

**OLIVIA VELAZQUEZ**  
**Eleganza Catering – San Francisco, CA**  
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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
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Project: Women at Work in San Francisco

**[Begin Olivia Velazquez – August 2013]**

**00:00:01**

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans on Sunday, August 18, 2013. I'm in San Francisco, California, at the La Cocina Food and Entrepreneurship Conference with Olivia Velazquez and we are re-visiting. We had some technological difficulties when I was here in May, so we're visiting here today to get an introduction to our interview and begin our talk about ceviche and her business and how it got off the ground.

**00:00:25**

So Olivia, if I could get you to state your name for the record and your business, please.

**00:00:31**

**Olivia Velazquez:** Hi. Well, my name is Olivia Velazquez, and I'm the owner of the company named Eleganza Catering. And well here we are—La Cocina, right, one year already.

**00:00:42**

**AE:** So tell us—you know, your story is so great about getting into business, selling the ceviche that your husband made. Could you say your husband's name and then talk about how that originated?

**00:00:53**

**OV:** Well my husband's name is Javier Delgadillo and, well, you know, so we started selling ceviche in the parks every weekend during the baseball games. And—because we needed

money; we have three kids, and everybody wants to go to college. We need something extra, right. We have two jobs each but, unfortunately, I'm not going to say that it's not enough, but, you know, when you have family in this country, it's kind of hard, especially when you want to send them to college. So we started selling ceviche, and it was getting very popular because even people that come to see the baseball games, they're starting to buy the ceviche. So our ceviche is made basically—we made it with shrimp, and I can say it's pretty, well, Mexican style—includes cilantro, onions, peppers, jalapeño, marinated in lemon juice. I mean, if you listen to the recipe, it's not that hard, but I think we make it with so much love that makes the difference.

**00:01:50**

So, and that's our popular ceviche for now.

**00:01:54**

**AE:** So how is that you landed on the ceviche as the thing that you knew would be the thing to sell?

**00:01:59**

**OV:** Well, because we're looking for something easy. You know, I mean it—it was not like a sandwich, especially if you want to sell in the park. You don't have too many things to use it or, you know, you need something like easy to sell, easy to prepare, and something easy that you can think that everybody is going to like it, especially, you know, in the baseball games when they're too early. Some people has no breakfast, has nothing. You don't want anything big because people need, you know, time to—to eat it. So the tostadas [with shrimp ceviche], they've been very good. It was like, wow, a rush. **[Laughs]** Everybody is getting it, like I say, so

that's why we sell one day, and then we saw that it was sold out. So during four months, it was ceviche every weekend. And every time we get in more and more people.

**00:02:47**

**AE:** And then how did you decide that from the popularity of one dish, the ceviche, that you wanted to and could build a business around food?

**00:02:56**

**OV:** Well, it was not exactly about the ceviche a lot, but where I was looking for something easy to sell and the ceviche, it was the priority, right, because everybody loves the ceviche, thank God. But I think if we have this quality, maybe, you know, to work with seafood—well, my husband [*Laughs*] and well, like I say, ceviche is something easy. But it was easy when you make it maybe for five people, twenty people, 100 people, but when we used to make it for 500 or for 1,000 people it was like, wow. Now it's—now we have a problem because one of the particular things that we have is everything has to be very, very small. You know, and—and seriously, when you sell them it has the same size. We don't use any machine, any nothing. I mean, it's just my husband and his knife.

**00:03:49**

**AE:** Yeah, and I remember before you were talking about how it—the presentation is so important.

**00:03:53**

**OV:** Oh, yeah. The way they look because, remember, the food can talk. But the way they [the customers] look is like, “Oh, my goodness.” You know, “I want that. It’s yummy.” It’s when you see the dress, you know, in the most expensive store, it’s like, wow. You know, that dress is beautiful and you buy it and it’s like—because you just saw it and you got in love with it. So that’s the same thing with my food.

**00:04:11**

The presentation because the name of our company is Eleganza, so everything has to be elegant for quality, for service, so that’s what you pay for. You expect something like that.

**00:04:20**

**AE:** And yesterday, I finally got to have your ceviche at the [San Francisco] Street Food Festival, and have you always sold it with the guacamole on top?

**00:04:27**

**OV:** No, no. No, this was only a particular thing for yesterday. And it was amazing the way people accepted it because we thought there’s a few people, and they’re going to say yes to guacamole. But because I think everything was so fresh, you know, everything was made like from fresh vegetables and fresh everything and—and it was wow, amazing. So now we have another thing, right, so to put on it, and—.

**00:04:53**

**AE:** Well, and I sat at your booth for a little while, and I heard a couple of people comment on how they said it was the best guacamole—your daughter [Fernanda] being one of them—but that it’s the best guacamole they’ve had.

**00:05:04**

**OV:** Well, like I say, because it's the way my husband made it. I'm—I'm not the master in cooking because he has his particular way to chop the things, the vegetables, the fruit—everything. And so how it tastes different, and I didn't know before that. The way that you—you play with fruit and vegetables. You know, I mean it tastes different, and you can see the quality. That's why yesterday I think it was amazing we sold out, and everybody loved it.

**00:05:30**

**AE:** And tell me also—your chicken salad sandwich. Tell me about your chicken salad because it's a little different.

**00:05:36**

**OV:** Well, in my country, we actually—we—we use the chicken salad for special occasions, but we also add macaroni, the pasta. And well, because it's too much for us, you know, to do the pasta and we use things like—the same to do the ceviche, something easy to get, something easy to handle, something easy, especially when you go to sell in the streets or in the park. You don't want to be—make a big mess. So that's why our chicken salad was—a small bite at the festival and it was amazing also. Chicken salad was made—basically, it's chicken breast, mayo, jalapeño, and it has potato, carrots, and green peas. And it was another thing. That was the only way my kids can get vegetables, so it was good.

**00:06:22**

**AE:** *[Waving to Maria]* Maria del Carmen Flores [of Estrellita’s Snacks] is walking by. We just had a great panel for the conference. So—and I want to make sure—we’re just going to be here a couple more minutes. It’s getting hot. But I want to make sure that we cover where you’re from and your short version of your journey to San Francisco, if you don’t mind.

**00:06:43**

**OV:** I came from Mexico, and when we came here, we had one, actually, reason to come here and it was because my son [Javier] was epileptic, and we knew there was the best hospital, you know, neurology hospital—it was here. So after we came here, we started looking for jobs. Thank God, we found good jobs, you know, the opportunity to work and get the doctor for my son. So one of the things that I can say thank you to this country and especially to San Francisco, it was the reason that my son can get surgery in his brain and—well, because of that, I have to quit my jobs in order to help him. And one of the reasons, you know, okay, what I know to do is sell food. So I started selling food because in that time, you know, I have no more job, and I had to be with my son and help him with his recovery. And we did. We did. So that was one of the reasons to come to this country.

**00:07:40**

**AE:** Where in Mexico are you from?

**00:07:42**

**OV:** The city [Mexico City]. Exactly the city. The Distrito Federal [Federal District].

**00:07:47**

**AE:** Okay. And did you have experience of selling food in Mexico before you came here?

**00:07:50**

**OV:** No. [*Laughs*] Nothing at all. My parents, they always have to work. My mother basically was, you know, working the whole time. I have to learn how to cook, but it's different. People expect because everybody is from Mexico, you have to know how to do the tamales or the pozole. No, never mind. That's not me.

**00:08:09**

I'm just good to talk, to—to raise children, and I love to pamper people. I love to care for people so that's—that thing is one of my things—my personality.

**00:08:20**

**AE:** Yeah. Yesterday, at the booth, you were selling it hard. Yeah, calling everybody *beautiful* and *baby*. It was so great. I loved that.

**00:08:25**

**OV:** Yeah. Well, that's one of my things, you know, and I like when—I believe when someone came to buy something, they're not looking just for the dish or for coffee or for—they come for a smile, for a great—great attitude, you know, something like that, and that's what I like to provide.

**00:08:44**

**AE:** Well, one more question and that is, how does your husband know how to cook? Where did he gain those skills?

00:08:49

**OV:** This is something really funny because he has no idea how to cook. When we came to this country, he started like a dishwasher, but it was too much. It was seriously too much and really hard, and he hated his job. **[Laughs]** So I said, “Okay, you have two choices. So you either have to learn how—I don’t know, how to do something else.” He started asking to the chefs how to cook, how to use the stuff, how to use the—we say, you know, like on fire and be more, I don’t know—more close with the recipes, and that’s the way he started cooking.

00:09:26

**AE:** Well, and he’s going gangbusters now. Congratulations.

00:09:29

**OV:** Thank you so much. And now—now he’s actually amazing. I can say that. He’s wonderful, you know. He’s—he’s really—he didn’t went to school to be a chef, but he learned what he had to learn and—and he’s doing amazing. So thanks to him, we have a really good business now.

00:09:47

**AE:** Well good. Well, and thank you for sitting with me here again today. I appreciate it, and thank you for the panel. That was so much fun, for me, especially. I loved it. Thank you.

00:09:54

**OV:** And thanks to you for all your time, all your effort. And, like I say, thanks to La Cocina because we have, you know, everything that we need for—we have mentors, we have classes,

and it—it's a lot. It's a lot. And it's a lot of people to say thank you—my family, my children, especially, because they're—I can't give up for them. So and I show them that you have to work hard. You have to earn anything—everything and that's—that's how we work, like a family.

**00:10:23**

**AE:** Good note to end on. All right. Thank you, Olivia, so much and *hasta luego* [see you soon].

**00:10:27**

**OV:** *Hasta luego. Hasta luego.* We'll see you very soon in Mississippi, right.

**00:10:32**

**AE:** Yes, indeed. I can't wait.

*[Interviewer's note: all of the women I interviewed through La Cocina were invited to attend the Southern Foodways Alliance's 16<sup>th</sup> Annual Southern Foodways Symposium.]*

**00:10:34**

**[End Olivia Velazquez – August 2013]**

**[Begin Olivia Velazquez Interview-May 2013]**

**00:00:02**

**Amy Evans:** *[May 20, 2013. La Cocina. San Francisco, CA]* All right. This is Amy Evans, again, with Olivia Velazquez. And we had some technical difficulties, and we were interrupted

rudely [*Laughs*] by the recorder, and we were talking about—I asked her to describe her ceviche and what’s in it, so if we could start from the beginning with that, please, Olivia?

**00:00:21**

**Olivia Velazquez:** Yeah, well, we made it with baby shrimp and just smothered it with lemon juice. And then we chopped white onion, a little purple onions, bell peppers—green, red, and a little yellow one and cilantro and we used to put jalapeño in it. So, basically, if you came here, and you can see it’s nothing different or nothing extra or nothing, but it’s the way—I don’t know why, but it’s just good. [*Laughs*]

**00:00:51**

**AE:** Well, can you tell me—you were talking earlier, when we first met today, about how important presentation is?

**00:00:58**

**OV:** Yeah. Like I say, unfortunately, the food can talk, and when you see something, for me, it’s very important that, especially in my case, the food says, when you see it, “Yummy, I want it.” And that’s the way it’s being happened now so everybody when they saw our trays with pasta or even the vegetables, I mean, it doesn’t matter that it’s something simple. But it looks great, so it makes people feel hungry, right, so and, for me, that’s, like I said, the presentation is very important.

**00:01:33**

**AE:** Now when you were selling it in the park, how were you presenting it there and selling it and packaging it and your pricing?

**00:01:39**

**OV:** It was very, well, like I said, Mexican style. **[Laughs]** It was two tostadas for six dollars so—and then we just had like a bunch of salsa, Tabasco, Tapatio [hot sauce], so that’s the way they eat. And sometimes we can put avocado on the top. Well, now it’s more, like I say, elegant or if they ask for that in any special kind, that’s the way we do. But in the park, yeah, it was two tostadas, six dollars, and boom. **[Laughs]**

**00:02:10**

**AE:** So were you setting up at a table? Was it very—kind of an informal thing or were there more vendors at the park?

**00:02:16**

**OV:** No. I mean, lucky for me, I was the only one because we have a hard competition. But it was this lady selling and I think it was pupusas or something. But, one of the things that get my attention, especially for me and my own opinion maybe, I mean, if the food is going to be hot, it has to be served hot right away when you eat it. So that’s why I don’t really want to be, you know, to do anything that has to be hot and, at the end, when you eat it because it doesn’t taste good. That’s why I choose the ceviche, something simple. I don’t want to deal with the firemen department or any—no, no, no. So something easy, boom, put it in the tostada. That’s it. Give them the plate and that’s it, ready to go. So and that was—they have no competition.

**00:03:02**

**AE:** And so tell me, I want to know more about what you make at home when you're cooking for your family and your children's friends.

**00:03:07**

**OV:** Oh, my god. My family is very demanding. I have a daughter and she's all the way vegetarian, but this is funny: if I make meatballs, we call it *albondigas*, she loves it. And—and that's her food. All—everything has to be green for her. And I have another one. and this is very funny. She eats everything, but she's a little picky in colors. She gets dizzy she says so—that's what I say sometimes, "Oh, my god." You have to deal with these three and after that, oh my god. You become to be the greatest caterer and the greatest chef. And I have my son, he loves meat. So I have to combine vegetables with some meat, always have at least two or three different dishes in order to—everybody can eat.

**00:03:55**

**AE:** You said your cooking is Mexican-style though, so what are some dishes that are popular in your house?

**00:04:01**

**OV:** *[Laughs]* Chicken. It's always chicken. We make this *milanesas* with chicken, *taquitos* with chicken. We make *sopes*. Soups. You call soups and we call it *caldos*. So I'm more like that way. Vegetables all the time. Rice, for example. Salads. I don't know how to do *pozole*, which is very Mexican, but I don't know how. I don't know how to do tamales. But I know how to do enchiladas, so just the little things—that's nothing special. It's just simple food, but it's good.

**00:04:42**

**AE:** And tell me about—I’m curious, we were talking on the walk over here about how you can get any kind of food you want in San Francisco. What did—what did that mean to you when you first got here? Was it very familiar or—describe that to me?

**00:04:56**

**OV:** I can say that the only difficult thing for me to come to San Francisco it was to learn the language. Besides that, everything—because I’m from the city, so this is almost the same. You can find the same people and, like I say, it’s just for the—for the language. So that’s my only difficult thing. And when it comes to the San Francisco, I think it’s very particular that you have different cultures, different people from everywhere, and that’s why, when I start up business to come with food, it’s unbelievable that people can feel, “Oh, no. It is too many restaurants, too many caterers.” But if you have your own style, you’re going to be the good one. And that’s what I—I pointed to. So to combine—for example, I was working at a deli [Le Regency Deli] and it was with Mediterranean people from Romania, so I learned a little thing. But like I say, we’re not familiar, right, with all that kind of style—that food or Indian food, they’re too spicy so I like to create, for example, the ceviche. It used to be Peruvian style but I don’t personal like it with corns and more stuff they put on it so we just take it away. So that’s why we create our own way to do it.

**00:06:10**

And it’s the same old pastas. For example, I don’t like *papa huancaína* [Peruvian Huancayo-style potatoes]. I don’t like it, but I like the one kind of sauce, so we make it with some—we make pasta. So we create things. We combine, you know, can I say stealing or using from other countries but at the end, it comes to the art personal food.

**00:06:34**

**AE:** I'm so glad you mentioned the deli again because now I remember than you have an Armenian wrap on your menu. Tell me about that.

**00:06:39**

**OV:** It's pretty simple. Something like super-easy to do, and it's very good. I—we work for one of the schools here, a very big school for boys, it's called Archbishop Riordan High School, and they have this band, around 400 kids. So the guy was always crazy because, of course, kids get tired of the same sandwiches all the time. So when I meet him, my son, one day he got out for lunch this Armenian wrap. I make his own way, you know, because they use a lot of stuff that my son, I know for sure, he's not going to eat it. So Mommy makes his lunch, and people got a little taste. They love it. And then one day he asks me for two and then for three. And one day the teacher said, "Well, I saw the kids been eating Javier's food." That's the name of my son. "Do you mind to do—?" I said, "Yeah, for how many kids?" And I was like, "What?!" when he said maybe 300. So that's the way I started to work more like, you know, in the school. So that Armenian wrap with our own way to do it, and that was very good for lunches in the schools.

**00:07:48**

**AE:** Great. So let's go back to when you started your business. You—you came to La Cocina, gave them some ceviche, and then how did you develop your idea for your business and your menu from there?

**00:08:00**

**OV:** We just have some ideas but, like I say, it's very helpful to be here because one of the things people have to remember is that we come with no education. I mean, talking education is not like we don't know how to talk. No, that is not—but we don't know anything about marketing, about production, about prices, so that's why La Cocina is very important because they—they make you. I told you something like it's when you have a kid. You know, you have a girl, maybe she can be beautiful, but you don't know exactly what it's going to be in her life, so you have to build that character, personality, you know, to make sure what is the good thing that she had in order to, you know, to create an amazing person for later. That's the same way for me.

**00:08:44**

After I have my three kids [Javier, Fernanda, and Andrea] and see that they're—they're doing well, I feel like I have the—that maybe I don't know, the power probably to do something different in my life, which is why I call this my baby. *[Laughs]* So—

**00:09:04**

**AE:** So tell me about the name Eleganza.

**00:09:05**

**OV:** Oh, this is a little hard part. We just like one day thinking and thinking. And it's not like I feel bad because I'm Mexican, of course not. I don't want people seeing that just because you're Mexican, you have to come here with *huaraches* [woven sandals] and eating tamales and have a—no, that's not my style. So I feel lucky that I—I meet very great people because I was working at downtown. People are different, and that's why I think we're different in my family.

**00:09:37**

So with different goals, different ambitions in my life. And that's what I was looking for: some name that represents what I want to do with my family. You know, so probably Eleganza sounds like it's too much, but everything that you do in life, it has to be in order, quality. And good service, good personality, good everything. So, and I think that's why we chose the name.

**00:10:05**

**AE:** And service, as I remember, is a big part of how you present yourself on your website. Tell me more about that.

**00:10:10**

**OV:** Well, I always tell people I feel in my other life I was Cinderella. I love to pamper people. Maybe because, like I say, I love my family. And when you have situations like we do before, especially when my son was in the hospital, to meet people that, you know, you have a really bad situation because you have somebody in the hospital, right. And for me, in order to make or bring a little happiness in their life, sometimes it was with a little maybe cup of coffee or maybe half a sandwich, and that's how I started to feel like I can change.

**00:10:50**

When I was working for Starbucks, you know, Starbucks, they have, maybe, in each corner, two or three [locations] right? But my Starbucks at 150 California, it was the first place regional in sales. Even in my hours [that I worked] it was very crazy because I opened at 3:00 a.m. I was working only three or four hours, but it was the number one [in regional sales]. And even if it's a lot of Starbucks, they always have letters about the service, how it was very early, and I always smiled and always, you know, great with the people. So that's why I think this feeling to the other is nice. They can feel not my sad things, but they have pity. So that's what I

say: service is very important. They don't care what's going on in your life, but they just want to feel like somebody cares for them, so—.

**00:11:44**

**AE:** And you've—you have your most of your family at least—I don't want to assume or put words in your mouth, but you're working with your family now in your business. You were talking about your—your daughter being your manager. Tell me about that.

**00:11:57**

**OV:** *[Laughs]* Well, yeah, because, like I say, maybe I can speak, maybe I can just read and probably write, but when it comes to the computers, it's like, oh, gosh. This is the hardest part for me. So they're amazing. My family has been really, really supporting me and my daughters, I have one is very good like talking and she is the one sending the emails to people, you know, to offer or to be thankful. And I have another one—this is like amazing also because she's the one doing my contracts, my invoices, and she's on the top of everything. For example, this month has been very, very busy for us, so she's like, "Mom, you have to send an email to this one to confirm. Mom, somebody sent an email to say this," because all phones all have the emails, so some—you know, just in case if something is missing in my thing, so they can remind me. So my family—my son, for example, he's part of, I mean—he's not helping me to do any writing or anything like that, but he's the one when we have an event, he's better for service.

**00:13:08**

He makes sure that if people throw things in the table or, you know, like plates or things like that—maybe it can be a small thing, but when it comes to having an event, it's very important to cleaning, to make sure people it's okay, or if they need something on the table, you

know, sometimes you have old people, so he's able to help them to maybe bring the napkins or fork. And at the end of the event, we have—everybody is happy because we have very good service.

**00:13:38**

**AE:** Now, do you have when you do catering jobs, do you rent those supplies that you use for the jobs or that—you're saying no.

**00:13:45**

**OV:** Not anymore. I mean, well, before we used to buy little by little, and because we started with like maybe fifty and then 100, and now it's 200 and when it comes to—be at 300 it's like well. Now La Cocina they're—I asked the other day [*Laughs*] because it was for 400. So but that's my goal to—like I say, for the service, and because it's a lot of competition, my idea was, when I offer it, when I give them a price, we include everything like plates and silverware, and it depends if they need like champagne glasses or wine glasses, so that's one of my things in my company. So we can get a little more, you know. People say, “Well, if I hire this company, the price is without plates, without this, blah, blah, blah. But if I hire Olivia, she's offered me for a good price and also—.” And it was a little hard because my prices are not too high but, for me, I don't really want to do only one event a month because I'm not going to have anything else. I have three kids, and they all go to college. I prefer to have like—like, for example, this month that I have almost one every single day and three every weekend, which is a lot. And so far, it's good because I just started.

**00:15:05**

**AE:** So do you have—you have a storage site for all of those—those catering supplies?

**00:15:09**

**OV:** My house. **[Laughs]** My house. I just started to rent a shelf at La Cocina because it's been hard, you know, back and forth with all the stuff. But, my house. We have to—to change all the living room to have all the shelves in order to have everything, so—. And, like I say, my kids are doing a very good job because they do inventory—that's what you call it? So one, he—the boy is in charge to order supplies, for example, the lighters, plastic bags, plates, or—that's his job. If we don't have enough, he has to run to the store or look for it to arrive but I need plates or I need—when we talk about compostables, right.

**00:15:52**

The other one, she's in charge when we finish the event and when we wash the dishes, she has to come and see how many we have left because you always have something left.

**[Laughs]** So and the other one it's—it's my grumpy one, but she's the one in charge of like, for example, aprons, towels that—I mean I do that a little bit. I can do everything by myself. I cannot, so—

**00:16:15**

**AE:** And so you—when you make the food, you're still reserving kitchen time at La Cocina. Tell me how that works.

**00:16:21**

**OV:** Yeah, we—thanks to Daniella [Sawaya], she was very helpful because I have no idea how to do that, and all the time I have to ask her so, finally, I got it. So yeah, you have to do

reservations, but in my case, I have been very like lucky, like I say, because I always find a time that I need. And if not, they just try to see, you know, because it's hard when you have an event. Some food, it has to be like got to wait sometimes, but it's not like you can prepare it two or three days before. You cannot. It has to be the same day, or that's the way that I work. So and they're very able to do that for me, so—.

**00:16:59**

**AE:** So what do you think the future is of Eleganza?

**00:17:02**

**OV:** Oh well, we're having only eight months and, you know, when I came here with my business plan, now that I saw the business plan, it's all different because everything that I had to do for two years, it happens already. So now I have to do another business plan in order to add more things because my goal is to be here. You—you have the choice to be maybe five years. But I don't see myself in five years—I want to do more. If I'm going to be here, but I'm going to do more for them and more for my community, so the future of Eleganza is to hire more people. And I don't want to put the responsibility on the shoulder of my kids because they're going to have their own career. So I don't want them to feel like, oh, I—I can't study what I want because I need to help my mom. I don't want that.

**00:17:54**

Right now, it's because just to start it and because I want them to know how difficult it is, so every time they go to college or they go to school, they remember how we start. So I want to hire more people, for sure, because that's one of my goals to help and to keep doing what I'm doing, service.

**00:18:17**

**AE:** So is that—well, you keep talking about service and that connection. Is that what you think sets you apart, primarily, to have grown this—to be this successful in such a short period of time?

**00:18:27**

**OV:** Uh, well I don't know, but the thing that I know is when you have a vision or a goal, you know, things are going to change for sure. But, like I say, I'm so grateful, maybe because I saw my business but not because I'm going to reach it one year or two years—no, that's not going to happen. And I—seriously, I don't want that because I'm so happy with what I have right now because to have my kids healthy, to have my family, that's more important. And if one day somebody says, you know, what? You have to choose. Of course I'm going to choose to my family because this is only one thing that I'm going to do in life. It's not like my business is my life—never. My family is my life. This is just part of my life, and I'm going to help if I can, you know, with this new part of my—my new life.

**00:19:21**

So yeah, in some years I just want to be running the business but have more people to help me.

**00:19:28**

**AE:** When you do events are you always there? Do people get to interact with you?

**00:19:33**

**OV:** Yeah. So but now it's getting hard because we have events on like the same days, so I meet the people the day before or I just came to them, you know, to show my people how they're going to serve and how they're going to do anything. And to pray, too, everything is well **[Laughs]** because this is another thing that when I show how are we doing and some people, they like my personality. Sometimes they want me there, but I can't. So but everything, it's okay for now. **[Laughs]**

**00:20:03**

**AE:** I can definitely see how people would want you to be a part of the package. You have a great personality. So do you still have family back in Mexico City?

**00:20:12**

**OV:** Uh, yeah. Well just—I mean I do have a lot of family living here. Here, I have more than 300 people. But I never get along with them because, like I say, for these twelve years I was just working and working and making sure that my family is okay—my kids. So now I feel—. They're very proud. They have some videos that they're watching now, and they're just crying because it's nice to see how someone who was kind of like a nobody, you know, so now to come to have your business and be able to help. I keep repeating that because seriously that's the way that you pay rent in this world: helping to the others.

**00:20:52**

So I have a brother in Mexico, and I think he's going to come back, maybe, in two years. He just actually went back over there. I have another brother—that's my closest family. The other one is just relatives. But I just care about my brothers and my kids and, of course, my husband.

**00:21:12**

**AE:** So what did your family—what do your brothers in Mexico City, what did they think about you making a life for you and your family through food?

**00:21:18**

**OV:** And they know we came from a very hard situation also, but they know I was the one who started working so very early because I needed to help my mom. And, like I say, because I was always the one who cared about the others, so I decided to work when I was fourteen, so they can have shoes, they can have—I don't know—things for school. And it's not like they're get impressed. They say, "You deserve it." And I feel very—very, like, nice. **[Laughs]**

**00:21:56**

**AE:** Is your mother still living?

**00:21:58**

**OV:** No, she passed away eighteen years ago. So and I was—because, unfortunately, like I say, we came from a very dysfunctional family. My dad was an alcoholic, and my mother has to work all the time. So I have to help her to raise my brothers. And I'm like their mother. So for me, it was my huge responsibility to my brothers—my two brothers and my three kids.

**00:22:24**

**AE:** How did you learn to cook?

00:22:26

**OV:** It was by necessity, [*Laughs*] so it was nobody else to cook, and that's it. You have two choices: to do it on your own and every single day, you practice it. So, that's survival, right? So that's the way that I learned how to cook.

00:22:44

**AE:** So you taught yourself, basically?

00:22:45

**OV:** Yeah. I have to because I have two little ones, and they have to eat and then Daddy was not there in the picture and Mom was working, you know, trying to make money. And I was like okay, now what? I'm—I'm the one always, like I don't wait until people tell me what to do. I can't. I'm always like this, okay [*Finger Snaps*]. There is nothing ready? Okay, let's do it. So I don't know. Maybe that's why. So when my husband—when we came here and then all the situation about my son, and I said, “Okay, well we can't sell tamales because we're not good in that. We can't sell pozole because we're not good in that. We have to sell something that it—it's going to sell easily and people will love it.

00:23:26

So we do some try-outs, and the ceviche was the winner. So he was working too, but he was working too much. So I said, “Okay,” you know, “what—let's do it. Let's go to the park and—and see what's going on.” But I teach my kids, you always have to try it because if you don't do it, you will regret it because you will say, “Oh, should I do this? Oh, why, I didn't know.” So, no. So you have to do it. And it's worked: good for you. And it doesn't: well, too bad, but at least you know what happened. So I call it experience.

00:24:02

**AE:** So your husband is part of the business now, too, of Eleganza?

00:24:06

**OV:** Yeah, he's a chef. **[Laughs]** He's the cooker, yeah. That's it. He's—it's all right. It's different. He doesn't have a very good interaction with the people because he—you know, this is funny: he knows more English than me, but he can't speak—he can't make sense, so that's what he—he gets like, “Ugh!” So we put him in the kitchen, so I—I discover each talent, so he's a good one to cook. He's amazing to do things and combine—that's what I love because he's, “Oh, we don't have this. Well, we can do it with this.” And everything is good. We don't have to hire too many people because, like I say, he is amazing. He can do three or four things. Don't ask about children because he's going to mess up, but talking about food, he can do a lot of stuff at once.

00:24:59

So he's very good in the kitchen. Don't move him like from there, so—.

00:25:04

**AE:** So now the whole family—all your energy and livelihood is invested in Eleganza?

00:25:10

**OV:** Yes. Yeah.

00:25:13

**AE:** Amazing in just a year.

**00:25:15**

**OV:** Yeah, we got started almost a year.

**00:25:18**

**AE:** So tell me how that feels to—to be so successful so fast on something that—.

**00:25:25**

**OV:** It's a huge responsibility because I—when I started, nobody probably knows what's going to happen and, like I say, because English is my not language, so it was really hard. Sometimes I got—I have to go to the bathroom, and I had to cry. But I can show my kids their mom isn't giving up. I can't because what is the example that I'm going to give to them? I'm always talking about to look forward, to, you know, don't worry, don't give up, you have to try it, so I can't—I can't fail. I was—it is too much responsibility on my shoulders because, for example, now, you know, my kids are ready to go, for example, my daughter to college, and she made it. And seriously, let me tell you this, we—we are like wow because she was very, hmm, maybe, party life. She's not a bad girl—no, no, no. But she was kind of, “Well, maybe. Maybe not.” And now, she's 100-percent into it. I can't just say, “Oh, I don't have the money for you.” I can't. So now I have to keep working and bringing more, you know, events and more stuff in order to keep busy.

**00:26:35**

**AE:** So do you think there's something special about the city of San Francisco that is—that embraces women like you? Can you explain that?

**00:26:43**

**OV:** Oh, yeah. That's a lot of—a lot of help here. I'm actually the one took all the opportunities; that's what I learned. It's a lot of doors. You have to knock, and they open. Go for it. So I take classes in a lot of organizations, so that's why I—I meet too many people and, like I say, because this—especially this city, it has too much. Unfortunately, people don't take advantage of that, and I'm the one that says, "Okay, if you don't want it, well, too bad, but I do." So that's why.

**00:27:21**

**AE:** So do you have anyone who is working with or for you now who will be like an apprentice in that you will hope to build up to have—so they'll have businesses of their own, kind of like a mini La Cocina? *[Laughs]*

**00:27:33**

**OV:** Um, you know what? It is a lot of people but, like I say—hmm, it's sad. Okay, let me explain this and see if we can be on the same page. Okay, I have my kids, right? Everybody asks me, how you—how Fernanda knows where she's going to be in college? It's not like they know, but you have to see where is their talent because it's so—it feels so bad or—or really sad if they fail, but there's no one that it will be their fault. So you can put too much pressure on someone that, you know, it's not going to happen because you can have dreams. Everybody can have dreams. But you have to be realistic in some point. And like I say, that's when my husband says, you know what—and that's why we create the company because I say, "Okay. You can talk. You can deal with people. He got headaches, but you can cook, and you're amazing, but you can do the things that I'm doing.

**00:28:30**

So I have to, you know, live and—and go to schools and take the classes so in order to—to—to build this business. So, of course, I may not be able to help people. When I saw they have a special thing they can—because it's a lot. And I feel—I'm going to feel bad if the people fail, you know, because I have to be like a warning for that. But if they have a special talent in other different things, well go for it.

**00:29:02**

**AE:** Well let's talk about this inspiration board here. Tell me about it.

**00:29:07**

**OV:** [*Laughs*] Well we've been having a little difficulties with my logo is in order to have a nice designer or—or the marketing, we need a logo, a good logo. So we just show here a little bit that who I am and how I like to work and with the people that I want to work. So when I started, like I say, everything has been changed too much because my idea was only a small catering and probably, you know, an hour just to do—just sandwiches, coffee, pastries. But now we do very huge events. Now we work with very good people, big companies, so now it's kind of like a—well, just how it'll be but it's good though, so—. That's what, it's a life challenge.

**00:29:57**

**AE:** And you said there was a problem with your logo. What do you mean by that?

**00:30:00**

**OV:** Oh well, because I came with a logo, but it was too much so, you know, it's just little things, but now we're going to look for something maybe more original I think or—or something that people can say, “Oh, that's Eleganza.” So—. That's the one. That's why it's very important when—when you came to this organization, especially La Cocina, they have people to help you to do your website. They—the photographer, everything. It's not just like, “Are you cooking? You do amazing soup or *huaraches* [large, oblong fried masa with toppings] or *sopes* [small round fried masa with toppings] and that—.” No. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of stuff to involve in order to have your business and growing your business.

**00:30:45**

**AE:** So tell me about some of the other stuff that you offer on your catering menus, what other things you make.

**00:30:51**

**OV:** Well, we're very—people like our appetizers, so it is a very huge variety from appetizers. And our pastas, they're very good. Rice is very good. We actually have a dinner, like maybe two—three days ago and people they attend the dinner, now they're looking for food for the next couple weekends because it is graduations. So it's nice, like this weekend, we have a lot of people come to our house and say, “You know what? I just want that—exactly the same menu.” So people get in love for—for what they try it, so, which is good.

**00:31:34**

**AE:** And so is your menu—p would you say it's more of what you want to make and serve or—or is some of it customer demand and what people are looking for?

**00:31:43**

**OV:** No. No, I don't want to get into any other problems. No, this is what I have, and this is what you can choose. So, but, like I said, we have no problems because pasta, everybody loves pasta. Vegetarian stuff, the vegetables the way they made it, everybody loves it—even the little kids so that's amazing. Salads, we have four different types of salads. We have chicken; you can't go wrong with chicken. Maybe pork and maybe seafood, but chicken, everybody likes chicken. So we just make things easy for people. But we just have one special request and that was—this is a wedding. So they give me some stuff to see if we can do it. I said, “Okay, for sure, it's not going to be the same because this mix is Japanese and Mexican.” I say, “I don't want to leave the Japanese out or the Mexican.” Because, you know, both families, they don't know each other. This is going to be their first time. In order—that's what I'm saying—service is over everything. In order to be the—to make this wedding special, it has to be, you know, a different type of food. So we create on a special menu for them but only for them. Let's see how it goes and, you know, **[Laughs]** and maybe we're going to keep doing it, but it was only because of the situation, so—.

**00:33:02**

**AE:** So how did you do that? How did you research and decide what to serve for the Japanese side of the family?

**00:33:07**

**OV:** Well, the guy was very able to do it. He actually doesn't care too much because he's been living here his whole life, but I was the one so this has only happened to me—I was the one to

recommend that. I say, “You don’t want your family to be here from Japan, all the way—they’re to come here and just offer something kind of Mexican. Because even if your family is going to be able to do it, for me, it’s very important that everybody, even the little ones, have a—you know, a good day. You don’t want it to be people in the corner or—or are you going to feel bad if someone goes to buy a hamburger? It is someplace to buy hamburgers. What if there is no place?”

**00:33:51**

So that’s why we just came with ideas and ideas to try to create something special for everybody. And of course another thing is people from Mexico—Mexico they don’t want to come here for rice and beans. No way. I mean that’s why they’re going to eat it, you know, over there back home. So that’s why we—we have to change a little bit. We do have cilantro rice, which is great rice. So we don’t do any Mexican rice this time, no.

**00:34:18**

**AE:** Tell me about the squid ink rice that I saw on your website.

**00:34:21**

**OV:** Oh my god, with the ink—with the—yeah, yeah, yeah. It’s really good. It’s only the bad thing because when you eat it you know everything is black, and you look like you’re playing *Pirates of the Caribbean*, but it’s amazing. It’s very popular; people love it and yeah, we make everything is fresh.

**00:34:39**

**AE:** How did you come to add that to your menu?

**00:34:40**

**OV:** Because, like I say, my husband when he is started, he started in very old restaurants and they have these New Orleans' style and Peruvian style, which is almost the same, and Cajun flavor and all this stuff. And he learned how to do the things because this is what happened. He doesn't want to be a dishwasher forever. He started to learn how to do like working the stuff, working the fire, and all this stuff. And he—he met his partner [Martin Guerrero], and they've been together for maybe ten years. We have this other guy he's helping us, and they're both like super-friends, very close friends, so they have a lot of recipes. They're like a bible.

**00:35:22**

**AE:** So your husband started out as a dishwasher in restaurants and learned in restaurants. Are there any restaurants that you could mention that—that he came up in that—that have influenced how he cooks?

**00:35:33**

**OV:** Yeah, one of the restaurants is everybody knows this one—is PJ's. It's not in existence anymore. But the good thing there—the guy he used to work—everybody he used to work for at PJ's, now they have a new one and the name is Fresca, which is a Peruvian restaurant. So and the same people is working with the same, you know, kind of like type of food and just changed the names. And he's been working with the same people since then, so it's the same flavors like I say before—New Orleans-style, very Cajun, very Peruvian, spicy, very good, very, very good.

**00:36:15**

**AE:** So I also made note of the Peruvian-style paella that you have on the menu.

**00:36:20**

**OV:** Yeah, we have paella, one is Peruvian style and it has corn and little more ingredients that we don't really use. I'm from Mexico, but our paella is more like a Spanish-style. So we create this by—with chorizo, so with everything, so it's been really good. Another amazing thing.

**[Laughs]**

**00:36:42**

**AE:** And could I get you to—to say your husband and children's names for the record so we have those?

**00:36:47**

**OV:** Yeah. My husband's name is Javier Delgadillo, and because we're Mexican my son has to have the same name. It's Javier Delgadillo and I have my first daughter's name is Fernanda Delgadillo and Andrea Delgadillo.

**00:37:01**

**AE:** And I asked you earlier about—do you need to check that? Your phone is buzzing? Oh, okay. Maybe it's Daniella's. I asked you earlier about the future of Eleganza, but do you have anything about your experience and this kind of fast transition into the catering business that you would like to mention of that I haven't asked you about?

**00:37:25**

**OV:** You know what? Before people can see—when things happens like little mistakes, people think, oh, I’m failed. Everything is bad. No, for me they’re just experience. If something happens that’s why you have to be strong and able to resolve the situation. Forget about what happened or whose fault was that—no. Just see what you can do in that moment. And, like I say, probably nobody believes me that it’s really hard to have kids, to have a home, to run a business, and to deal with clients. It’s not easy, but it is not impossible, so you have to find a way. In everything that’s my always kind of—my stuff to say things happen for a reason. When something really bad is coming or it’s happening in your life, well you just have to see the positive things and take that whatever happened in your life like a learning experience, and that’s it.

**00:38:26**

**AE:** Well I like that note to end on. But I also, for a second, if you don’t mind, would like to go back and ask you about when you were a little girl in Mexico City taking care of your brothers and if you ever had—if you had daydreams then about what you could or might become?

**00:38:41**

**OV:** You know what? My family has been here for, I don’t know—sixty, seventy years, I don’t know. My mom never wants to come here. So my dad is the one just to come all the time. So when my mother passed away, my two brothers they was already here, so of course in my mind it’s always to—you know, USA, the American dream. But it was different. It was very, very different. I never believed or—or even when I came here the first time, I never expect that one day I can do things on my own. I—I always think that—I used to have a very good job. And when I was working for Starbucks, I was—when they offered to me to be a supervisor I say, “No, because if I’m going to do that, I have to be the best one.” So I learned how to do things

and the same to my other job. So if I'm going to do something, it's going to be—because I feel like you pay for that. It's not like you're getting things for free, so you deserve that.

**00:39:45**

And I treat people the same way that I want people to treat me. And I told my kids, if you respect yourself, you're going to be able to respect people, and they're going to respect you but that's how it goes. It's a circle.

**00:39:59**

**AE:** Exactly. What's your favorite food to eat?

**00:40:03**

**OV:** Oh, Mama. Now? Everything. **[Laughs]** Well, I don't know. Green stuff. Now I'm trying—now at La Cocina you—oh, wow. This is amazing because you—you try more new things. Azalina [Eusope from Malaysia] is cooking amazing, so it's everything, you know, go green and we have these Japanese people they cook great things that you never think you're going to try it in your life. But so but I'm more like a green. I love salads and vegetables.

**00:40:35**

**AE:** Is there ever an opportunity for the—the women who go through the La Cocina program to learn from each other? Do y'all do that?

**00:40:43**

**OV:** Here? Yeah. I—yeah, I mean it's not like you have a competition, you know. This is something where sometimes people get a little mad with me because I don't see any competition.

I believe that each company or each person, they have their own qualities. They have their own you. So for me, everybody is my friend. If I need something, they're always able to give me that or if they need something from me, they can come out—why not? So I don't see any competition. Even if they say you know because that's the rule. That's your competition. I say, "I'm not." First of all, I don't sell tamales. I don't sell pupusas, so they're my friends. So, and that's how they work. When you—when you die, over there, He's not going to say, "Okay, the people selling tamales in this line and people selling pupusas—" No, everybody is going to be in the same room or whatever we can be, so—.

**00:41:33**

So I love to be here, and I love to have everybody involved, you know.

**00:41:39**

**AE:** Well, Olivia, we can end on that note, unless you have something that you want to add, but this has been lovely and I thank you so much.

**00:41:46**

**OV:** No. No, thanks to you for all this time and, you know, to share. And this is good for me because I remember who I am and where I come from, so this is good. I love it. And thanks, of course, to La Cocina. I always say that, so it's—it's like a clinic when you have your baby, they give you everything, but after that it's on you. You're going to be the one to decide to, you know—to do whatever you—you know how to do. Good or bad, but you're the one. They give you everything. It's your fault if you don't take it because you're—they're really very helpful.

**[Laughs]**

**00:42:25**

**AE:** Well, here's to the future of Eleganza. Thank you.

**00:42:28**

**OV:** Thank you.

**00:42:29**

**[End Olivia Velazquez Interview – May 2013]**