean foods.

Kimchee Girl offers Korean Barbecue at the Hershey Farmer's Market on Choco-



At the Kimchee Girl tent, from left; Kwang Hyon Park (Joyce's brother) friend & booth helper Arcelia Marquez, niece Se Nah Park, Joyce, nephew Young Min Park, nephew Devin Pamphilis and husband Kevin Williams.



Joyce, center, poses with niece Se Nah Park (left) and nephew Young Min Park.



Korean Radish, Nappa Cabbage.

late Avenue every other week, cooking Korean pork chops on site with sticky rice and kimchee, and all-beef hot dogs with kimchee, the east-meets-west kimchee dog.

She has an agreement with Eleven Oaks Farms in Newville for Wagyu beef (also known as American Kobe), a breed of cattle raised specifically for its flavor, tenderness and perfect marbling. Joyce uses that beef in her Korean barbecue to make the meal both authentic and tastier than the customer would expect.

The Kimchee Girl product is starting to get out there.

“People may not know what kimchee is, but they know what good food smells like,” Kevin said of the customers that come to their tent at events.

“The smell of the food brings them in, then it’s word of mouth and friends of friends,” Joyce explained.

Kimchee Girl kimchee is made from the traditional Korean vegetables, which Joyce gets by personally shopping Korean grocery stores in Maryland, or sometimes Philadelphia. It’s the only way she’s been able to find the kind and quality she needs.

In addition to being available for order online, Kimchee Girl kimchee will also be showing up in small, independent markets that feature local makers and products. “I want to get good, authentic, premium kimchee on the shelf,” Joyce said.

She’s currently making new batches

every other week in a shared commercial kitchen.

Joyce has a few serving ideas for people new to kimchee: you can eat it straight out of the jar, cooked, with eggs, with fried rice, or treat it as a spicier salad that already has dressing on it.

Kimchee with a purpose

Joyce and Kevin have been givers all their adult life. In addition to owning a business in Camp Hill, Kevin also works seasonally as “Santa-a-gogo.”

They have continually given back to their community in a very tangible way: helping families affected by cancer. Whether someone has passed and a family is left without a parent or a child, or someone in the family is undergoing treatment, helping them is important to the couple.

“We know how expensive it is to have cancer,” Joyce said.

Yang Sun was diagnosed with breast cancer, and later died from stage 4 lung cancer, although she had never been a smoker.

Joyce had checked to see if the type of cancer her mother had was genetic, and was told it was not. Five years after Yang Sun passed, Joyce was diagnosed with breast cancer and underwent treatment. She was later diagnosed with pre-uterine cancer and had a partial hysterectomy.

Recently, Joyce’s oldest sister was diagnosed with lung cancer.

Does any of it have to do with Joyce’s family living along the creek after the Three Mile Island accident?

“We were poor – we couldn’t leave,” Joyce said. Experts tell them no, but it doesn’t change what they have experienced and are experiencing in their family.

Because cancer is such a financial burden, in addition to the stress and emotional toll it takes on the patient and the family, Joyce and Kevin pledge part of the proceeds of Kimchee Girl products will be donated to locally affected families.

While they applaud medical research and larger support organizations, they feel they best serve others by helping cancer-stricken families in central PA in ways that may free up the stressed family budget to pay another bill or put more money than expected toward groceries.

How big that can be remains unforeseen, but so far authentic Korean kimchee that carries on in Yang Sun’s tradition has been well received.

“I can’t believe how busy we are,” Kevin said, less than three months into selling the product.

Joyce may be a little less surprised, but just as happy about how Kimchee Girl is starting out.

“When it comes down to it, really Kimchee Girl is about my parents.”



Andrea Rich



Edward Krick