

LINDA GREEN

Miss Linda's New Orleans Soul Food Seasoning Company—New Orleans, LA

* * *

Date: March 12, 2013

Location: Linda Green's catering facility—New Orleans, LA

Interviewer: Sara Roahen

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 2 hours, 1 minute

Project: Ya-ka-mein in New Orleans—Louisiana

[Begin Linda Green-Ya-Ka-Mein]

00:00:01

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is Tuesday, March 12, 2013. I'm in New Orleans East with Miss Linda Green, otherwise known as the Ya-Ka-Meat Lady [Interviewer's note: this is the phonetic spelling for one way of pronouncing the dish]. Or Ya-Ka-Mein Lady. We'll see how she pronounces it. Miss Linda, could we start with you stating your first name, your last name, and tell me what you do for a living, please?

00:00:25

Linda Green: Good afternoon. My name is Miss Linda Green. I am called the Ya-Ka-Mein Lady. I do catering. I do all the festivals in the city of New Orleans, and I do what I do best. I love cooking.

00:00:40

SR: Thank you. Could you tell us for the record your birth date?

00:00:41

LG: November 20, 1957. Now you know my age. [*Laughs*]

00:00:46

SR: If we can do the math. Can you describe to us where we are right now and what you do here?

00:00:54

LG: Okay. We're in New Orleans East. I'm in the old Ricardo's Building—we're in the old Ricardo's Restaurant in New Orleans East on Morrison [Road] and Crowder [Boulevard]. It's a commercial kitchen and I do my cooking for my catering here. You know if I have an event, this is where I cook all the food at. I like it because they have freezers and coolers and fryers and tables. Oh, they got all kinds of stuff up in here, and I like it you know. I like it. It's a commercial kitchen.

00:01:32

SR: How long have you been cooking here?

00:01:35

LG: Oh well, it's been like six months now. Uh-hm, six months.

00:01:39

SR: Well, I'm going to back way up for the start of this and ask you where you were born and where you grew up.

00:01:50

LG: Okay, I was born in New Orleans and I grew up in Central City on Third and Danneel [Streets]. That's where I come from. That's where my family comes from: off of Third and Danneel, Jackson [Avenue] and Oretha Castle Haley [Boulevard]—but it used to be Jackson and

Dryades. You know, that's where my grandparents—that's where they come from, off of Oretha Castle Haley and Jackson.

00:02:14

SR: Was it called Oretha Castle Haley when you were growing up?

00:02:16

LG: No, it was called Jackson and Dryades, uh-hm.

00:02:21

SR: And that's the area where you still live—is that correct?

00:02:24

LG: I still live in Central City. Still live there. You know, my grandmother, my grandfather, my great-great grandmother, all of us—yeah, mom—

00:02:34

SR: I know that your mother was a big influence in your cooking life. Can you tell us a little bit about what food in your childhood home was like and who was cooking then?

00:02:45

LG: Yeah, it was great. My mom, she did all the cooking. And she taught me everything because it was like me and my brother, but my brother stayed mostly with my grandmother and

them because my mom was working. And I stayed sometimes with my auntie, so by my mom working and stuff—but we be there at the house. But she did a lot of cooking at that house, and she showed me how to do a lot of it. I was in the kitchen with her. And I was the only girl. And it just was me and him. And she did a lot of—what? I had to chop all the green onions and the parsley and the celery. I had to do all of that, but I had fun doing it. And then it got to a point I got tired of doing it. I did. I ain't going to lie. I did. But then I look back on a lot of things that—I look back and look at my mom. See, my mom used to cook for Saint Francis De Sales Catholic Church. That's where she was from. We called my mom a Bapta-Ca. She was Baptist and she turned to Catholic.

00:03:52

She used to do banquets. My mother was the one that put all the freezers and the coolers and stuff in the coffee house at Saint Francis De Sales on Second and Loyola. She was the one that did that. She did all the banquets by herself. And all the money that she received she gave to the church to buy the things that they needed. And she cooked every Sunday. You know after Mass you'd go and eat dinner—yeah, you ate lunch, and she was the lady that was cooking. You know, baked chicken, macaroni and cheese, green beans, potato salad. That was my mother doing that—Shirley Green.

00:04:37

SR: You said that she gave her money back to the church, so I guess that this wasn't her paying job?

00:04:43

LG: Oh no. My mother come from Orleans Parish School Board. She retired thirty years with that. I have twenty-five years with that school board, but after [Hurricane] Katrina I went out on faith and I never looked back. Tipitina's told me to come back; in one week and one day I came back. I started feeding disadvantaged musicians and everything been nice for me ever since. I never looked back.

00:05:13

SR: I want to get to that, but first, what do you mean that your mom worked for the Orleans Parish School Board?

00:05:20

LG: Well, she was a school cafeteria worker just like I was you know. She retired thirty years with that. My mother used to cater for the school board too. She did catering for them. My mother was one of the best cooks on the board.

00:05:35

SR: How did she have time to cook at home if she was out working?

00:05:41

LG: Well you know you go in the morning, and she had time because you get off at 2:30, and she'd come home and she'd cook for the family. My mom used to cook everything—red beans and rice, and I sure miss those green lima beans and I ain't talking about the little ones. I miss the big ones. [*Emphasis Added*] Oh, I love them things. Mom used to cook everything. She cooked

everything. She used to cater for this family on State Street: greens and cornbread every Thursday.

00:06:14

You remember—you know Mr. Silas Lee? He is a political analyst, Silas Lee. Well anyway, my mother used to cook greens and cornbread for his mother and father every Wednesday night; she did a family on State Street with the greens and cornbread every Thursday night. And you know my greens is popular, too. And she showed me how to cook them greens. And I could cook greens. I could cook beans without meat and you'll think you're eating beans with meat. My mother taught me that. There's a secret. We got to get together on that cookbook.

[Laughs]

00:06:56

SR: You're not going to give away that secret here?

00:06:57

LG: I can't, no, I can't. You know that's what makes me so intrigued—everybody so intrigued with me with that. My mom used to cook ya-ka-mein at home, but when she did it, it was with a pork chop. That's what black families were doing. Families, they would cook ya-ka-mein and it was in the black houses. My grandmother used to cook it, my great-grandmother, she cooked it, and they cooked it with the pork chops. I do it with the beef because, you know, when you're traveling with it—you know, I don't want it to spoil or nothing like that, so beef carries more than pork do. But she did it and it was delicious. That ya-ka-mein tasted the same way my

mother—the same way I cook the ya-ka-mein, that's the same way my mama cooked it, and it tasted good.

00:07:55

My mom used to sell it at this bar on the corner of our house and it was named Bean Brothers. It's the same bar that was in the Treme movie. And how she did it—because the Bean Brothers and my family, they were close. You know the Bean Brothers, their mother and my great-grandmother was the best of friends. My great-grandmother used to keep them two boys and their sisters while their mother Miss Stella used to go to work. So we was a close-knit family.

00:08:30

And then my mom started selling ya-ka-mein out their bar. And it just was so in high demand. And my mom was working at the school board; she had to stop because the school board had benefits and the bar didn't have no benefits. So she went on with that, but she always did tell me that one day I might be able to use that. Because we used to sit down and talk—do sandwiches and all things with catering because she did catering too. But like I said—I'm going to back again—when she used to do the banquets for the church, you know she would have Cornish hens, split pea soup—my mom did all of those things, you know. And she took them proceeds of that money and gave it to the church, and it was a big affair. I mean it was a huge affair and she did all of that by herself. All of that.

00:09:20

SR: Do the churches still have big lunches like that after service on Sundays?

00:09:24

LG: Yeah. The one on St. Claude, right there—St. Michael's. Yes, right there on St. Claude and two blocks before you get to Esplanade. They have that every, um—every Sunday after Mass they feed the homeless I think. Yeah, uh-hm.

00:09:46

SR: There is so much in what you've already said right now that I want to unravel a little bit further. The first thing is how do you think your mother got—? Well, first thing is: What is your mother's name?

00:10:02

LG: Her name is Shirley Green.

00:10:04

SR: And how do you think that she got known by those families for her greens and cornbread?

00:10:09

LG: Doing catering. She used to—Father Robert Gus, Robert L. Gus—. There used to be an attorney William Gus—remember he was the Attorney General? Okay, Attorney William Gus' brother Robert Gus was the priest at Saint Francis De Sales. And he just fell in love with my mother. He fell in love with her, you know, and my mom just was cooking. And I think his mom, because she used to do little things for his mom, too. They just loved my mama and my mom started cooking for a lot of people. Cooking for them, and I guess at the parties and stuff that she

did everybody wanted to eat her food. And she did. They called her and she cooked it. And she did it every Thursday.

00:11:08

I remember that greens and cornbread for Mr. Silas Lee's parents and for this family on State Street. I will never forget that.

00:11:17

SR: What kind of greens did she cook?

00:11:17

LG: She cooked—you know what my mom do? It wasn't just one green. My mama cooked all the greens together. She cooked them all, and our specialty is cabbage and greens. It is so delicious.

00:11:31

SR: So she would put cabbage in with like the mustards and collards and—?

00:11:34

LG: And that would bring that sweetness out, because you know cabbage is sweet. Uh-hm, cabbage is sweet. My mother did that.

00:11:42

SR: And then I want to ask: When I asked you to introduce yourself, you said “The Ya-Ka-Mein Lady,” but then when you say the dish just in conversation you say something that sounds more like ya-ka-meat.

00:11:56

LG: Well, you know what? That’s what the people in the black community—they call it ya-ka-meat. That’s how we call it: ya-ka-meat. But it’s ya-ka-mein. That’s what it is: it’s ya-ka-mein, you know, but everybody calls it ya-ka-meat.

00:12:10

SR: So if you spell it—let’s see how it’s spelled on your shirt.

00:12:14

LG: On my shirt it’s y-a-k-a-m-e-i-n, okay. And then when you saying it, another term you going to say y-a-k-a—well, some of them call it y-a-c-a-m-e-a-t—ya-ka-meat, yeah.

00:12:31

SR: But when you were coming up, it was ya-ka-meat?

00:12:33

LG: It was ya-ka-meat. That’s what it was, ya-ka-meat.

00:12:36

SR: I'm always kind of going back and forth, too, with the pronunciations because I'm not quite sure how to do it.

00:12:40

LG: Yeah, and then the history of it, too—a lot of people really don't know the whole history of it you know. We've been searching it and searching it and we coming up with certain things that the Chinese Americans had it and the Korea soldiers brought it to Korea or whatever and brought it back up—some kind of way they was doing it. But they call it Old Sober, and I connect with that because it was always in the black bars. It always been there, you know, in the black restaurants and the bars. And you know everybody out there having a good time and at the end of the night that's the thing that they get and bring home. That's to sober them up, and they call it Old Sober and I really connect with that. You know because it makes sense. It really makes sense. So I did so much of it at Tipitina's and I thought about it and my mama was doing it in a bar too, you know, so yeah. I connect. I don't know about the Chinese American because I just did an interview with a television director from Japan and I had them here and I introduced them to this ya-ka-mein. I know in Japan or Chinese or wherever it's at in China, they have a noodle. They have a noodle, but we use spaghettis. That's the difference. It was always a poor man's dish. That's what it was, you know.

00:14:19

We would take the green onions and our egg and the meat and chop it up and put it all together and make a broth, because my mother used to make a broth. She would do her broth and after she'd do the broth we would put soy on top of it and that would bring the flavor out too. But I'm going to tell you this much here: they asked me about it, and it always have been a New

Orleans dish. It is a New Orleans dish but it is a New Orleans dish with a twist to it. And they ask me: What is that twist? And I tell them the only thing the twist is is soy sauce. That's what it is. That's exactly what it is: soy sauce.

00:15:12

SR: In the broth or just put on top after?

00:15:14

LG: Put on top. Well in the broth too you have soy. Yeah, in the broth too. You got to cook it through. You got to cook that soy sauce, yeah.

00:15:21

SR: Well tell me: The Japanese director—when he tried it, did it resonate with him? Was it familiar to him?

00:15:31

LG: Well I think the only thing that was familiar to him was the noodles. You know the spaghetti, I guess, and the meat, but what really intrigued him was the broth. He told me he never tasted nothing like that before. The girl from Top Spin in New York City, she was with him. She's a television producer and she said the same thing. She said, "We never tasted nothing like this before. It's so different." They want to come back in April and do a documentary on me, so—.

00:16:16

SR: You said that it's known as Old Sober. Did you know that term when you were coming up?

00:16:21

LG: When I was coming up, no, we didn't know it. I didn't know it. I didn't know it, no.

00:16:26

SR: So your mom and your grandmothers called it ya-ka-meat?

00:16:30

LG: Yeah, they all called it—yeah, all black families called it—that's what they called it.

00:16:34

SR: I know that your mother made it to sell at Bean Brothers. Is it also something that would ever be served in the schools like when y'all were working for the Orleans Parish School Board?

00:16:46

LG: You know what? If I think about it, no. We never had that. Have we ever? No, no, no, no. We never had that in the schools. I cannot remember nothing like that. I cannot remember eating nothing like that in the school when I was coming up. No, uh-um. But it could be made in the school. Boy that would be—

00:17:09

SR: What about at the church? Would your mom make that for one of the church?

00:17:15

LG: She did used to make it at the church. Yeah, she used to make it at the church. That's where we used to sell it. *[Laughs]* Yeah.

00:17:24

SR: Bean Brothers Bar—I know that the sign is still on it, but I don't know if it's still open. Is it?

00:17:30

LG: Oh yeah, it's open. A little guy is running it now, you know. Mr. Horace has retired. They retired, you know, and then they rent it out. That's all.

00:17:38

SR: But when you would have it at home—so first you said that you would have it with the pork chop, so—

00:17:42

LG: Well that's what we used to do. We used to boil the pork chop and chop it up real good and that's it. It tasted good, too.

00:17:50

SR: I see, so it would be chopped up. And would it be like a special occasion dish or would it be on a night when there actually wasn't much time to cook, or what sort of event—what sort of occasion would you be eating it at home for?

00:18:06

LG: Well you know it would be like on a weekend. Yeah, like on a weekend. But you can eat that and you eat ya-ka-meat any time you want. Any night. Any night. It might be on a Monday you might want to eat a ya-ka-meat. Yeah, so you know—

00:18:21

SR: I guess I'm wondering about the time it takes to make it. If it's like the kind of dish you make when you have a lot of time or when you don't have much.

00:18:28

LG: Well if you got a lot of time, yeah, you can make it. All you're doing is boiling spaghettis, chopping green onions up. Like just for a family of four, you know, you're just going to boil you a pack of spaghettis, boil your meat. That's the longest part of anything is your meat because you want to get the meat a little tender. And it depends on what meat you use because you can use shrimps, you can use smoked sausage, you can use any—chicken. Because a lot of people like chicken ya-ka-meat, uh-hm. A lot of people like that. They would get the chicken—that's just like if you have some chicken parts in the refrigerator, you just peel it and chop it up and boil your spaghettis and chop your green onions up and make your sauce, you know, because a lot of people used to cut onions and make a little sauce out of it. It got different flavors. But the flavor

that I have and everybody that eat it tell me this is the flavor they remember. And they used to sell it at Sam's Bar on Rampart Street and they used to sell it at Mr. Byron's on—it used to be on Danneel and Seventh years ago. Years ago.

00:19:57

And yeah, it was good. Like I said, it was a tradition thing in the family, black community. And then you have some in the community that don't even know nothing about it. And that's when they tell me that I have to double take them. "You don't know nothing about it?" Yeah, I'm serious.

00:20:19

SR: Does it have anything to do with what part of town you live in, do you think?

00:20:21

LG: No, no, uh-uh, because they had ya-ka-mein in Peck's on Orleans [Avenue], you know where Kermit's bar is at now [Kermit's Treme Speakeasy]. It used to be Peck's. And they had ya-ka-mein there, and that's where everybody know(ed) that it came from over there too—Sam's, Peck's. I think the Duke of Orleans, too, you know; they had been. It always had been in the black communities. Now I don't know—like I say, I don't know anything about the Chinese Americans, if they had it. They probably did. But I do know we familiarized our self in the black community with that ya-ka-mein. That was a good dish. And it was like when I'm making ya-ka-mein, that's a delicacy. I'm serious that was like a delicacy in our kitchen. Yeah, you're making ya-ka-mein, well, that's something exciting you know. Lord, I can't wait to eat that. Because you know like on Mondays you're going to eat red beans and rice. That's what my mom used to

cook, red beans and rice on a Monday. On a Tuesday we might a white bean or something. On Wednesday we got to have spaghettis. Yeah, on Thursday she might have meatloaf or something like that, but on Friday it's always seafood. Every Friday we have seafood. And on Saturday, you know, that might be ya-ka-mein. Ya-ka-mein may be on a Friday, but on a Sunday it's stewed hen. They used to have the chicken shacks and you'd go and get them to kill that chicken and cut it, and oh yeah, the chickens. You know you got to kill the chicken in order to have a hen, get a hen, and my mama would stew hen every Sunday—stewed hen.

00:22:18

SR: Are you saying that you would go pick out a live chicken and they would kill it?

00:22:20

LG: Yeah, they used to go and—because they had the chicken shacks all over, all over the city. They had chicken coops. Yeah, they had that and they would give you—you'd go in and buy you a chicken, and that's one of the best eating chickens going. **[Laughs]** I remember my mother taught me how to do the roux. And she used to take that hen, and you know they have the fat and that fat would be yellow and it would be so pretty. It would be so pretty. And she used to fry the fat to get the oil out of it and would take the flour and sauté that flour into that to make a roux and that roux would be a golden color. I mean talking about something beautiful. She taught me how to do that. I know how to do that golden brown oil. And I mean golden. Not the brown color—the golden. Oh my God it's so—and then it tastes good. After you pour your water in there to break it all up to simmer, oh Lord, it's so good.

00:23:28

SR: So that was how she made a gravy?

00:23:30

LG: Oh yes. Oh yeah, my mom knew how to—and I used to get tired of doing that, stirring. You got to stir it. You cannot move. You got to stir it and you move, you burn it and that's all it wrote. **[Laughs]** That's all it wrote. But you know what? As I'm talking about it and I'm thinking about it and looking back, I mean I really was in that kitchen.

00:23:54

SR: From what age do you think?

00:23:56

LG: Oh wow. I was in there—ten. Yeah, I was in there ten, eleven, yeah. Yeah, I was in that kitchen. Oh yeah, helping her.

00:24:07

SR: Did you ever burn that roux?

00:24:08

LG: Yeah, I done burnt it. I done burnt it. Not so many times, but I done burnt it. “Girl, didn't I tell you? Girl, didn't I tell you to keep stirring?” **[Emphasis Added]** “But Mama, my arm hurting me, my arm hurting me,” you know. **[Laughs]** So yeah, but she taught me that.

00:24:30

SR: I'm so intrigued by these chicken shacks. I've never heard of that. When did those go away?

00:24:34

LG: Well it's been a while. But they used to have one on Fourth and Danneel, and one on Loyola, and on the corner of Liberty and Fourth. They had one on Loyola and Louisiana Avenue. I remember them three. Yeah, I remember them.

00:24:54

SR: I'm thinking there is a sign that says "Chicken Shack" on Oretha Castle Haley and maybe Jackson?

00:25:03

LG: Chicken Shack? Oh no, you're talking about Chicken Mart. You're talking about Chicken Mart, no. I'm talking about this place where they used to have live chickens and hens and roosters and stuff like that. They had all of that.

00:25:18

SR: Would they take the feathers off for you or did you have to do that?

00:25:19

LG: Oh yeah. No, no, they would clean—they would do everything. They would clean it, and then what my mom used to do when she'd get it home, she would cut the stove on, the fire come up, and you know she would take that chicken and burn all the rest of the hair that they done left on there and she would burn all of that off. Yeah. Wash it up. She would cut it. She showed me how to cut a chicken. And after you cut it you wash it off real good and it's good to go.

00:25:48

SR: That sounds so good. What about, would you say that Ya-ka-mein—ya-ka-meat—is comparable to gumbo in its, like, special occasion feel, or how people would get excited?

00:26:03

LG: Uh-huh, it is. It is. It's something—yeah, it's a soup and gumbo is a soup, too. Gumbo is a liquid soup. Yeah, and you can put—. What I do, I have a vegetarian one that I use vegetables in it. You can eat it—the meat with the vegetables together. Oh yeah, it's good. It's delicious.

00:26:26

SR: What kind of vegetables do you put in your vegetarian?

00:26:28

LG: Like cauliflower, broccoli, carrots, zucchini, peas, any vegetables you can put in there. You can put chopped up with meat. I do the green onion, you know that. You can take the white onion and cut it up. But what I do with my white onion, because it's a sweet onion I like to sauté it a little bit and put it in there, and when I tell you—Sara, it is delicious.

00:26:58

SR: Is the vegetarian kind something that you've come up with recently or is it—?

00:27:04

LG: When I started at the Jazz Fest. Yeah, I started—they asked me to do a vegetarian so I had to sit down and concentrate. Well, really I had to lay down because that's when I do all my thinking, when I'm laying down. And I had to come up with what would I do. You know, how will I do this? And I came up with the vegetables and it's delicious. What I do, I use a vegetarian—you know I use the vegetarian cube. I use that. And I do the beef with the beef, so yeah. It's good.

00:27:41

SR: Okay, let's talk about the broth for a little bit. You said that some people will chop up onions and that's how they start their broth? Did you say that earlier?

00:27:49

LG: Well my mom used to do that she used to chop her—she would chop it up. Chop up onion and she would boil her meat; she would boil her meat with onion. And that's how a lot of them used to get their flavor from that, you know. But she used to—when I was younger, she never told me—. You know I used to see her putting stuff in there, but I wasn't too much worried about that until I got older and I asked her, and one day I said, "Ma," I said, "you got to show me how to do this," I said, "because this stuff is so good." She said, "Girl, you got to come over

there by the house and you got to sit down. Well Girl, look, when you do that go get me six beers, okay.” **[Laughs]** So I had to go get her a six-pack of ponies and Baby, she’d be in that kitchen, because that’s what my mom used to do. My mom—and I’m doing the same thing. History is repeating itself. I am actually cooking just like that woman. I’m doing the same thing.

[Emphasis Added]

00:28:58

Sit in that kitchen. She had bought a house three months before she retired from the school board. She retired thirty years with them people. Thirty years, and she had fun. She enjoyed herself and I’m glad she did. And we would get in the kitchen and she would show me how to do this, showed me how to cook that, and I know how to cook just about everything. The only thing I don’t know how to do is the kosher food and stuff like that, but other stuff I know how to cook. I know how to bake anything. I know how to barbecue anything. I know how to grill anything, you know. Yeah, she taught me that.

00:29:37

SR: Well, the day that she told you how to cook the ya-ka-mein, what—I don’t know how much you want to tell us about your recipe, but we’ll take anything you’ll give us. Did anything surprise you?

00:29:53

LG: Well a lot of stuff surprised me when she was giving me that recipe you know, and she did. You know what? I’m going to tell you something. When she gave it to me, I never wrote it down. It’s just that I remembered everything that she gave me in my head. But then after a while

I wrote it down and I gave it to my daughter—the one that is in Houston, Texas. I gave her that recipe and I told her to hold that recipe. I said, “Don’t get rid of it. Hold it.” And she made ya-ka-meats out there for her family in Texas. Yeah, but she showed me how to do it. She gave me—you know like I said, I can't really reveal what’s going on in that package, but it’s a beautiful package I got. Did you see it?

00:30:46

SR: What package?

00:30:47

LG: Wait a minute. Oh you never seen the package? Sara, I’m so sorry. Oh Sara, I apologize for that. I thought you seen it. They got some of the stuff on here that is required by law. But some stuff they don’t have on here.

00:31:18

SR: Could you say that again, because you were probably too far away from the microphone?

00:31:21

LG: Oh okay. They have some stuff in the recipe that is required by law, but they don’t have that main—that main ingredient, they don’t have that. They can't have that.

00:31:33

SR: But it’s in there?

00:31:34

LG: It's in there, but they can't have it. No, because I had to trademark it and stuff and copyright it and stuff and make sure that the people that made it, that they had the confidentiality lawyers and everybody—I had to make sure that everybody was on board with this because really and truly I'm the only one in the city of New Orleans with this.

00:31:53

SR: Can you explain, since—well, I don't have a video camera right now—what *this* is? What you're holding?

00:31:57

LG: Oh, I'm holding Miss Linda's New Orleans Soul Food Seasoning, or Miss Linda's Original New Orleans Ya-Ka-Mein Seasoning package.

00:32:11

SR: That's amazing.

00:32:13

LG: Uh-hm.

00:32:14

SR: So you can make your own ya-ka-mein with what? Putting water and mixing this with water?

00:32:19

LG: With water, but you got to do your own spaghettis. You got to do your—I'm not going to do them spaghettis. *[Laughs]* You got to do your own spaghettis, you got to do your own meat, and you're going to do your green onions and you're going to do all of that. You're going to do anything you want. But you're going to have to purchase this. You got to purchase this. You got to. You have to purchase this from Miss Linda. And I'm glad. I want to share it. You know I don't have a problem with sharing. And everybody knows me. I don't have no problem with sharing. I just want them to respect, you know—I want them to respect the game. That's it. I want them to respect that. That's why I had to go through a lot of—I didn't go through a lot of trouble. People just was so excited for me and so happy for me—for me to do this you know. And I had my friend Rhonda. Rhonda helped me out a lot with packaging and doing all of this. She helped me a lot with this.

00:33:14

I'm with **[Blend Marks]**. **[Blend Marks]**, they blended this for me. I mean this it's good. It is.

00:33:24

SR: Can I smell it?

00:33:25

LG: Yeah, you can smell it. Yeah, watch out. Yeah, it smells so good and I mean, Sara, it is good. It is delicious. My grandchildren that tried it from Texas—“Oh, Mama.” The one down here, she tried it too, Jasmine, she loved it. She said, “Oh, Mama.” So what I did, I had told them how they can do it with this package. They could use eight cups of water, hardboiled egg and stuff, cook their spaghettis and do whatever type of meat they want. They can put a human being if they wanted, chopped its butt up and cook him and eat him. I don't care. But that's what they ask me, *Chopped*, [a television show] “Miss Linda, what if you see something strange in that box?” I said, “Well guess what? If it's a human I'm going to sauté his ass and I'm going to cook him.” *[Laughs]*

00:34:26

SR: Did that get on film?

00:34:27

LG: Oh my god, they cracked up. Yes indeed, yeah, they cracked up. Oh lord, have mercy. They was all on the floor in the hotel. All on the floor. They said, “Oh my god, we love you.” I said, “And I love you more.” *[Laughs]* They was so—you know and they asked me, they said, “Well tell us, what do you want this to come—by you being on *Chopped*, what do you want?” I think they told me what I want the outcome of this by me being on *Chopped*. And I just told them, I said, “I just want my city to be proud of me. That's all.” I love my city. I was born and raised here. You know, and I am seeing all kind of different things and I never thought that I would, never thought that I would get to this height in my life, you know. But I work hard, Sara. I works hard, Baby. Believe me, and these little legs—Girl, I had big old pretty legs, Girl. Go

ahead on out of here, I had big pretty legs. I ain't got no pretty legs no more. **[Laughs]** I got puny legs now, but that's all right. That's all right. I'm all right. **[Laughs]** That's all right, Baby.

00:35:42

But—

00:35:42

SR: We should say what *Chopped* is, because we haven't explained that yet for here.

00:35:47

LG: *Chopped*—I was on the Food Network channel that is—*Chopped*, that is a program where different chefs compete against each other in a—they have a basket, they have secret ingredients in that basket, and when you open that basket up you got to cook everything in that basket. You just can't eliminate; you have to cook it all. And you eliminate—you get eliminated, and that's what a lot of them don't understand.

00:36:24

Now I've seen some of the programs. I never watched *Chopped* before in my life. My grandson—that's the one, his name is Eric Davis, Jr.; he has renal failure. And he's the one that looks at all of the cooking channels. So he's the one who had me looking at *Chopped* and told me, he said, "You think you can do it?" I said, "You think I could do it?" He said, "Yeah, I think you could do it." And I went on—who it was? The first thing was Anthony Bourdain. That was the first. It came to my booth at Jazz Fest. The lady stuck her head in the window and told me—asked me who I was, and I told her who I was. And she told me that Anthony wants to try my ya-ka-mein. And if I'm not mistaken—I can't pronounce his name. Lolis?

00:37:24

SR: Lolis.

00:37:25

LG: Lolis. If I'm not mistaken, Lolis had something to do with this. Plus Anthony's producer. Her name is Diane. Her boyfriend told Anthony about me. I met him at the Ogden Museum a couple of weeks ago and he said, "I been trying to get in touch with you." And he introduced me to his self—you know, introduced me, and he said, "I'm the one that told Anthony about your ya-ka-mein. He told me that. And I just hugged and kissed him and thanked him, you know. He said, "Oh Miss Linda," he said. "I just wanted Anthony to touch that," he said, "because he drinks." **[Laughs]** I said, "Well, guess what? When he was eating it I was filling him up with alcohol too. **[Laughs]** So it don't matter."

00:38:16

SR: So you were on Anthony Bourdain's show?

00:38:17

LG: Yeah, I was on the Travel Channel show. I also was on *Larry the Cable Guy* on the Discovery Channel. Now that was crazy. **[Laughs]**

00:38:28

SR: In what way?

00:38:29

LG: That man ain't nothing nice. He's a nice man, but he's nothing nice. He—but he was nice. He really was nice. We did that in Jackson Square, right, and he had me to pull that blue truck in Jackson Square and he was cleaning the city up. And I gave him and his crew the ya-ka-mein and they loved it. But him, he was eating it and talking and eating and it slid on his shirt. And he all up and said, “Now who is going to suck this and lick this off my shirt?” Baby, we went into an uproar. That man there, I swear. I really enjoyed it. And then he told me, he said, “Oh my god,” he said, “Miss Linda?” He said, “This is fantastic.” He told me, he said, “I ain't never had nothing like this before.” And that's what I been getting, you know, a lot of people be telling me they ain't never taste that before.

00:39:28

SR: What do you think it is that they're tasting when they say that?

00:39:31

LG: That flavor. That's what that is. That's that flavor that's all about the juice. It's all about the juice. When you cook this package and you pour it on top of that spaghettis and them green onions, this package flavors your spaghettis, it flavors your green onions, your meat, and your hardboiled egg. And that's the mystery. See when they see that egg, they go crazy over that egg. They do. They go crazy over that egg. I don't know why but they do.

00:39:58

SR: So does this package—so you basically have your ya-ka-mein selling in stores—

00:40:05

LG: And I'm going to be having it in stores. I just had to—what I had to do, Sara, was make sure that I was right first before I go into anything. I wanted to be comfortable in putting it out there like this. I wanted to be comfortable, okay, because I work hard. I work hard, hard, hard for—it doesn't matter, you know, if they put it in their restaurants. That's fine. That's good. I love it. That's what it's for. It doesn't bother me like that, you know.

00:40:42

I still believe, even though they may put it in there, they still won't get that taste like I have.

00:40:50

SR: That's what I was going to ask you. So if I make ya-ka-meat/ya-ka-mein with this package—

00:40:56

LG: You can call it ya-ka-meat, it don't matter.

00:40:58

SR: I don't know what to call it. If I make it from this package, is it going to taste like—?

00:41:02

LG: Like mine.

00:41:03

SR: Yours?

00:41:04

LG: Uh-hm. It is going to taste like mine, but then I do all kinds of stuff. Me, I'm always coming up with different stuff. I do. I comes with all different types of stuff, but it's going to taste like out the Jazz Fest and all of the festivals. It's going to taste exactly. It is, I'm telling you. Sometimes when I—you know I don't eat it that much, but when I do feel like I want to eat a ya-ka-meat, I'm going to tell you something. Look what I say? "Damn, who cooked this shit? This shit tastes—" Excuse my language. I'll be saying, "Damn. This ya-ka-meat tastes some—" I have to actually say that myself. I'm serious and I'm being honest with you. Girl, my mama, when she come up with that particular recipe, she did that.

00:41:55

SR: Well I have to tell you—

00:41:57

LG: Go ahead.

00:41:58

SR: —I'm looking at the ingredients and there are like six named ingredients—

00:42:07

LG: That's all right.

00:42:08

SR: —but there is a lot in there that I'm not reading.

00:42:11

LG: That's right. You better believe it because I had to talk to Dagmon [a nutritionist] with that, and I told her, I said, "Let me tell you something, Al Copeland didn't give you all of his. Emeril didn't give you all of his. Paul Prudhomme didn't give you all of his. John Besh didn't give you all of his. And I ain't giving you all of mine's neither, so what we going to do?" "We going to do what you said, Miss Linda." I said, "Well, okay then. That's all it is." And they didn't. She honored what I said and I appreciate her doing that for me. That's why I had to go through all of the chain of commands with this, you know, with the lawyers and they had to search this and search that. Oh yeah, they had to do some searching and they come up with nothing, so it's on. I'm just happy.

00:42:59

You know this is for my grandchildren. That's who this is for, my grandchildren, you know. And I believe they going to do something nice with this. I really do.

00:43:08

SR: Who is "they"? Is there someone who is marketing for you?

00:43:11

LG: No, not right now. We're getting ready to start. Rhonda Findley, she going to help me out a lot with this.

00:43:21

SR: I'm just wondering: Did you sell your recipe to someone or do you—?

00:43:25

LG: No, no, no, uh-um.

00:43:26

SR: Do you have this business now?

00:43:28

LG: I got this New Orleans seasoning, and that's what it is, Miss Linda—it's Miss Linda's New Orleans Soul Food Seasoning Company. That's me. Original New Orleans ya-ka-mein seasoning. That's that.

00:43:40

SR: So you could sell this to restaurants or little stands or bars or grocery stores?

00:43:45

LG: Yes, ma'am. We want to put it in Rouse's, you know, because Rouse's said they do local, I'm going to tell you who I am. I'm natural New Orleans. **[Laughs]** Ah yeah, I'm New Orleans. I'm strictly New Orleans, Baby, because that's all I know. I don't know nothing else. I did have the pleasure of going to New York to be on *Chopped*, and I did San Francisco, too. I did La Cocina Street Food Festival—San Francisco Street Food Festival. I did their festival and I donated all the proceeds to them. I did all of that, yeah. I did that. And they asked me to come back and you know what? And I really want to ask them something because they help women, minority, the small business, and I just have a question. I want to find out what could they do in my behalf, you know? You know I want to ask them that because they do help womens and minorities and they did ask me to come back. They did ask me. And I was so glad because a lot of people didn't know what ya-ka-mein was. And then I found out when I went back to the hotel and I'm looking at the news and I'm looking at another news and I'm looking at another and I'm all over the place. I said, "Look at me on the San Francisco news." I didn't know but the newsmens and womens, they came and took pictures and did interviews and stuff and they actually put me on San Francisco news. And I was just sitting up there looking. I said, "Now look at you." **[Laughs]**

00:45:23

SR: Your mom would be so proud.

00:45:24

LG: Oh my god, would she be. Her and my brother both would be so proud of me. She would, but my mama always was proud of me. She was. She always—my mom loved me. She really did, you know, she loved me. Yeah.

00:45:41

SR: So when you make ya-ka-mein now, do you use this seasoning?

00:45:48

LG: Yes, I do. Yes, I do.

00:45:49

SR: So that's how you make it now?

00:45:50

LG: That's how I make it. That's how I make it. I carry my backpack with me. And I got the packages in that backpack. On no, the backpack is on the bed, but that's what I do. When I get to Vendy [The Vendy Awards] and I have my pot on the little stove, them packages going to be split up and that's right.

00:46:14

SR: And will you add anything to the juice or no?

00:46:19

LG: No, no, no, because everything is in there. Everything is in there.

00:46:22

SR: Now tell me, like when you went to San Francisco—and I don't know if you made ya-ka-mein in New York—but if you've made it anywhere else, have you ever had anyone say to you, like, "Oh, we eat that in my neighborhood," and it's a place other than New Orleans? Have you had that reaction?

00:46:39

LG: No. The reaction that I do get is that we never tasted this before. Where did this come from? But if you have this somewhere else, whoever did this came from New Orleans. Because you have a lot of people, if they had it in California—now I did hear someone say that they tasted it in Virginia, but I found out when they said that after they was talking and I was steady talking and in my mind I'm saying, well, I'm going to let them keep on talking but I'm going to ask them my next question is: Who it was? And when I asked them and they told me that that person used to live in New Orleans. So that's how it was: they went there and made ya-ka-mein. They got some people since Katrina done left and making ya-ka-mein other places, but it's not like mines. It's nothing like that. I'm going to say it just to give you an example.

00:47:42

Someone said—they're rude and ugly—"Oh, anybody could make ya-ka-mein." And they said that, and what they said that for? Eric Paulsen [a newscaster] said, "Oh, yeah, anybody could make ya-ka-mein, but they can't make it like Miss Linda." That's what Eric Paulsen said. And he said it again at the—they had a thing at Tipitina's the other night and the proceeds—I

gave them that proceeds to, I think it was for the Musicians' Clinic, yeah. You know I told them—it was money that was coming and the musicians or whoever was giving your tickets and I just told her, "Don't worry about it." Keep it. But I want to do a function, you know. I want to do something; I haven't decided on what I want to do and who I want to do it for. I do know I want to do something for my grandson. And I have a lot of people say they going to help me with that, but I'm saying I want to do something here. I don't know if it's going to be for the homeless or—. It's going to be something that's going to be a worthy cause. It might be for the Kidney Foundation, yeah, because that's where my grandbaby need a kidney, you know. And I'm a donor. I donated life. My daughter is a registered nurse. She been donated life, so I donated life. Because my grandson, he has kidney failure, and we don't—he's twenty-one years old. We don't know where that come from.

00:49:13

SR: What do you mean you're a donor? Oh, you're an organ donor?

00:49:16

LG: Uh-huh, organ donor, yeah, so you know—

00:49:18

SR: And he needs a new kidney?

00:49:19

LG: He needs a new kidney, so my—I don't know. When they explained to me—like I said, I'm a donor—explained to me that my tissue might be able to save somebody. So I was excited about that. I did a big thing for them, you know, and I was introduced to them on Nashville Street and to one of I guess it was the board of directors. I went in her home and I cooked for all of them and they just went crazy so they asked me to do the big event and it was in Old Metairie. And I mean the houses, oh my god. The houses was beautiful. And it had the house here and then it had two--three other houses there. Oh it was just—oh my god, that was old money there.

00:50:06

So they had a big old thing and I cooked and everybody kept talking about the food. But I always tell them, Sara, when I do events like weddings and stuff like that—and I done did a lot of events—I always tell them, I say, “I'm going to tell you this: they're going to talk about the bride and the groom or the birthday person or whatever, and then they're going to talk about their food.” And that's what they do. They talk about their food all day long.

00:50:32

SR: What was that organization?

00:50:34

LG: Legacy Donor.

00:50:36

SR: Legacy?

00:50:36

LG: Yeah. Legacy Donor, yeah. They were real—those people was real nice to me. And I appreciate them. And when I get ready, they told me to come on, and I just been so busy. I mean—

00:50:51

SR: They told you to come on to do what?

00:50:53

LG: Well, you know when I get ready for—. They registered my grandson here at Ochsner [Hospital] and he's registered in Houston, so you know I guess when a kidney is ready for him, they told me that it wouldn't take long. He can jump on a plane and come on. But I want to do a fundraiser for him because, see, what I did with my money when I was on *Chopped*, I gave half to my daughter because she had to pay for kidney rejection medicine. The insurance didn't cover everything for her. And at the time when I was on *Chopped* he was in the hospital, so—. And I was real, real worried about him, too. I'm still worried about him, but he's all right. He'll be on Instagram all day long. [*Laughs*]

00:51:40

SR: Now when I—you brought up Tipitina's, so I'd like to sort of talk about your life post-Katrina, because it seems like a lot changed then. And that's where I first met you, was when you were at Tipitina's. So after Hurricane Katrina in 2005—

00:52:03

LG: Uh-hm. I lost my job.

00:52:04

SR: —you lost your job, okay.

00:52:06

LG: Lost my job. They didn't call us back. They didn't do nothing. I mean that was a horrible feeling. And Adam Shipley. Adam Shipley. I guess he talked with Tipitina's because he was working there. He was one of the music directors. Him and Quinn Davis just fell in love with my ya-ka-mein. And they talked; after I lost my job they asked me to come back. They gave me a job. Told me one week and one day and I came back.

00:52:43

SR: After the storm?

00:52:44

LG: After the storm, and Tip's gave me—you know Tip's owns the apartment complex right there at where the Fontainebleau Hotel used to be on Carrollton and Tulane. It used to be the Fontainebleau Hotel. Well that's the foundation over there, and they gave me four months free rent when I came back. Four months free rent to get me settled and stuff. And I did get settled until my house—because my house had caved in. Like three—wait, the kitchen and another bedroom, it caved in. I lost the whole kitchen. But all the rest of the house was saved. I didn't

lose no clothes. I didn't lose anything. No water damage or nothing. Just the water when the roof came in. So after they fixed the house I was able to move back into my house, so I was cooking out of there and serving the disadvantaged musicians you know. They was eating.

00:53:50

SR: You were cooking where? Out of—at Tipitina's?

00:53:53

LG: Yeah, I was cooking at Tipitina's. At the kitchen on Peters [S. Peters Street], and after that I was just selling food out there, you know, and I appreciate them because it helped pay my bills and I had to catch up on the back bills from Katrina and stuff you know. Nobody wasn't paying anything at that time, but even though we wasn't paying anything they wasn't letting you ride with nothing, so you know they gave me an opportunity for me to just—I caught up with everything. So I appreciate everything that Tipitina's did for me, Adam and them. I really, really appreciate them. They really did a beautiful job with me. And like I said, and then they brought my—because I was worried and I didn't know what I was going to do. They gave me my granddaughter. She's fourteen now and she's an artist. They gave me her two weeks before Katrina, and me and her been together ever since. She's fourteen years old Her name is Cherryana Gordon. That's my son's daughter. And she been with me, you know; they called me up and told me they was getting ready to put her in a foster home. And I hurried up and got dressed and went to the courthouse, and my son at the time was in jail. And that's my black sheep I got. You know everybody got a black sheep and he was mine. But he gave me permission and her mother gave me permission to take the child. They had to write it down.

They had to. We had to wait all day in court until the judge sent for my son out of Orleans Parish Jail and he came and he signed papers for me to take his daughter. And she signed papers too for me to take her daughter.

00:55:41

So been with me ever since. Uh-hm, I'm raising my granddaughter you know.

00:55:47

SR: When was that? That was in 2005?

00:55:51

LG: Two weeks before Katrina. Two weeks before Katrina and we been rolling ever since.

[Laughs] That's my baby. That's my baby, uh-hm.

00:56:02

SR: So not only have you had all this going, but you're like a single mom now too?

00:56:07

LG: I'm a single grandmother. I'm a single grandmother, that's right. A single mama. But them other ones, oh lord, you should seen them other ones. You know I have nine grandchildren and I love them all. And they all are good kids. You know like some might have bad kids. I don't have no bad kids. I got some good grandchildren.

00:56:30

SR: Is Cherryana interested in cooking or food?

00:56:34

LG: She eat a lot. [*Laughs*] Cherry know how to draw. Cherry is an artist and we're trying to get her into NOCCA [New Orleans Center for Creative Arts]. Yeah, we're going to try to get her in there. Cherry drew a picture—she was going to Milestone Academy. She goes to Kipp Believe now in Carrollton. But when she was at Milestone she have a picture that hung in the Governor's Mansion for six months. Uh-hm. She was in *Times-Picayune* and everything. This little girl can draw. She goes all on the computer and just whatever she pulls out the computer she can just sit there and actually draw it. Oh yeah, she can draw. Oh yeah, she draws everything. She take a little bitty circle like that and that circle will come to be a beautiful flower. It just bursts into a big beautiful flower. She know how to do that. She could sit, actually sit here and draw that. She know how to do all—all she got to do is look at it. And you know what fascinates me with her is that with the hair, you know if your hair is out of place or whatever, all the strings—she know how to do all the strings. When she did Voltron and they had him—Voltron cartoon—and she know how to do them cartoons. And his hair was like sticking up and she had all the strings, all the strings. And I'm saying to myself, "Lord, how do you do that, all the detail?" She's good at that.

00:58:09

They say she's going to—you going to sell food and she going to sell art. I said, "You got that right, yeah." She know how to take those little—I don't know what you call them—it's like they white little things like masks. You know what I'm talking about because I don't know what

it is, but masks. It's white and she know how to take them and color them so pretty and you can hang them up. Yeah, she know how to do all of that.

00:58:39

SR: So there's creativity in the family?

00:58:41

LG: Yeah, yeah. Well my brother was one of the first black firemen in New Orleans. My brother, his name was Norman Bowman Conley.

00:58:51

SR: Sorry, say his name again.

00:58:52

LG: Norman Bowman Conley, Jr., and that was his name, and he was with McDaniels and two other guys and they were like the first black firemens in New Orleans, uh-hm. Yeah, he died. You know he was—how you pronounce it? Because the lady was on TV last night and they was talking about what they was in because he was in the Air Force and he was an Airman Fireman. Yeah, that's what he was in the Air Force. Plus he was an engineer. He was very smart. His grade level is like a 4.3. Yeah, he was a very smart, very, very smart boy. They used to call him Intelligent. [*Laughs*] Here come The Intelligent, because he talked proper and stuff like that, but he was. He was smart, yeah.

00:59:45

SR: How long were you cooking at Tipitina's?

00:59:47

LG: Oh about I think about a year and—going on two years, going on two years. Yeah, going on two years, yeah, yeah. Because they never really—it took a while for the city to come back. And yeah, it took a while. Yeah, it was going on two years.

01:00:11

SR: And then did you say, “Okay, I’m going to have a catering business now”—? Or what did you think you were going to do?

01:00:17

LG: That’s what I said. I said that because see, I was selling my ya-ka-mein at the second line. That’s where I started, at the second line. I have a second line Club. The Lady and Men Rollers. And it’s going on eighteen years now that I have my club. And when I started—you know what, Sara, when I look at it? I was even blessed with the only person out there selling ya-ka-mein. You know like they have the trucks and some of them have pork chops and smoked sausage and sandwiches and stuff like that. You might have two or three trucks that got all of that. But I was blessed to be the only person out there with the ya-ka-mein. I really was blessed with that, you know. Some would try to come out there but they just couldn’t make it. They just couldn’t get that—they couldn’t get that flavor. And they going to get mad at me. The other ones are going to

get mad. “Why you made me go and buy that?” I said, “Because you went and bought it because you wanted to buy it.” *[Laughs]*

01:01:25

SR: Buy what?

01:01:25

LG: The ya-ka-meat. “Why you made me go out and buy that lady’s ya-ka-meat?” I say, “Because you wanted to get it because it was in a bigger cup.” I said, “I don’t give it away.” “Oh you shouldn’t—I had to throw it away. Now I got to come and get yours.” I said. “Because that’s what you want.” *[Laughs]*

01:01:42

SR: So you were selling at the second line and you knew that you had enough traction to open up a catering business?

01:01:49

LG: Well like I said before, after the school board didn’t call me back for to come back to work—you know they didn’t call nobody. And I knew with me doing the cooking and Adam Shipley and all of them giving me jobs and stuff, keeping me busy, and having the right food and people loving it and people hiring me to do catering, I was blessed with that. But I was always in the back of my mind, I always was worried about the teachers and the counselors and principals that didn’t. Why? I don’t know why I was worried but I was worried about those people because

those people went to school for those jobs. And them people lost their jobs. I used to talk to a couple of teachers on the phone and they were so distraught because some of them was like five years or maybe two years from retiring. Yeah, and that always bothered me.

01:03:01

And you know I used to always thank God that I was blessed to have a skill that people love my cooking. And I always wanted to make sure that I cooked fresh food for these people you know, because when you cook the fresh food there it lasts and it tastes better, and that's what I want: tastes better why they can come back, yeah. Yeah, and I knew it and I never—I knew something was going to go with this and I never looked back and I ain't never looked back to take a peek at nothing, no, no. I never took a peek. You know some people might turn around and peek. I never took a peep because I knew I was going to be where I'm at today. I knew something is going to happen you know. And then with my personality, too, you know my mama taught me—Shirley always told me, “Don't ever be jealous of nobody.” And my mama always taught me, she said, “You respect yourself, you can respect everybody around.” And she taught me that. So I feel good about that.

01:04:15

SR: Earlier you said that people have to respect the game.

01:04:21

LG: Yeah, you got to—

01:04:22

SR: What does that mean?

01:04:23

LG: —respect the game, you know. You know that's what a lot of people be saying: don't hate the player; respect the game. [*Laughs*] Don't hate the player because I'm that player; respect that game. [*Laughs*] That's a saying, Girl.

01:04:40

SR: I like it.

01:04:41

LG: I know, everybody like that. Don't hate the player; respect the game. [*Laughs*]

01:04:46

SR: What was your first year at the Jazz Fest?

01:04:48

LG: Well you know what? I'm very proud of myself. I'm very proud of myself because they used to sell ya-ka-mein at the Jazz Fest years ago, they said. I don't know who it is, but you know I'm going to find out who it was. They were so intrigued, and I'm not talking about Jazz Fest officials, because Renee and Michelle and Quint Davis had confidence in me knowing that I was going to pull it off. But like I told you before, I laid down and think, and that's how I do my

thinking, and I was trying to figure out how I was going to keep this fresh and keep it at a temperature that it's supposed to be. **[Interruption]**

01:05:43

That was one thing that I was worried about, is the temperature. You got to keep your spaghettis at a temperature. You got to keep your meat at a temperature. You got to keep your egg at a temperature and your green onions. Well green onions is green onions. And it was in that Styrofoam cup, so what fascinated the Health Department, they just knew they was going to shut me down. But some of them had confidence in me, too, but what I did was asked the temperatures that everything is supposed to be at and they told me. And Bradstreet—that's her name, Bradstreet. I'll never forget her. She told me how to do my spaghettis, what to do with the spaghettis, and what to do with your meat, what temperature it's supposed to be. So what I do, I fix it and I put it in the cooler where I can get that right temperature, so when they come around that temperature is thirty-four. I think it has to be below forty, so I make sure that it's like thirty-four or thirty-two or something like that. Yeah, all of—everything. Put it in a Styrofoam cup and keep that top on there. You keep that top on there and you keep your temperature, okay.

01:07:21

So that's what—like I said, I'm very proud of myself, and the Health Department sit right there by me and it doesn't bother me. It bothers everybody else but it doesn't bother me at all because if they see something I want them to tell me. And I tell them all the time, "If you see something that is not right with my employees or whatever, I need you to tell me because I don't want you to shut me down because I done invested too much in here for you to shut me down." So you know I have a good relationship with them. So with the Jazz Fest, like I said, I started doing cooking demonstrations, and when I did the cooking demonstrations my lines was longer

than the ones who had booths. So they just pushed me in. Yeah, so I'm very proud of myself with that.

01:08:05

SR: What year was that, do you think?

01:08:07

LG: In 2005. Uh-hm, but I was doing cooking demonstrations before that. I was doing the demonstration and they let me do the demonstration for about a couple of years and after that they just hurried up and put me in. They were debating on that, and yeah they was debating on whether to let me in because they was trying to figure out how I was going to do it and they sit me down and talked to me and told me, said, "Hey, we want to let you in here, but we need to know how you're going to do it?" I said, "Don't worry about it." I say, "I got that and I got that. I got that." I'm so excited, Sara, that you know they gave me the pork chops. I was some excited, and now I will be having a pork chop-seasoning package coming out too.

01:08:51

SR: What do you mean they gave you the pork chop?

01:08:52

LG: Well the other people quit. Yeah, they quit and they couldn't do it anymore. I think they moved out of town if I'm not mistaken. And Michelle [Nugent] asked me, she said, "Would you like to do the pork chops?" I said, "I'll go for it." And I used to see how he do his pork chops and

I would never—and I would always say to myself, “I would never do my pork chops like that.” And I love pork chops. And I know what type of pork chop that I want to eat. And if I— whatever pork chop I want to eat I’m going to give it to you. I know that. And let me tell you something, I don’t like no—it’s a way that you can fry that pork chop and it can be a well-done pork chop but at the same time a tender pork chop too. I use a thick pork chop. And I season it real good so when you put your mayonnaise or mustard or whatever on that sliced bread, that’s a good pork chop because I love—. Let me tell you something: I love pork chop on French bread. That’s what I love. I love a pork chop and I want that bone in it because after I eat all of the meat off that bone, I’m going to eat the bone too. I am not going to eat the whole bone, but I’m going to be trimming off that bone and I’m going to be sucking on that bone. Yeah, I like that. I love pork chops. I love them, yeah.

01:10:33

SR: So you’re serving at Jazz Fest a pork chop sandwich?

01:10:35

LG: Yes, on sliced. It’s so good. Oh lord, don’t talk about it on some French bread. Girl...

[Laughs]

01:10:41

SR: Does it have the bone in it?

01:10:42

LG: Yes. Look, with some mustard, and you could mix that mustard and mayonnaise together.

Girl. Girl, when I tell you that thing is so good—.

01:10:53

SR: I'm going to have to try it this year.

01:10:54

LG: Oh Girl, it's good. Ask Poppy [Tooker]. Ask Poppy. Poppy had one in her pocketbook and Anne the wine lady, Anne Tuennermann, she told Poppy she was hungry. And Poppy pulled out a pork chop on her and gave her my pork chop. And I was so glad to meet that lady and she's going to let me—well, I did toddies for the cocktails, she sent me a thank you and told me that my ya-ka-mein was a hit there. So they got something coming up and they want me—she invited me to do it. But we are coming out with—I'm coming out with some stuff. We are coming out with—and I talked to her about it and something that we try and we was in the kitchen just playing around and we going to do a ya-ka-mein Bloody Mary. Sara, it is so good.

01:12:03

SR: What does that mean?

01:12:03

LG: What I did was this: I took my seasoning and I was measuring—we was doing with the Bloody Mary just sitting there drinking that shit and just talking and I said, "Damn." No, Rhonda said, "What about a Bloody Mary ya-ka-mein?" I said, "Let's do it." We started in the kitchen

with them little measuring cups and had the Bloody Mary mix and we just was adding and adding you know and taking out and adding and taking out and we got to the right—. We was writing down and Rhonda was writing things down—you know, the ratio part—and we tasted that Bloody Mary ya-ka-mein and that thing tasted some good.

01:12:57

And we going to put the celery in it and we going to stick a celery in it and we'll put a bean in it, too, but we going to cover it with green onions and we going to stick an egg on top of it.

01:13:14

SR: That is beautiful.

01:13:16

LG: That is. Look, we took the pictures but I don't have it on there. You should see. When I tell you—Sara, when I tell you it tasted some good and you going to have to stick—. And when you give it to them you're going to have to stick a fork on the side of it to stand up in your drink, because afterwards you going to want to eat your green onion and you're going to want to eat your egg and stuff. But yeah, so Anne told me that that sounds so good. So when I'm ready I'm going to do that, and it's just so much stuff I want to do.

01:13:56

SR: Maybe at Tales of the Cocktail.

01:13:58

LG: Yeah, Tales of the Cocktail.

01:14:01

SR: So, in my mind—and I want you to tell me if I'm at all right because I don't know if I am—but in my mind, you starting to sell your ya-ka-mein at Jazz Fest was—. Not that white people in New Orleans never ate it before, but that seems to me—that really introduced it, like got it out of the black community.

01:14:25

LG: Right, yeah.

01:14:25

SR: Do you agree?

01:14:26

LG: I agree with that because what it was—not at Jazz Fest, at—. Well some at Jazz Fest, but when I hit the streets with it—and they had a lot like with Quint Davis and Bill Taylor and Adam Shipley and all of them from Tipitina's—when they started eating the ya-ka-mein—. Because Quint Davis, he's the one that brought me to Jazz Fest.

01:14:52

SR: And so they had your ya-ka-mein first at a second line?

01:14:56

LG: Yes, at the second line. That's what brought it out. And then when I started with the Jazz Fest they didn't know anything about it. I didn't make no money. That just was like an introduction thing. And I was glad of that. I was happy of that. You know I'm going to tell you something, Sara, and I tell them this all the time. Ya-ka-mein is a soup, but I don't care what temperature it is, I sell a lot of it out there. It'll be hot, hot, hot, they still eats it. You know I told them, I said, "My ya-ka-mein, what it's doing is growing at the Jazz Fest." It's growing. It is growing. People, they got people just wanting just to come and taste it, and once they taste it, **[Laughs]** they come get it every year. I have a man on the scooter that he comes and—well, early in the morning he get three and in the evening he get four. And I do his personally. I do him and he comes every day.

01:16:00

SR: At the Jazz Fest you mean?

01:16:01

LG: At the Jazz Fest. He's a heavy-set man and he's on a scooter and I make sure—and he's riding all around there eating my ya-ka-mein in the morning time. And then in the evening time he got his—I fix it for him. And he used to bring—you know he'd have his bag and stuff, so I put it in a bag for him, but he still puts it in his bag and he's gone, yeah.

01:16:21

SR: What is the proportion of your black customers at Jazz Fest to your white customers at Jazz Fest?

01:16:28

LG: Well you know right now—. Well in the beginning it was like the black folks was coming because they couldn't believe ya-ka-mein was out there you know. The white folks didn't know anything about it. But then it started getting—you know, you put it in your book and started—and I appreciate that and I love you dearly for that, because I tell everybody this. I love you dearly for that. You know, to put ya-ka-mein in your book and stuff, and that pushed a lot too for me. You know, for people to, “Well, what is ya-ka-mein?” So they curious so they want to come and try it, and once they tried it, I was trying to make sure that once they tried it, it was all over with. **[Laughs]** Yes indeed, I made sure. You going to like it and you're coming back. And that's what happened. You know so now it's more white folks come now than the black folks. And that's the truth. I have more white customers now than—I get calls all over the world, all over the world. If they come into New Orleans they want to taste the ya-ka-mein. I have a group coming now. I got to deliver some ya-ka-meins to them in St. Bernard Parish.

01:17:47

I had the EOC, COU—whatever for Dell. I pulled that table and fix the table; it was so beautiful. He's the—how you do that, the EOC?

01:18:01

SR: CEO?

01:18:01

LG: Girl, that's a shame. Yeah, Dell—

01:18:05

SR: The CEO of what?

01:18:06

LG: Dell Computer. I had him sit right over there and fixed the table. Me and Yolanda fixed it up. And the Japanese directors. I have a shrimp and crabmeat—. I don't know if you ever tasted that. Girl, I got a shrimp and crabmeat—. Girl, all this time she could have made you some. Girl, I got some shrimp and crabmeat; it's in a little thing like a pouch that we scoop and make it. When I tell you it is delicious, oh my god. I gave it to the Japanese people and Yolanda fixed it up and she put it on a bed of lettuce and she had some duck sauce and some soy sauce and it was so cute. It was about that big. And they were just dipping and eating, and then when he—he was eating the crust part like a biscuit but it was crust, dough—it was dough, and when he bit down on that shrimp and crabmeat, oh my god, he said, "Lord, what is this?" He said, "What is this?" I said, "That is shrimp and crabmeat dressing." They loved that.

01:19:10

SR: Oh, it was like dressing in a dough?

01:19:11

LG: Oh Girl, it is so—I got some but I'm going to have to get—. It's frozen now. It's frozen because when I do the crabmeat—and I know I have to do the crabmeat dressing for like two days ahead of time—like for tomorrow I have it at what you call it, at Wednesdays at the Square. But what I do, I make it. I go get the crabmeat at Christiana, and what I do, I make it. I make that shrimp and crabmeat and after I make it I wrap it up. You have to put Saran on it first to keep the freshness in. And after you do that, I put the foil on top of it. And I shove it in the freezer and let it freeze. And then you know while it's freezing—after it's thawed out, after you pull it out, you get all your flavors just dropping in and all your—oh, Girl. I know how to do all that, Girl.

01:20:18

SR: So tomorrow night I know you have Wednesdays at the Square, and you have the Vendy Awards.

01:20:24

LG: And then I got St. Alphonsus.

01:20:27

SR: When? Also tomorrow?

01:20:29

LG: Uh-huh.

01:20:30

SR: You don't seem to have a huge staff. How do you do all that?

01:20:33

LG: Well I got people. Well I have—my granddaughter is going to do St. Alphonsus, my daughter and her husband and Willie is going to do Wednesday at the Square, and me and Yolanda and maybe somebody else will come and do—well, we're going to do the Vendy by ourselves. We're going to kick butts over there.

01:20:52

SR: What do you do at St. Alphonsus?

01:20:54

LG: Well Aimee and Bill deTurk? Yeah, they got an Irish extravaganza going on and she always do it and she had the pleasure of having me come every Wednesday, but when they do it—. It's not ever Wednesday. It may be like once a month out of that Wednesday, so on the 13th it's the last. And I told her—she know that I'm not going to be there. But she know that the ya-ka-mein is going to be there. I already told her. I said, "You ain't got to worry about it. The ya-ka-mein is going to be there." So, yeah. So you know, but they know I'm going to be at the Vendy. They know this.

01:21:31

SR: Are there any downsides to how busy you've gotten in the past, let's say, seven years?

01:21:36

LG: What you mean?

01:21:38

SR: Are there any negatives? I mean you're so busy.

01:21:42

LG: I am.

01:21:43

SR: And there are people like me who are demanding your time and not paying you. I know I'm not the only one. And you're kind of being pulled this way and that. You are *The Ya-Ka-Mein* Lady. And I know that feels really good and you're deserving the attention, but you're also being asked a lot. You've been asked to do a lot and to give a lot.

01:22:07

LG: Right, right.

01:22:07

SR: And is it worth it?

01:22:08

LG: You know, Sara. You know what? I think it is because by y'all giving me this exposure I get a lot of catering jobs. And like I explained to some, you know, that even though I'm doing catering I can't—some people will be always looking for deals and stuff, and like I try to explain to them, I don't have a problem. You know that's my thing. My mom used to feed the block and did all of those things. I do that. Somebody come to me and ask me, they hungry or whatever, I feed everybody. So it's no problem with that. But I work so hard, and I'm doing catering, and I know you want me to give you a deal, but you got to understand: when I go in the Restaurant Depot and Christiana's, Sam's or whatever—you know, Sysco—I don't get a deal from them. You understand? And all I want, like I said before: don't hate the player; respect the game, you understand? I want them to respect that. You know if you go to Emeril and John Besh and you're going to pay seventy-two dollars a head, don't come to me and ask me to pay—you want to pay me ten dollars and five bucks a head. What is wrong with you? That is out of the question. Don't do that.

01:23:29

I want to be able to—when I'm doing a catering job, I want to be comfortable where I can make the money for what I done spent, plus to pay my employees; to make me a salary too, you understand. And maybe I can—and pay the people. And even though if I get a salary maybe I have a little something that I could put in a nest egg for things that I want to do. So that's the only downside, where people try to—I'm that last-minute caterer. They know they can call me that week or maybe a couple of days and know I'll have it ready, okay. So, yeah. That might be the downside. I just want them to respect my talent, that's all. That's all I ask them, to respect that. And the thing about it, you know, you're going to get good food. You know the food going to taste good, and it ain't a thing like this, Sara, where red beans and rice is good. But the

macaroni ain't no good. You're going to get red beans and rice that's good. You're going to get macaroni and cheese that's good. You're going to get bread pudding that's good. You're going to get greens that's good. You're going to get chicken that's good. You're going to get everything that I put out; everything is going to taste good. And that's when things like that happens, that's good. So that's all I be wanting them to do, you know.

01:24:59

Some of them—and I don't feel bad if they don't come to me. I don't. And I'm going to show you how it happens. When one door closes two of them open and that's how it's been going. When one door closes two of them—. I don't know what I'm going to do for April 6th. I got so much going on April 6th it's a crying shame. But I know one thing. Now I'm supposed to be doing our Jazz Festival, but I know one thing that I am doing is Freret Festival. I love Freret. I'm growing with them and I love Freret. I do.

01:25:42

Now I'm supposed to be doing something with NOCCA and donate to them. But if I do the NOCCA thing I might have my grandchildren fix everything, the ya-ka-mein for them, and I'm going to have my grandchildren do that because they good at that. You know they work with me at the Jazz Fest and stuff.

01:25:59

SR: Oh, your grandkids do?

01:26:00

LG: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

01:26:02

SR: I was going to ask you if there is anyone who you're handing this all down to?

01:26:09

LG: Well—

01:26:10

SR: Not that you're at an age to have to hand things down, but there is anyone who you see in your family, or just in your social circle, who is really learning?

01:26:19

LG: Yeah, I see Jasmine, Jasmine Green. That's my grandbaby. I see her. I see Eric Davis. That's the one who got the renal failure. I see Eric doing something like this, yeah, because he looks at that cooking channel all the time, you know. I see Eric and I see Jasmine. I see Brian too. Brian is another one. He likes to cook. Yeah, Brian likes to cook. That's my grandson. He come in the kitchen sometime. His name is Brian Coston. And the other one's name is Eric Davis, Jr. That's the one who got the renal failure. Yeah, Eric Davis, Jr. and Jasmine Green, yeah. Because Jasmine, she's going to be at St. Alphonsus tomorrow night. You know, she doing this. We making the ya-ka-meins for her and all she doing is scooping up. She know how to do that.

01:27:11

SR: But does she know how to make it too?

01:27:12

LG: Yeah, she know how to make it.

01:27:15

SR: You know I wanted to ask you. You said that you're sort of the last-minute caterer and people don't expect to have to pay as much as they would, you know, some other famous chefs. Do you think that that's because you're new, because you're nice, or because people think that your style of food makes itself delicious?

01:27:36

LG: Well I don't see how it makes itself because when you get greens, greens is plain, so you got to add some flavor to that greens to make it taste good. And I add flavors. I add Miss Shirley's flavors to that. That's just like with jambalaya. You got to make that jambalaya taste good. You cannot cook no plain rice and mix it up with some meat and the sauce and stuff and think it's going to be on its own. You got to put some flavor into that. Now I don't know the reason why they do what they do. But then when they do it and they go to another caterer, they all upset. So I mean, hey, that's what you chose. And I'm respecting that. I got to respect that and I don't have a problem with that. I don't have no problem with that.

01:28:20

SR: You said earlier that when you were at the second line, sometimes people would go for the bigger cup or the better deal.

01:28:25

LG: Yeah, they do.

01:28:26

SR: How big are your cups and how much does it cost to buy it?

01:28:28

LG: You know what? When I'm at the second line I normally use a sixteen-ounce cup. It's just a little cup like this [*Gestures*]. That's all, a little drinking cup. Yeah, I use that when I'm at the second line. But when I'm at the festivals they tell you to use a festival-sized cup, and that's the twelve-ounce cup. So I have to use that. And the sixteen-ounce is the same price with the other cups you know. And lately I just been using the twelve-ounce cups—twelve-ounce squat cups for everything. Seven dollars and eight dollars. And I like it like that because when you have that big old cup like that, Sara, you're giving up numbers and you're not making nothing off of that. You're giving everything away.

01:29:20

And I'm not trying to give everything away. I want you to enjoy it but I want you to buy it. And I want you to enjoy it because I know you're going to enjoy because I done had people done eat that ya-ka-mein and coming back and get three and four. "I got to have another one. I just got to have—." Thank you. You know it's been a road now.

01:29:39

SR: So I know that ya-ka-mein has mostly been in the black community. You know, a lot of people—that's probably the biggest thing that I hear from readers of my book, is "I've lived in this city my whole life and I've never heard of that dish." What other secrets do you have?

[Laughs] What's the next dish that I'm going to discover?

01:30:04

LG: You going to discover that shrimp and crabmeat. I'm going to have it in a—I'm going to do it at the—it used to be Swamp Festival at the Audubon Park zoo. But I'm going to do the—they know about the pork chops, and I take that shrimp and crabmeat and put it on a French bread, that po-boy, and it's hit. It is a hit there. It is a hit. And then what I'm going to do I'm going to put it in—wait a minute. Wait a minute. **[Calls to Yolanda]**

01:30:51

SR: Oh, so there. They look like a ravioli. Yeah, big ravioli or a small meat pie.

01:31:01

LG: That's what they look like, a small meat pie, but what it is is a seafood pie. That's what it is. Shrimp and crabmeat. You know I haven't decided on what name it's going to be but it's going to be a shrimp—it should be shrimp and crabmeat pie, deep-fried. And when I tell you it is delicious, it is delicious. Believe me.

01:31:23

SR: But you don't put this on the po-boy? You put just—?

01:31:26

LG: The—

01:31:27

SR: Just the filling?

01:31:27

LG: Oh the filling, yeah. I put that on and they love it. They had one young girl and I really thanked her for this. She went on Channel 8 and she told them, she said, “That shrimp and crabmeat that Miss Linda have, that po-boy,” she said, “it's the real deal.” She said no imitation, and it's not imitation because when you eat it you're going to taste all your crabmeat and you're going to taste your shrimp. You're going to do that.

01:31:59

SR: Where did she have that?

01:32:00

LG: At the po-boy festival. Because I have it at—I have shrimp and crabmeat on French. The line was the next two blocks. That's how long that—. Yeah, they loved—. That's all they kept ordering. They was ordering the pork chop sandwich, but they ordered more of them. Yeah, they

ordered more of that. They got to get used to that pork chop sandwich on French. They got to get used of it, yeah. They got to get used of it. And that's what I like about different festivals that I be in. It grows with me, so I like that. Like Freret. I grows with that one. They love my macaroni and cheese over there. I have greens and cornbread and they love that. Oh, they love that. And they love the ya-ka-mein over there, so—.

01:32:46

SR: They have to get used to it because of the bone?

01:32:48

LG: Well I don't know. Um, maybe because a lot of them don't know anything about a pork chop with a bone and I don't understand that because that's all I was brought up on. Yeah, I'm serious. I was always grewed up on a pork chop with bone in it, I did.

01:33:07

SR: I know that you can make good money at festivals, but that first Jazz Fest must have been a big leap of faith for you.

01:33:13

LG: Well not that one. Not only that. It was the first couple of years that wasn't really all that good, but I mean it just—like I said, the exposure that's built up. And let me say this. Even though I do a lot of the festivals, some of these festivals you don't make sometimes. Sometimes you lose. Sometimes you lose with these different festivals because if you have a festival here—.

I'm just going to take one for an example. They had a festival with Algiers Festival one year, and it was last year and everybody lost. And they had another festival across the river—you know I think it was in the French Quarters. I don't know if it was Road Food Fest or whatever—whatever festival they had in the French Quarter—and they had the Algiers Festival; everybody stayed on that side. No one came over there, you know. So sometimes when you're doing a festival it's best that you look on that calendar and see what's going on because even though they have a lot of festivals, some of them might have a festival at, what, twelve—or eleven—to five. And then they may have another festival that same day where that festival might last up until ten o'clock. So you know, you got a chance to go to different festivals.

01:34:42

But when you got a huge festival and you're just a little small festival, don't expect nobody to come out there because them people are going to stay there. That's just like with Gumbo Festival. You know, Gumbo was a huge success; that was a huge thing for everyone. Everyone made money off that. And it was good.

01:35:00

SR: Were you serving ya-ka-mein there or gumbo?

01:35:02

LG: I was serving ya-ka-mein and gumbo, and Baby, they was in lines for that gumbo.

01:35:07

SR: What kind of gumbo?

01:35:07

LG: I had a seafood gumbo, and it was delicious. And everybody said it was good. Yeah, I had lines, like I was the only one who had a whole lot of lines, yeah. It was good. I had the shrimps. You know what? I don't put crawfish in it. I don't like the crawfish tails in gumbo. I don't even like—. When you cook a crawfish—and that's what I notice about a crawfish—the only time I want to eat a crawfish, if I do I might do a crawfish pasta and stuff like that. But that crawfish turns. They don't understand that. I don't want to see no black-ass crawfish in my—. I don't want to see that.

01:35:47

You know I don't do that.

01:35:49

SR: It turns color, you mean?

01:35:51

LG: It does. I don't like that. So I don't put that in my gumbo, uh-um, I don't. Now I put the oysters in there and it has to be the oysters that is good for that month. Now, like milky oysters, I don't fool with that, uh-um. I have to check. I check my oysters before I do anything. They have some at Restaurant Depot. Sara, god, we sit at the table and was eating a raw— **[Laughs]** eating an oyster before we were putting it in the gumbo. They was huge and they was so good. They come out of the container and it was forty-four dollars for that container. Girl, them things was so big there we did our sauce and we was sitting up there eating, cooking gumbo, but we was

sitting at the table. We was sitting right over there eating the oysters. **[Laughs]** And everybody was saying, “Where are the oysters for the gumbo?” We ate them all. They was so—they were salty and I haven’t tasted nothing like that in a long time.

01:36:54

And I’m going to tell you what happened. They had a guy working on the riverfront and he liked—he have a truck, too, and he told me he got them oysters from out of Texas. And I know a lot of people say that the oysters, they be salty and stuff like that. Sara, I actually—I done tasted them at Acme and all of these places here and I really never—. And I love oysters and I never really tasted a salty, salty oyster. And he had them on his truck. And I said, “Let me taste one of them.” And that thing was so good. And I had to look at him. I said, “This oyster is salty.” He said, “I got those oysters from out of Texas.” And they was so good. They really was good. I got my five year old—she’s six years old now—me and her go to Acme, we go to New Orleans Seafood, and me and her sit there and eat raw oysters.

01:38:00

SR: This is a granddaughter?

01:38:02

LG: Yeah, she loves oysters. She says, “Give me some oysters, Grandma.” **[Laughs]**

01:38:07

SR: I don't want to take up very much more of your time because we've been going a long time, but I did notice when you went in the other room that there were a couple questions I need to ask. One is: spoon or fork?

01:38:18

LG: Fork. I don't carry spoons with me when I'm doing ya-ka-mein. I don't do that. And the reason why is because when you're eating the ya-ka-mein with a fork, after you heat up everything you have to walk around and savor it and bring it on and drink that juice. You really do. That juice coats the inside of your body. It does. It does something to the body especially when you have a cold or something like that. It opens you up. Now you can get it with a lot of hot sauce and stuff like that. I use Tabasco sauce. I like the Tabasco sauce. I even had the pleasure of—Mr. McIlhenny, he just passed away. Well I had the pleasure of meeting him. He came to me at the Ferret Market. And he came strictly just to see me.

01:39:19

And that kind of tripped my world out. I thought he was kidding. **[Laughs]** He said, "No, I'm not." Someone told him that I use Tabasco sauce in the ya-ka-mein. So I have to—he gave me—well what happened, I gave him a ya-ka-mein with the Tabasco and he said he never tasted nothing like that. And I think that was the time when he was going to be king of Rex. And you know he started talking to me about his family and was telling me how the business was started and stuff like that. And something about some island he was telling me. Yeah, so we had a nice conversation. He was a very nice man you know. And he thanked me and he left.

01:40:08

And next couple of days I gets a phone call and the phone call is his secretary and she told me, she said, “Well Miss Linda,” she said, “he told me he had a very nice conversation with you and he really loved your ya-ka-mein and stuff. And we’re going to send you a—.” And I can't find my chef jacket. It's a chef jacket with “Chef Linda Green” with Tabasco sauce on it. But plus, he gave me a personalized Tabasco sauce with “Chef Linda Green The Ya-Ka-Mein Lady” on there and he signed it. And he sent the note to me too and he signed that. And she told me, she said, “Miss Linda,” she said, “this is an honor to get something like that from him.” She said, because really truly that Emeril, Paul, and a couple other ones have that from him. “And for you to get one, Miss Linda, is an honor.” So what I did, I put it in a glass case, the hot sauce with my name, some kind of way. I don't know how they did it but he got my name on it. I got pictures of it. I got pictures of it in my phone. Yeah, they did that and when I found out that the man had died, well, I just sent his family a condolence you know and I told them I would keep them up in prayers and stuff like that. And I had the pleasure of meeting him. I really did. And I just was shocked you know, and the man was only sixty-eight years old. He was young, you know. But he didn't look like he was sick to me.

01:41:46

SR: I guess he had a heart attack.

01:41:48

LG: Oh, okay then. Yeah, well, that's how it be.

01:41:51

SR: I can pause this, yeah. You say you put Tabasco in yours. Do you mean that you just put that on as a condiment yourself, or do you put it in everybody's ya-ka-mein?

01:42:04

LG: I put it in everybody's, and I love to put it in everybody's because once when I first started out with the ya-ka-mein and I was using the hot sauce, you know, and a lot of people like other hot sauce and that's good. So what I do, I carries all of them like the Crystal and stuff like that, but what I found out about that Tabasco sauce with this is it's something that connects it. It really connects. This here and that Tabasco, it gives the whole ya-ka-mein, it just gives it another flavor, a whole different dimension. So that's what I—I just use it. And I thank the person—I don't know who it was that told him that I uses it because that man actually came to see me to do that. You know to tell me that he appreciated. And you know what I told him? I said, "Well, we need to do some kind of commercial together with this." **[Laughs]** He said, "We need to do that." He said, "We sure do." He said that's no problem with that. And then he died.

01:43:25

SR: Well his company will keep living on, so you could maybe still do it.

01:43:27

LG: Yeah, yeah, that's right. That's the truth. You know what? And you know I wonder why—and this is something that I did—I wonder why *Treme* never asked me to be on their show because they put ya-ka-mein in New York. Yeah, they put it in New York. They put it in New York and they had some chef talking about selling ya-ka-mein for twenty-eight dollars, but

Baby, them people was some upset. They had a lot of people come on my blog and was telling me, “Oh, why didn’t they put the real deal on there,” talking about me? I said, “I don’t know,” but I mean hey, I’m glad she put it out in New York where I could get the exposure, yeah. Glad of that but I did wonder why they never asked me to come on their show because they had everybody else in New Orleans with it, you know. But I guess they don’t have it anymore. They’re not going to have that show no more. Oh, wow.

01:44:26

SR: I don’t know. I think they are done filming.

01:44:28

LG: Oh, okay then.

01:44:30

SR: What do you think of people who put ketchup in their ya-ka-mein?

01:44:35

LG: They do, they love ketchup. A lot of people love ketchup. They love it, they love the ketchup. It’s just another dimension for them. It’s another—look, they put a whole bottle of ketchup in it.

01:44:48

SR: You approve?

01:44:48

LG: Yeah, because I tasted it and it tastes pretty good. I have an auntie and my mother's—my mom's brother, him and his wife and their children, when you say "ketchup," every time somebody might say "ketchup," I think about them. They eat everything with ketchup. And I mean everything—grits, everything. They eat everything—all their food is with ketchup. That's right, they eat everything. I don't know how they do it but they do it. They put everything—they put ketchup in everything they eat. But yeah, a lot of people like ya-ka-mein with ketchup. It's delicious. It is good, yeah. I have to keep that out too. I have to bring ketchup.

01:45:36

And what I like to do, I like to keep the ketchup on the counter for them to do their own, yeah. Yeah. I don't put that in there for them but I let them do their own.

01:45:45

SR: So also I've had people tell me that they use a certain number of noodle. What number of spaghetti do you use?

01:45:53

LG: Well I use number four spaghettis, the regular spaghettis. Excuse me. They have some of them used to use that linguini one. Now in the beginning, I mean years and years ago, that's what they used to use: the linguini ones, the flat ones. That's what they used to use, the spaghettis—I mean the ya-ka-mein—with.

01:46:22

SR: Your mom would?

01:46:22

LG: No, my mama always used the spaghettis, always used the spaghettis, but like I think at Sam's or one of them, I think they used to use the linguine kind. But my mom and them, they always used the spaghettis. That's what we use still, uh-hm.

01:46:44

SR: Okay, so one of—almost my final question. We touched on your club. You know, that you would sell at second lines, and you have a club that second lines. Did you start that club?

01:46:54

LG: You know what? My ex-husband started that club. That was his club. And I was with him. There was Men Rollers first, and we was the Roller Court. That's what we was. We rode on the cars and the Men Rollers, they did the second line. And after we divorced he left the club with me. And I been carrying on with the club ever since, you know, so he's no longer affiliated with any clubs now. But he was the one that started that club.

01:47:40

SR: At what point did it become the Men *and* Lady Rollers?

01:47:43

LG: Well it became the Men and the Lady Rollers when I took over it. Yeah, when I took over it, it was the Men and Lady Rollers, yeah. Yeah. The Men and the Ladies had—well, what happened was the guy that was in charge of the social and pleasure club at the Jazz Fest, he took the men from me. For what reason I still don't know today. I don't know. I really don't know why he did that. But at the time I wasn't too worried about it. I just said, "Let it roll." And it became the Lady Rollers. Yeah, so now we've got the men back, so now it's the Lady and Men Rollers now, so—.

01:48:39

SR: And do you second line once a year?

01:48:41

LG: Once a year, yeah. I had the pleasure of second lining twice a year in 2010. Yeah, we paraded January of 2010 and we paraded again in December, uh-hm. I'm the only club that do all kind of crazy stuff around here. I'm the first one to integrate it. You know, I had other marching girls to come in like the Pussyfooters and the Partyliners, and I was trying to welcome the 610 Stompers and I'm hoping that we can get them next year—I mean this year. Well they told me that I have the pleasure of coming out to the Ogden Museum each year and I'm so happy about that.

01:49:26

SR: Oh, so you mean you would emerge from there?

01:49:28

LG: Yeah, we're coming out of the Ogden Museum, and if we do come out of there we might just do a parade. See, I don't do what every—I don't do what all social and pleasure clubs do. I don't have the same route or nothing. I don't do what everybody do. You know I like to have a good time. That is one day out of each year that I can enjoy myself after doing all this cooking. I can sit that day on the car, because I don't second line. I come out the door but that's it. You know I do mostly like the parade chair type. That's what I do, and I am the president of the club. So you know I let the ones that's in the club with me, I let them have all the fun. Let them go out there and have a good time. And then I invited—the first year I invited the Bearded Oysters, the Camel Toe ladies, the Partyliner ladies, the Pussyfooters. I think I had a couple of Drunken Whores too. I think I did.

01:50:35

SR: I need to say for the record, these clubs that you're talking about, who you invited to your second line, are—what are they?

01:50:42

LG: Those are marching groups. Those are marching groups and—

01:50:47

SR: And they're not—I'm familiar with most of them. They're not *only* white, but there are a lot of white women in those clubs, and so you're saying that before you invited them that didn't really ever happen at a second line?

01:51:01

LG: No, it never happened. No, no, that never did happen you know. I don't know. I just thought about—yeah, give me—no, another napkin. Here Baby—felt good. Yeah, thank you.

01:51:15

SR: Yolanda?

01:51:16

LG: That's Yolanda.

01:51:17

SR: Yeah, Yolanda just brought us—she fried up some of the crab and shrimp pies.

01:51:23

LG: Uh-hm, yeah, they delicious. You got to try it and you got you some—what you call that? Take a picture of that, Girl. They're delicious.

01:51:32

SR: Have you—well, I'm going to make you talk while I take a picture. Did you get any resistance from your club members about integrating your second line?

01:51:41

LG: No indeed. They wanted it. They loved it. Oh no, “Bring it on.” That’s all they was saying.

[Laughs] No indeed, uh-uh, uh-uh. You know I just like to have fun with that, and—thank you, Love. Yeah, uh-hm.

01:52:06

SR: So why do you think that had never happened before?

01:52:08

LG: I don’t know. You know a lot of the groups, social and pleasure clubs, they work very hard for that one day of their time and they come out on their own. They works real hard, you know. They give out functions to get their clothes, and that’s what we do too. We give functions. And I feel like whatever these people want to spend for their clothing, their shoes or whatever, they can do that because that’s one day out of a year. It shouldn’t be a problem. I don’t think—you know a lot of people used to be saying negative things about it, but that’s—these people give functions. That’s what we do. We give functions to buy our cloths and our shoes and hats and stuff like that, so hey, that’s just one day out of a year, so they can do that. You know, and then the Jazz Fest helps out too. They give you money to help pay for your bands and stuff like that, help pay for your permit, and that’s what you got to do because—. And that’s another thing, too, with me, with the bands. You know I love the bands. And if these boys are asking for whatever price they’re asking for, I feel like you need to give it to them because they have families. They are gifted. It’s a lot of people that wasn’t trained in school playing instruments. It just was a gift from God. So hey, you know if they ask you for this, hey, pay these people. You got to pay them this too, you know.

01:53:43

SR: Are you talking about paying the bands in your second line, or are you talking—?

01:53:45

LG: Yeah, paying the bands in the second line. These boys you know, a lot of them used to give you deals and everything but now these boys are good. And I'm going to tell you something: my band is Hot 8 [Brass Band]. That is my band. I was the first person to employ those boys. They was the Looney Tunes at first and they was at Fortier Senior High School, that's right, and I been with them ever since—ever since, that's right. Those boys are good. That's my band. What I like about them, like when my group is marching in, wherever they stop at that band is still outside playing. That's what I love about Hot 8, yeah.

01:54:26

SR: Just to give some context for people who hear this or listen to it who haven't been to a second line before, when you sit—when you talk about stopping, you stop at different bars along your route and—

01:54:38

LG: You can stop at different bars or you might have a house, because that's what they used to do years ago, stop at bars and houses and clubs and stuff like that. And they would have cold drink, sandwiches for the paraders and the marching group and for the band. And you'd take like

a ten-minute break and stop and then you go onto the next one. You know, your next stop, because that's what you're parading. You're going from stop to stop, yeah.

01:55:05

SR: And when you talked earlier about coming out at the Ogden Museum, it's a big deal at the start of your second line to walk out of a place—

01:55:15

LG: Tipitina's was one and it was a huge thing and we loved it. We did it at Tip's and we came back at Tip's. We're going to do it at the Ogden Museum, and I may find some other venues are in that area to see whether we can make a stop and make it uptown. We can do that. We can make it uptown, and in Uptown somewhere, you know maybe at the Sandpiper because Benny, he would love that you know. And yeah, and Le Roux—that boy there is so good. And La Roux there on Carondelet [Street], his name is Kurte Pellerin, and he's good. I love him for letting us come in and ending there you know. He was there. I love what he did. I really did, you know, I appreciated it.

01:56:08

SR: Where did you come out this year?

01:56:10

LG: At Le Roux, yes, yes, and I loved it. And I do know this year we got to stop there. He told me any time, whatever you want to do, just let me know. And I love—him and Benny both said

that—the Sandpiper, uh-hm. Because you know the Partyliners and them, they always start at Benny's. Yeah, they always start there. They bring their bus, and Silky wants me to bring the people there too because he actually enjoyed it. He told me, he said, "I've never seen nothing like it." And he was one of the founders of the Men Buckjumpers.

01:56:52

SR: So where is Silky?

01:56:53

LG: That's on Magnolia and Marengo, General Taylor and Magnolia.

01:56:59

SR: What's that called?

01:57:00

LG: Silky's.

01:57:01

SR: Oh, I don't know—

01:57:02

LG: Uh-hm, his name is Frank Charles. Yeah, Silky's. It's a popular place, Baby. Oh yeah.

01:57:09

SR: Oh, I do know where that is. Okay, I do know. Now I was at your second line this year.

Now I didn't follow it the whole way, but I did not see any ya-ka-mein being sold.

01:57:21

LG: Oh they had it. My son had it and his wife had it. Oh yeah.

01:57:24

SR: I just missed it then.

01:57:24

LG: Yeah, you missed it because they sure had it. Oh yes, lord. I make sure that ya-ka-mein is out there. I make sure of that. Yeah, they sold it. They sold it out too.

01:57:35

SR: Now you did that in February this year, or was that January?

01:57:37

LG: No, in December. December 30th.

01:57:41

SR: Really? Oh yeah, that's right. Is it always in December?

01:57:43

LG: I'm the last parade of the year. Every year going on eighteen years now. This is going to be our eighteenth year. We the last parade and they get mad when we say we saved the best for last.

[Laughs]

01:57:55

SR: Ya-ka-mein—second line season runs from what through December?

01:58:00

LG: Well they start—Okay, they start in August. And then that's—December is the last parade of that year, and then you start in January and then you end like in June. So it's a two-part thing, you know. I remember somebody was trying to correct someone, and you have to understand, when you say "the last," it *is* the last parade of the year. It is. I mean it is the last parade of the year. I mean then you coming in—like we was the last parade of the year. I'm the last Sunday of each year. So then you start in January. When you start in January and then you end in June and then you have a couple of months for resting, and then you start back in August. And that will be the first parade, is the Valley of Silent Men and then after the Valley of Silent Men, that's when you have the Young Men Olympians. And they do a--a pre-parade and then they do their big parade, the Young Men Olympians. They do it that one week in September, and then the following two weeks they do the big parade. And they got like six divisions, yeah, so it's a big huge parade. And they're one of the oldest clubs. It's like one hundred years old for that club, yeah. So I mean hey—

01:59:35

SR: I could talk to you for all week. **[Laughs]** There's so much I'm interested in, but I've taken a lot of your time and I think we'll wrap up. But I'm going to ask you one more question. One final question: What do you like most about this career that you've built for yourself?

01:59:53

LG: I love the people. I love to interact with them, talking with them, I love feeding them, I love to see them enjoying my food. I love that. Like I said before, a lot of people say, "Oh, you're famous. You're famous." I don't feel famous, you know. It's just that I love what I do and I'm glad that I can get into somebody's stomach and make them smile. I'm really happy about that. I love that.

02:00:28

SR: Thank you so much, Miss Linda.

02:00:30

LG: You're welcome, Baby. You taste that. Taste that and tell me what you think about that and I'm going to take one of them.

02:00:35

[End Linda Green-Ya-ka-mein]