

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

You know when I was a kid I can remember when we were getting close because we'd be driving along the highway - and it was only a two lane highway at the time - and there would be the big signs, ya know, "Valerie Jean's Up Ahead" and it would say, "Date Shakes" and it would announce, ya know, all kinds of date products that they were selling and I can remember seeing those big yellow signs so I knew we were always getting close. But you couldn't miss 'em, I mean, it was just in the desert.

Local Farey Tales music begins

NORA VETTER

Welcome to Local Farey Tales. I'm your narrator, Nora Vetter. What IS a local farey tale? It's the story of a fare, f-a-r-e, that can only be found in certain regions, states, cities and so on... Each tale will be told with the help of the voices that know it well; historians, creators, servers, festival organizers, super fans, etc.

Today's featured fare is the Date Shake. You just heard Russell Schubert recall visiting the Valerie Jean Date Shop which was named after his mother and owned and operated by his enterprising and inventive grandfather, Russell Nichol. Now let's meet the rest of our Date Shake tale-tellers...

Tale-Tellers Intro

I'm Maureen Boren, member, volunteer and board member at the Coachella Valley History Museum; Travis Brown, General Manager at China Ranch Date Farm; Bob Harrick, Vice President Sales & Marketing for Woodspur Farms/Oasis Date Gardens; Charles Phoenix, Pop Culture Historia, Humorist and otherwise enthusiast celebrating classic and kitschy American life & style; Heather Raumin, one of the owners of Shields Date Gardens; I'm Russell Schubert and you're listening...

MAUREEN BOREN

...and you are listening to...

BOB HARRICK

...listening to the local...

TRAVIS BROWN

...the local farey tale of...

CHARLES PHOENIX

...local farey tale of the date shake...

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

MAUREEN BOREN

...farey tale of dates and the date shake...

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

...of the Valerie Jean Date Shop Date Shake...

HEATHER RAUMIN

...the date shake.

2:17 - Music transition

CHARLES PHOENIX

I'm Charles Phoenix and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake.

(Singing)

I love Date Shakes, I love Date Shakes. You've gotta have one when you go to the desert.

TRAVIS BROWN

I think it does qualify as like a regional food at this point. Which I kinda love cause the milkshake part is ya know the fast food culture which also owes a lot of history to Southern California. It's almost like the two combined. It could only happen in a place like Southern California.

MAUREEN BOREN

Oh my gosh, when we first came to the Valley in the 70s, it was a very hot time. I came in July. And people had already told us, the coolest thing you want to have is a Date Shake. But don't plan on having lunch afterwards because it's very rich, very filling and it really satiates your appetite. And they were right. It is something that is very different from any other ice cream mixture or shake that you could have.

TRAVIS BROWN

First time trying a Date Shake... I wanna say it was probably down in Indio or the Coachella Valley somewhere. You know I was a kid so anything, you put ice cream in anything and yeah of course, I thought they were great.

HEATHER RAUMIN

So in all honesty, I had not tried a Date Shake until we acquired Shields Date Gardens. And my first take was, "Wow! This is sweet!" At the time I was, like all women after child bearing years, I was trying to watch my sugar intake so I had to try and stay strong and not have too many because the caloric intake was a little more than what I needed. But it was delicious. Definitely delicious.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

Delicious! I used to love 'em when we were kids. I used to drink 'em all the time.

BOB HARRICK

Well, I remember the first time I tried it and that's when I actually started working at Oasis Date Gardens. Quite frankly, I was shocked at the flavor profile and the sweetness of the Date Shake which was very unique.

CHARLES PHOENIX

I do remember the first time I ever had a Date Shake. I mean it was, well, before I could even remember because um, growing up in Southern California we would go out to the desert to Palm Springs or Indio and you know, we always went to Shields Date Garden and got a Date Shake but...as a child um, I remember thinking they were really, really sweet...

MAUREEN BOREN

It's a little nutty flavor and kinda caramel flavor. And you'll get little bits of date in the ice cream. It's really thick and that's why I say it's very, very filling.

CHARLES PHOENIX

Dates are nature's caramel.

BOB HARRICK

Uh, it's very sweet and primarily has more of a caramel flavoring. But I don't know hardly anybody that has not been completely astonished at the delicious flavor of a Date Shake.

TRAVIS BROWN

I'm still a fan and I've literally made like tens of thousands of them with my bare hands.

CHARLES PHOENIX

Okay, here we go. This is a Date Shake. Vanilla-ish-y ice cream. Yeah. Well, actually not ishy it is vanilla ice cream...

HEATHER RAUMIN

Prior to our acquiring Shields they had switched over to a high quality ice cream which is really the key.

CHARLES PHOENIX

...with some sort of date puree if you're lucky. If you're unlucky, you'll get one with the date crystals.

HEATHER RAUMIN

And we also add our date paste which is, our date paste is our date crystals.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

TRAVIS BROWN

Probably a preference thing, too. I'm sure other people prefer the chunks but I, ya know, I think the paste works really well.

BOB HARRICK

And then the paste to give it the flavor profiles.

HEATHER RAUMIN

We mix them still the original way that Mr. Shields mixed them in the old fashioned blender.

TRAVIS BROWN

You have to hand spin it. Some people are using soft serve and just, yeah...no. They're doing themselves and the Date Shake a great injustice. I think you need to make it the old fashioned way.

CHARLES PHOENIX

Date puree mixed with vanilla ice cream. That is a Date Shake.

TRAVIS BROWN

We have variations. You can add like a topping or you can add banana and blend that in. I think the original one is pretty good on its own though honestly. I think sometimes you start adding too much to it and it takes away from the Date Shake.

BOB HARRICK

And you can if you so choose, pick a particular flavor such as blackberry. We can add a little bit of syrup to that to give it that particular flavor but most people will order just the original Date Shake itself. Which is soft serve ice cream and date paste and is made basically from scratch right there when you order it.

MAUREEN BOREN

It's indescribable, you just have to have one.

CHARLES PHOENIX

It's the local flavor. Ya know? I mean, you have not done Palm Springs or the Coachella Valley until you've had a Date Shake. That's it. And people love 'em. I mean, they just, they just like slurp on 'em, ya know, until they are done and then go get another one. We love 'em so much. I mean, they are delicious. They really are.

7:41 - Music transition

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

MAUREEN BOREN

I'm Maureen Boren of the Coachella Valley History Museum and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of Dates and the Date Shake.

Since we're talking about Fairy Tales, the tale of how the date got to America and California it is the stuff of the Arabian Nights I'm telling you. There's so many stories that go along with so many explorers and it's just like a movie I mean, it's just like a film. There were people in the United States Department of Agriculture very early, turn of the century, who of course were looking at populating the West. So the idea is if you could find crops that could be grown in our vast deserts in California, Arizona and so forth, especially in California, Southern California our Mohave Desert and all of this area, then people will be able to come and establish themselves. So the Department of Agriculture was highly interested in finding a sustainable crop that was marketable, that could be grown in our Valley. And of course they knew about date palms. They were instrumental in developing trips for their scientists to go to the Middle East. And one of the key people that was a physiologist and botanist for the Department of Agriculture the Dr. Walter Swingle. And in 1904, Dr. Swingle was sent to Morocco. One of his tasks was to find out what was going on in the oasis. What was going on with this rampant disease that they had heard about...

BOB HARRICK

The US Department of Agriculture had found that in the country of Morocco, there was a soil born disease called the Bayoud disease. It had wiped out just about all of their plants, trees...

MAUREEN BOREN

It was catastrophic. Because these countries, Morocco, Egypt, all of them, they really depended upon the date palm. So Dr. Swingle went along with his credentials from the United States Department of Agriculture and he made contact with the Sharif who was considered the religious head of a very particular oasis, Bou Denib in Morocco. And this oasis had a very fine product. It had the Medjool, which is considered Queen of all of the dates because it is large, fleshy, sweet, it's got a small pit... All of the dates are great but this one is the one that is highly sought after and so very marketable. Well, we did not have Medjools, uh, we didn't have anything! But we did not have Medjools, certainly. And he had a conversation with this Sharif. And he informed him that his products, which were being sent all over Europe, were receiving very high prices. And yet, he was selling them very cheaply. And he did not realize the quality and what money was being brought by these very special fruits in other parts of the world. So, oh, Sharif was very happy about that and he agreed to let Dr. Swingle go into the oasis and they searched for quite a while to try and see if there was any area that had a non-diseased area of palms. Now in order to propagate the palm, you can propagate it from the seed, which had been attempted by several individuals. But you get these tiny little dates that are just really not worth the effort so if you want to get a really good date you take what grows off the base of the palm, we call them the babies...

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TRAVIS BROWN

You wanna cut a clone off of the parent tree. Um, they put out these little baby...some people call them suckers, but they're little offshoot trees. And if you cut the offshoot from the parent it will be a genetic clone of the parent. So you can keep transplanting that way. So if you want more Medjool date trees you have to cut off a Medjool offshoot, transplant that. If you plant a Medjool seed it's not going to be a Medjool. It's going to be something else.

MAUREEN BOREN

...the shoots. So very carefully cut off the base of the tree, wrapped and then they can be transported and replanted. And those are the ones that will give you the marketable date. The best fruit. So Dr. Swingle was looking for disease free shoots. And he happened to find eleven. That's all he could find. Well, the Sharif allowed him to take them back. Now when I say, "Take them back", you have to understand, this man in the early 1900s did not speak the language. He had other people with him to help him but it was a long journey from where he was in Morocco to the coastline to load them up on ships that would bring them to the United States. That was just the beginning of the story. And as they were loaded, they went on camelback out to the coast. Now, these were highly prized items. They were worth a lot of money. So he had to have guards go along with him. And I don't know how he negotiated that. We have his journals. As well as the journals of several other of these explorers. They have hair raising tales...what they went through to fend off the thieves and all of this and to keep the darn things alive while they went by camelback over to the coast. Then they had to have people on the ship who were willing to keep these things damp, covered up and alive. And then when they came into the United States, the Department of Agriculture said, "We want to make absolutely sure you're not bringing a diseased product in here." They have to be quarantined for two years in a state that doesn't have any date palms whatsoever. Well, some people had been growing a few date palms from seed so they couldn't come directly to California. So what he did was he went to Nevada. He went right alongside the Colorado River and he negotiated with a Native American couple who lived in encampment right by the Colorado. He planted those eleven...I'm not even sure all eleven survived the journey but he had what he had. And he planted them and he negotiated with them, paid them to take care of these offshoots for two years. Which they did. It's amazing! They kept them alive. And they found they were disease free. So then they shipped them over and they came directly to Indio. They will actually produce fruit in about five years but the best fruit is a good ten years. And so it's an investment. And from that point in 1944, Dr. Swingle distributed them to many of the growers in the area so they could start propagating which was the whole idea.

BOB HARRICK

So from that point some of those shoots or plants were transported to Oasis Date Gardens and that's how it really got started as far as planting into acreage and from that point it's grown into millions and millions and millions of harvested pounds every year.

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MAUREEN BOREN

So this story is told in our Date Museum and we have artifacts from these adventures into the Middle East and lots of photographs...oh my gosh, what these men went through in order to get this started is absolutely amazing.

15:48 - Music transition

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

I'm Russell Schubert and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Valerie Jean Date Shop Date Shake.

Yes, I can't recall the first time I had it but I remember visiting my Grandfather's Date Shop and that was a big item that he had and he sold it quite a bit. And as kids we went in and drank 'em all the time. And I just love 'em. And then later he sold it as a 'date butter' and we got 'em at our home in Flagstaff so I could make 'em at home just anytime I wanted.

MAUREEN BOREN

And Valerie Jean's was a little local stand that was run by a family. It was approximately, on Highway 86 and 66 so it's in the middle of almost nowhere.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

You know they're right outside of Palm Springs and people just used to go there and buy dates and get Date Shakes and use that as a little oasis place. You know, there wasn't much out there at the time.

MAUREEN BOREN

And the family who had it, they also had found other ways to market the dates to locals and you know there wasn't a lot going on in the '70s in this part of the Valley so...ya know, experimenting with things and trying to get people to come out so that's where I had my first Date Shake.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

I mean, I always remember him having the Date Shake and that's back into the '50s.

MAUREEN BOREN

That's what we believe. You know, a lot of people say they had Date Shakes early. But everything I've been able to find in our archives...and I won't say that it's ya know, 100% but it really appears that the earliest record we have of a Date Shake came from Valerie Jean.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

The Nicolls were one of the founding families of the Los Angeles area. And I don't know how he got started in it but he built the Date Shop by hand. Probably in the early 1920s.

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And he'd built it out of railroad ties that he'd salvaged from a local railroad line and just built it up from there. After he built the initial Date Shop, he built a house which joined the Date Shop and lived there with my Grandmother and then they had my Mom and they all lived there for years.

MAUREEN BOREN

Before we had the big agribusiness that was dealing with lots and lots of date gardens, we had many, many families who had family operations. And one way to move their dates was to have a place where people could buy them. And of course the automobile was critical. People were coming out, once we had decent roads, people were coming out and exploring this very unusual desert. They had been coming to Palm Springs for a long, long time. But pulling them farther East there needed to be some ways for people to explore. So we had little Mom and Pop date stands all the way from Thermal, Mecca...all the way almost into Palm Springs. Not quite...Rancho Mirage... And if you know the layout of our Valley, one city just goes right into the other so we've got Mecca, Coachella, Indio, La Quinta, Indian Wells, Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage, Cathedral City, Palm Springs. And it was not unusual to see a little stand even though the date groves would be farther away. At least they could market them.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

The front served as oh, just as the shop where you come in...There was some counters and you could walk around and pick things off of shelves and they had a counter with items displayed and there'd always be someone behind the counter where you could pick things off the shelves or you could order things specifically and if it was something they didn't have readily made then they could go in the back to make it up...Because everything was made fresh there in the shop. And I remember as a child, I was just fascinated by the Date Shop and they had a, like a processing plant in the back and I was always back there. And I was always getting in trouble for playing with all the equipment and making boxes. That was my favorite thing to do was put...the boxes were laid flat and I used to go back there and fold boxes whether they needed them or not.

MAUREEN BOREN

And in our museum, we have kept many of the packages of these small little date stands and we have the names of them and the signage and everything. So people can see what a big deal it was. I mean, that was the way they marketed, you know, the dates.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

I mean, they didn't have air conditioning back then. And at that time they didn't make the Date Shakes with any ice cream or anything so to make them cold he would chill the butter that he used.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

And that was his secret recipe that he came up with and then he would also uh, I don't know if he froze the milk or just chilled it 'til almost the point of freezing..then he would put the milk and butter together in a blender, blend it up and serve it as a Date Shake.

HEATHER RAUMIN

Uh, they called it ice milk back then because ya know there was no such thing as an ice cream delivery service. But uh, yes, after we purchased it, they had already made that transition, Mrs. Shields had, in finding that perfect vanilla ice cream.

CHARLES PHOENIX

Shields Date Garden. They've been in business in Indio since 1926. They're definitely the most famous, most iconic place to have a Date Shake and to celebrate the date itself.

HEATHER RAUMIN

Mr. Shields, when he acquired Shields Date Gardens, it was actually over a cup of coffee with a friend of his. And Mr. Shields was in the furniture business. Bess, his wife, was a teacher. And ya know, you have to remember, this was 1924 so, it's uh, things are very barren here. This is a desert. And you're out in the middle of nowhere and so if you can just imagine, two men having a cup of coffee, both saying..one didn't like what he was doing and the other one said, "I'm not any good at what I'm doing." And they switched pink slips over a cup of coffee and said, "Since you have a degree from the Colorado School of Engineering and Mining..why don't you try dates. And I would love to run a furniture store."

MAUREEN BOREN

But Shields is still a very visible one. And it's in Indio, run by a wonderful family. And they have a wonderful cafe and you can get your Date Shake. And it looks like, it looks like an old ice cream parlor inside, ya know, they've retained that.

HEATHER RAUMIN

The most important thing, one of the things that we're very proud of is our Date Shake counter. And our Date Shake counter has the original stools, it's the original counter that people from all walks of the world have stopped by and sat at that booth and ordered a Date Shake and probably sat there and just, ya know, if Mr. Shields or Mrs. Shields had time they just sat and talked. But we had a lot of the Rat Pack from Los Angeles that used to come to Indio to try to get away from it all, they would stop by, Huell Howser, all sorts of different, ya know, the whole Hollywood scene, they've all had their picture taken at the original Date Shake...sitting on those stools. It's really fun to see that when people walk in, one of the first things they want to do is get their picture taken in front of that counter. So it has the original linoleum, aqua linoleum platform. It's in a bird's eye blue. It's just very retro.

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And the entrance is actually the very first Coachella Valley Water District Building which Mr. Shields acquired. Then, the two end caps that are attached to that round building were actually two World War II training barracks for General Patton's hospital barracks that they had out in the Mojave Desert. And so, Mr. Shields knew that those were no longer going to be needed and so, he actually had them brought in. And they brought them in on humongous logs. And oxen were actually responsible for actually pulling them out of the desert onto the road where they could safely bring them then by truck. So it was quite the feat to get these two humongous buildings in tact that they brought in, including the windows are original. And so, it's beautiful to feel as though when you're in the main store front of Shields, you're looking out windows that people who were training to go to Africa perhaps were looking out of themselves. So there's some real history to the building.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

A little story, he was selling Date Shakes in the early 1940s... General Patton when he was getting his troops ready for the Invasion of North Africa, he had them training down by the Salton Sea and he became friends, my Grandfather became friends with General Patton. And a lot of General Patton's troops used to stop by the Date Shop to purchase Date Shakes because they loved them and uh, it was about the only cold and refreshing thing they could get in the desert at that time.

MAUREEN BOREN

Oasis Dates is farther out in Mecca...

BOB HARRICK

If people are not familiar with where Oasis Date Garden property is...at one time going way back before the 86 Expressway, you're really talking about Highway 111...which was a direct route South. So people would annually stop at the facility or at the cafe and it would be part of their stop. We also had products in there, the different varieties were available to be purchased. There was a film there, a story about the history of dates...so there was a reason for people to stop into the gift shop and the cafe. Once the 86 Expressway was developed it did take traffic away but there are those people that make it a point to particularly stop in...once they've had that shake and they compare it to other ones they always come back to our Date Shake. I'll put it that way.

MAUREEN BOREN

All of these were family owned.

BOB HARRICK

Oasis Date Gardens is a subsidiary of Woodspur Farms as of 2014.

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MAUREEN BOREN

The Laughlins were some of the early pioneers in developing the dates...

BOB HARRICK

Oasis Date Gardens, quite frankly, is over a century old. It was settled by a gentleman by the name of Ben Laughlin, Sr in 1912. He immediately started planting seeds at that time. But he started to realized that uh, that was not the correct way uh, to start to plant acreage. What Mr. Laughlin did was plant fourteen differrent varieties on Oasis Date Gardens property. And as popularity grew, it became evident that the Medjool date was quite frankly, the largest and sweetest of all the dates. And so, it became the most marketable variety and from that point and I don't know exactly whether it was ten years after he planted or how many years afterwards but most of the property was converted to Medjools. However, the original trees that were of other varieties are still on the property but they just were not expanded as far as additional plantings.

TRAVIS BROWN

There's about a hundred or were about a hundred original trees planted in 1920. And that was actually my Father's Great Aunt who had lived here and planted those from like a mail order catalog. So we did have family here who uh, planted the original date grove at China Ranch. But that thing grew wild for about 50 years untended so it wasn't really until late '70s that my Father had moved here, early '80s, started to clean that date grove up and turn it into ya know, farmable orchard basically. So interesting fact about dates, anytime you plant a seed it's going to be a hybrid variety. It's gonna be a cross between whatever the female was that are generally...the females attract and those are known varieties and the males are always random so anytime you're planting a seed that's going to be a cross pollination. You're getting a new heirloom variety basically. The hybrid. And some of them are good, some are bad. It just kinda depends if you get some good varieties or not. So I would say about half of them in there were really good varieties, other ones not so great but we keep them because the trees are pretty and you've got about a 50/50 chance of it being a male or female tree. When you plant from seed.

MAUREEN BOREN

It is a very interesting thing that these trees have male and female - like most fruits trees, fruit palms - one male can produce enough pollen for 49 females. So we say that in a date garden, we have a harem. Every male date palm has his own harem. Which he pollinates. He's responsible for that. It's very important that he has a lot of pollen.

CHARLES PHOENIX

Shields Date Garden... They have a film there they've been playing there for decades, at least 65 years, called "The Romance and Sex Life of the Date"...

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MAUREEN BOREN

And they love to show, "The Sex Life of a Date" in a film. And it really talks about the pollinating of course. The male and the female. But there's billboards on the highway, "Come and see the sex life of a date", ya know, "Come to Shields"....

CHARLES PHOENIX

And it's a film, that is just continuously running on a loop and it tells you how they pollinate dates. And just, ya know, how it all goes. And so, it's kinda like out there. There were billboards that said, ya know, "See and hear the Romance and Sex Life of a Date". That was pretty racy. That was pretty darn racy in the day.

HEATHER RAUMIN

You know, you have to really give this man a lot of credit. Because to use the word, "sex life" back in the '60s was still just a little premature to what we're used to today. And this was right around the time Elvis started doing his fun dance. And The Beatles were doing their fun concerts and you remember seeing signs of Moms covering their children's eyes because they were on stage and maybe verbalizing things that they had never heard before you know... And so, I thought Mr. Shields, he must have liked The Beatles ya know? He must have liked Elvis. I like to think so because he was just as brave as they were in starting something new and wonderful. And so, "The Sex Life of the Date" really is though what it is. You have female trees and male trees and without those two obviously you will not have a crop. The male tree has the pollen for which we actually collect and we dry and then we go and we hand pollinate the trees in order to ensure a crop. So there is something behind this movie that is actually talks about the propagation of dates. And the horticulture behind them. He came up with the film, which was actually first started as a slide show, just so as that people would have a true understanding of what it was that he was doing when maybe he just simply didn't have time to sit and talk all the time. And he just wanted so dearly to educate people but he knew he would never get anything done during the day if he just spent all day talking with individuals. Which he loved doing but it just wasn't feasible. So uh, that's where the movie came from, the movie idea. He was just trying to spread his knowledge.

CHARLES PHOENIX

But we love it. It's hysterical. And it's still happening. The tradition continues. It's no longer, like a movie on a film loop. Then ya know, it was video for a while and now I'm sure it's totally digital...

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HEATHER RAUMIN

We turned it into an actual movie when we acquired it in 2000 from a slideshow. So realistically the movie still has the original slides in it and Mr. Shields voice however, it has a few clips on the way things are done now compared to when he first started. So people can have a true educational experience.

CHARLES PHOENIX

But "The Romance and Sex Life of a Date" is a film that you have to see at Shields Date Garden in Indio.

MAUREEN BOREN

Each little Mom and Pop date stand had their own little flavor. Some of them had kind of a Spanish flair ya know with the tile tops and everything. Others played up the Arabian theme. Most of those are pretty much gone.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

And I was excited when I found out they made Valerie Jean Date Shop a historical site. I believe it's a California Historical Site. It was a fun operation. We enjoyed visiting. My Grandfather was a fantastic man. And uh, we just enjoyed it as children.

34:08 - Music transition

HEATHER RAUMIN

I'm Heather Raumin from Shields Date Gardens and you're listening to the Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake.

I think that people pretty much know that uh, ya know when they come here that's one of the reasons that they are going to uh enjoy. That's one of the things they are going to enjoy. It's a predisposed thing in their mind. I'm going to Shields to have a Date Shake and the rest will just follow.

CHARLES PHOENIX

Well, you know one of the most exciting things about the Date Shake besides the delicious flavor of it is...ya know, everyone love milkshakes, so then when you get a specialty flavor that's really generally only available in a certain region, I mean people look forward to having a Date Shake. It's a destination. Having a Date Shake is a moment.

TRAVIS BROWN

Somebody came to visit China Ranch Date Farm they could expect to go down a windy canyon road for about two miles. Which, I think the drive down is part of the fun really cause at that point you don't know where you're going. You're wondering if maybe you're going the wrong way.

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There's no cell service so you're kind of are trusting a map or directions somebody may have told you. And then you get down here and it opens up into this lush green oasis. And it's pretty magical once you get down here.

CHARLES PHOENIX

Hadley's is another very famous place to have a Date Shake. Hadley's is right near where those giant dinosaurs are on the 10 umm, between ya know, L.A. and Palm Springs out in Cabazon. That's a great moment to have on a road trip. Is to stop at Hadley's, to stop at the, umm, dinosaurs. Date Shake and dinosaurs go together. They're a match made in...I mean, dates have gotta be prehistoric so...

MAUREEN BOREN

In our Date Museum we start out with the history of the date on the planet. And this is probably the oldest cultivated fruit plant that we know of. It was know to the Sumerians in 3000 BC. There's evidences of it mentioned...there, it was mentioned in the Bible, the Torah, uh, repeatedly over and over and over again. Very much a part of the Sumerian culture. And that's where you would start in our Date Museum. You would see the inception of the plant and why it is so revered in the Middle East and in areas where it has grown for thousands of years.

CHARLES PHOENIX

I think dates are VERY underrated. VERY underrated.

MAUREEN BOREN

And it's extremely nutritious. There are so many vitamins and minerals that are included in, in a date and of course it may vary with the variety of dates. But it's very high in anti-oxidants and vitamins, iron, lots of iron, potassium, B complex vitamins, Vitamin K, calcium, magnesium, copper...very high in fiber so great for digestion. But it's easily digested. And it's a natural sugar. It's not like a refined sugar. So you can eat quite a few dates without worrying. Even diabetics can eat them, but in moderation of course. Because it's totally different from any other sugar that you would get in refined sweets. It really replenishes your energy almost instantaneously. I carry a small bag of the drier dates, the Deglet Noors, in my car and when I'm in between places and I just, I can't get anywhere to get anything to eat they're great to grab and chew. They are considered a complete food. And historically they were used by armies in the Middle East. They would carry dates to sustain themselves. All they needed was water and dates and maybe some camel milk. Merchants that were on the Silk Road, they would carry the dates. And you could actually probably live off the dates for some period of time because they're easily kept when they're dry they don't ferment or rot...

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

HEATHER RAUMIN

I believe that if you go back to 1924 and even into World War II, some of the commodities that people were trying to store, especially in Europe and after the war, you know refrigeration was a...and electricity for that matter was something you conserved and so, to store dates because you only have one harvest per year, you realistically would try to sell feverishly as much as you could during this first part of the year. But then in order for them to stop sugaring, to stop ripening, you would have to put them into some kind of a cooler. And that of course is very expensive. Especially back then. And the space alone, just the technology of being able to have the kind of coolers that we have today it simply wasn't there. So, Mr. Shields, if I was to talk with him, I would almost venture to say it's my true belief that he developed the crystals as a way to preserve dates so as that people could enjoy them year round without them spoiling. Crystals are simply and purely a dried date. Now, our crystals are dates of a few varieties that we mix to get that awesome taste in our shake. But it's kinda like that hidden secret. Our recipe, ya know? Once you rehydrate the crystal it literally becomes date paste again.

TRAVIS BROWN

We didn't come up with the paste 'cause other people were doing that. But it's basically like ya know grinding up ground beef or something.. You know, you have to take the pits out. I mean you can grind it in like a sausage grinder. That's like the way we started. Now we have it done in a larger facility because we're grinding so much. But yeah, yeah, it kinda comes out like ground beef almost.

BOB HARRICK

We have date paste which is 100% just dates that have been for all intents and purposes ground up so to speak into a paste form. And it makes it so much easier and quicker for us based on the volume of the shakes that we might make in a day....so...or on a particular weekend...so it's just having that really available and take a scoop of paste and actually put it into the soft serve. So when we say, "date paste", it's actually um, just picture a giant meat grinder and we grind up the dates with no additive and will turn it into paste.

TRAVIS BROWN

And it's pretty dense. The consistency is really dense so... Like if you're trying at home that's what I would recommend. Maybe like a Cuisinart would work if you just had it in your own little kitchen...didn't have a grinder for sausage. You could do, probably blend it up and then I would add some warm water just to like get the consistency right. We like the consistency to be about the same as mashed potatoes.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

MAUREEN BOREN

So you want to know how to make a Date Shake? We have a very simple recipe. Very, very easy. You have to start out with dates. You can get dry dates or you can get the nice moist dates. Deglet Noors are used quite a bit and they, they're a drier but of course all of them will moisten up with a little water. So generally what you're getting in the markets might be Deglet Noors or Medjools. Personally I think it's a waste to use that fine Medjool in a Date Shake because it's so good just eaten by itself. But if that's what you have you can experiment with that. So it really doesn't matter ya know? Some of them have a little different taste. We have Barhis which are little round golden things and they have a really different flavor but they're all kinda caramelly I think. Or a little nutty. That's kind of, they won't be tart. They'll be more mellow. De-pit them and as I said you have to put a little water with them, soften them up and you need about oh, I'd say a good blender full. And then you blend them up and you get what we call a paste. A very dense paste. So. Then you're ready. Okay, you need 2 cups cold milk, 3/4 of a cup of date paste, 4 scoops of ice cream and blend it like mad...and then if you want a little looser Date Shake you put a little crushed ice. And that's your Date Shake.

HEATHER RAUMIN

We give the recipe out to people along with all the ingredients minus the ice cream for them to take home and try it themselves. And so, we've had a lot of people that have had coffee and made a Coffee Date Shake. Uh, we've had people mix it with a little bit of coconut. We've had people...all sorts of things, peanut butter, you name it. There's been a lot of people that have experimented with it.

RUSSELL SCHUBERT

But I, I've got a lot of fond memories of Date Shakes and like I said, I loved them. Everybody in the family drank 'em and I used to get home from school and if I wanted a nice little treat I'd pour a glass of milk and put a couple spoonful of date butter in it and make myself a Date Shake.

HEATHER RAUMIN

We're just pillars watching over Shields. That's our job. We're keepers of the Shield. And so, that is something Mr. Shields developed and that is something that uh, ya know, like anything else, we try to pay homage to everything that he did so that was a no-brainer for sure we will always keep the Date Shake. And I love the word "finest" it's just to me, it's just a beautiful word.

TRAVIS BROWN

I'll be curious to see what happens with the next generation though because it does definitely seem kinda tied in with an era of nostalgia maybe.

"The Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake" Transcript

Like Route 66 and drive thrus and things like that. I think it kinda has its own little place in that history of food. And I don't know what the younger generation thinks about that so...

CHARLES PHOENIX

I mean, you are tasting history. You're tasting...a Date Shake has a story. A Date Shake has a soul. A Date Shake is a ...a delight. And delicious.

MAUREEN BOREN

And I hope this farey tale intrigues other people and encourages people to put dates into your everyday diet you know. It's such a healthy, healthy thing and it's great for kids. You know, once they get past, "Oh, it doesn't look so pretty," ya know, "It's not like a peach"...But uh, I guarantee that if you give 'em a Date Shake they'll be sold.

45:15 - Music transition

NORA VETTER

And that is the Local Farey Tale of the Date Shake.

More information about the Date Shake and the Date Shake Tale-Tellers can be found at local farey (farey) tales (tales).com and be sure to follow LocalFareyTalesPodcast on Facebook and Instagram to share your own tales about the Date Shake or other local fare. And if you don't know much about your local fare... Ask! There are tale tellers everywhere. Generously filled cups of Gratitude to Maureen Boren, Travis Brown, Bob Harrick, Charles Phoenix, Heather Raumin and Russell Schubert for sharing their time and Date Shake knowledge. Concept, Production and Editing by me, Nora Vetter, Music by Anisha Thomas, and Artwork by Jonathan Reich. More Local Farey Tales are coming soon so be sure to subscribe on your favorite place to listen to podcasts.

46:52 - End of episode