

Hello everyone – I am very happy and feel privileged to be here.

From a very early age, I was interested in faraway places. I grew up in a small fishing town called Anacortes in the northwest top of the United States between Seattle and Vancouver, Canada.

There wasn't a lot of cultural diversity in Anacortes at the time, but I was very curious about faraway places and what life was like there and did have some exposure when I was young.

My father would often take us on drives to Seattle where we would have dim sum. I also had a shortwave radio that I would listen to in the summer outside at night trying to hear distant voices. Sometimes things would wash up on the local beach with words from languages I didn't know which fascinated me as well.

When I was around eight years old, my mother would make me instant noodles. She would cook them, drain them, and add a scrambled egg and fry it all together so the noodles got just a little crisp – this was one of my favorite meals.

Well, the particular brand disappeared from the local store so once again my father drove us to the big city. We went to a large Asian foods market in hope of finding a variety similar. We did – in fact it was the first instant noodle variety originally on the market.

While I was there, I noticed many different kinds of instant noodles – ones with different languages and flavors I'd never heard of. I was immediately fascinated. This is where my interest in the instant noodle started.

About twenty years later, I thought it would be interesting to make a list of the ones I liked and disliked. This is how The Ramen Rater was born in 2002. Over the next three years, I tried about 60 varieties and then I stopped as my interest and accessibility to new varieties faded.

In 2010, I moved to a city in Washington called Edmonds. We lived next to an International District, with Asian grocery stores in walking distance. I have poor eyesight – what is known as Legally Blind. I don't drive and have trouble seeing lights to cross the street. The stores were close enough for me to make my way there safely.

Every day, I would walk to the store, pick an instant noodle variety and come home to give it a try. This is really when The Ramen Rater started.

At first, many flavors were unfamiliar to me. After some time trying different varieties and researching their origins, I soon was learning a lot about them.

For someone who didn't have the means to travel and was curious about distant places, this was an easy way to learn and discover new flavors – travelling through taste.

Eventually in 2014, I made my first trip to Asia, visiting Penang, Malaysia. My wife Christine and I spent five days with our host bringing us to many, many hawkers and street courts to try new foods. The next year was Thailand, and the next was my first visit outside Taoyuan airport to see Taiwan.

Taiwan has captured my mind like no other place. From the busy streets of Taipei to the rural landscapes around Tainan, the flavors, the people and the land are all truly amazing.

Many people I know are fascinated with traveling to Europe. I think this is because it is a place they believe will be familiar to them – a place where their families come from.. I can understand this, but I am more interested in visiting places unfamiliar; to get a taste of the unknown.

The opportunity to learn is an important one. Many people in Asia I have met have travelled to other parts of the world to learn about different culture, to work with people far away from home. It is easy to be fearful of things we do not understand. Sadly, this can lead to mistrust – and sometimes to anger and hate.

Learning about people and where they come from is very important and it cannot just come from a book or a video. It comes best from firsthand experience.

Food – especially good food – is important to everyone, everywhere - as we can see from all the people here today.

I believe through the simple act of tasting food we retain the 'flavor of a moment in time.' I see this as a way people can come together – to shed the fears of each other they may have, and come together.

This has been my goal as The Ramen Rater – to bring people together through taste.

Now, I would like to share with you my three favorite flavors I've experienced from packaged noodle varieties I've sampled from Taiwan from my Top Ten Taiwanese Instant Noodles Of All Time 2017 Edition.

In third place we have Little Cook Green Curry Instant Noodle

In second place, we have Xiao Ban Mian Traditional Shallot & Onion Oil Noodle

In first place, the winner of The Ramen Rater's Top Ten Taiwanese Instant Noodles Of All Time 2017 Edition, Mom's Dry Noodle Dan Dan Noodle