



Linh Garza

Dong Phuong Bakery - New Orleans East, LA

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Phillip Norman Reid: All right. Today is Thursday April 28th, 2022. We're here at Dong Phuong Bakery in New Orleans East. I'm Phillip Norman, and I'm speaking with Ms. Garza. Ms. Garza, could you introduce yourself for the recording?

Linh Garza: My name is Linh Tran Garza.

Phillip Norman Reid: Perfect. And who are you and what do you do?

Linh Garza: I am the current president of Dong Phuong Bakery in New Orleans.

Phillip Norman Reid: Perfect. All right. Well, thank you so much for doing this, Ms. Garza. I really appreciate it. And, just to start out, could you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what your upbringing was like?

Linh Garza: Where I grew up? I grew up here in New Orleans East. My family arrived in the US in 1980. I was 2 at the time, so those are very [laughter] early memories that I don't have.

Probably my earliest memory was when I was probably 4. We were all living— my whole extended family was living in a shotgun house down in New Orleans East in the Vietnamese community here in New Orleans, which, by the time we arrived, the community had already been established.

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And because most of the Vietnamese immigrants came in 1975 after the fall of Saigon. We had to wait till 1978 because my father was [laughter] a POW. So, we had to wait till he was released to leave. So, the community was already starting to build here. So, growing up here in the neighborhood, it was mostly surrounded by Vietnamese. There were some grocery stores that popped up. To me, growing up, I didn't really feel like I was in New Orleans.

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I didn't quite know what New Orleans was until later. Maybe elementary school, high school was when I started to feel like being part of New Orleans. In New Orleans East, we are pretty far from what I call New Orleans proper, downtown, uptown. So, distance-wise, we are in the outskirts, so there's a lot of influences or cultures that doesn't quite make it this far, especially when you're growing up in a community that is mostly Vietnamese.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, because this is really like the edge of Orleans Parish out here, like the furthest—

Linh Garza: Yeah, this is the east, so if you go any further, you're in the swamps. [laughter] So, this is the farthest east that you can go.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, the edge of the civilization out here—

Linh Garza: The edge. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: —before you hit the swamps.

Linh Garza: The edge. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, totally. Well, great.

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Just as a kid, what did you like to do, and who did you hang out with?

Linh Garza: As a kid, hang out, well, I pretty much grew up at the bakery. My brother, and I, and my sister. There was no such thing as day care, in a sense. My parents worked here [laughter], well, almost 24/7 [laughter], in a sense. It felt like 24/7. So, when we were dropped off after school, we were dropped off here at the bakery, and we played in the parking lot. We hung out with some other— there was other businesses here at this location, and they also have kids kind of our age. And we just played makeshift games, maybe kick ball in the parking lot, and dug holes—

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: —build tunnels, just kid stuff. In the '80s, there's no iPads [laughter], so you make up your own games

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And it was enjoyable. I had a lot of fun. But this is all we knew.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, I know that's how it goes with family businesses is that really gives like the shape to your life. And I know a lot of bakeries are family businesses, so I've heard that from a lot of bakers, for sure. So, at what point were you like involved in the business? Did you have little jobs you would do or anything like that?

Linh Garza: So, when I was old enough to, I guess, reach the counter [laughter] almost, really.

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: So, probably 12, 13, somewhere around there, I started working, helping my mom at the store in retail, sort of like a cashier, working on the weekends, and just helping out where I can. [laughter] I remember when I was maybe 7 or 8, going back to when we were playing, I have this memory of me.

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So, we used to stack flour all the way up to the ceiling—

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: —because we didn't have a storage or anything. It was just a room. And I remember there's a cardboard box up there just for some reason. And I climbed up there, and I went into the box, and I guess I was trying to hide or play, thinking I was going to slide down. I have no idea. But, apparently, I fell asleep in the box.

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: My parents went nuts.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, my god, I bet.

Linh Garza: They could not find me. [laughter] They searched everywhere. And, finally, one of the employees, [laughter] they checked, and I was in that box. So, that was one of the memories that stuck with me of creating my own games or plays, and doing work at the bakery environment. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, totally, you make a jungle gym out of flour sacks and boxes.

Linh Garza: Exactly. [laughter]

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I did work mostly at the store, the shop, the retail. I didn't really help much out in production. I guess they shouldn't have a 12-year-old operate heavy machinery or anything like that [laughter], safety-wise. So, I helped, and I think that really helped with my Vietnamese. I don't want to say I'm fluent. I can speak. I have a pretty good command every day because I do communicate with my parents in Vietnamese. But if I have to guess, I'm probably at like a second-grade or third-grade level with Vietnamese. But I think being able to work at the shop itself, to communicate with Vietnamese customers, I think that really helped with my linguistic skills. [laughter]

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Phillip Norman Reid: Right. So, are you grateful for that now to kind of have both languages?

Linh Garza: I am. It gets very rewarding being able to communicate in a different language, especially with Vietnamese. I think they appreciate it, and it's a level of respect. It shocks them sometimes. They're like, "Wow," that I could speak so well. Most of the older Vietnamese, they don't feel like I have an accent. Because, sometimes, when Vietnamese, second-generation Vietnamese over here, when they grow up, they learn English first, and then kind of their Vietnamese, you kind of have an accent, I would say.

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But [laughter] then they realize as they keep talking that [laughter] I don't have the words for a lot of the— we can't talk politics or anything. [laughter] Anything higher up, I'm like, "Oh, you lost me [laughter], terminology-wise." I'm like, "I don't have the vocabulary for that."

Phillip Norman Reid: But you're able to kind of trick them at first like, "Yeah, I know what I'm doing" [laughter], right?

Linh Garza: [laughter] Exactly. They're like, "Oh." [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's cool. Like you said, I know for a lot of second-generation immigrants, that is the struggle, like growing up with these two languages, and being able to hold onto one but also kind of adapt to US society through English, and that kind of thing.

Linh Garza: Yeah, and I feel like I've failed as a Vietnamese parent. My daughter, unfortunately, I did not teach her Vietnamese. She's 8, and the only thing she knows is *pho*. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: It's tough because it's not taught in the schools here, I imagine.

Linh Garza: It's not taught in school.

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She is bilingual in Spanish though because she's in a dual-language class, and my husband speaks to her in Spanish only. I guess it would've been nice if she was trilingual. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Impressive, for sure. Bilingual though is impressive on its own, for sure.

Linh Garza: Yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: So, you had two siblings growing up, right?

Linh Garza: Yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: Okay. Got you. What are their names, and how old are they in relation to you?

Linh Garza: So, I have my older brother. He's two years older than me. His name is Trung Tran. And a younger sister, she is four years younger than me, and her name is Phuong Tran. I like to joke sometimes because we have now established, like, corporate record-wise— marketing-wise,

not corporate, marketing-wise. Dong Phuong Bakery was established in 1982. She was born in 1982 [laughter], and her name is also Phuong. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, I got you, right.

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Linh Garza: So [laughter], there's been debate as far as whether my mom named her after the business, [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, because it already had that name?

Linh Garza: Yes, it already had that name. She denies it but I don't know. It's kind of a coincidence, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Definitely, it's suspicious, for sure.

Linh Garza: It's suspicious.

Phillip Norman Reid: Well, talk a little bit about just like the family dynamic growing up. What did you like learn from your parents? What were kind of the values that were encouraged, and how did you interact with your siblings?

Linh Garza: [laughter] So, a typical Asian family dynamic [phone rings], or not just Asian but just immigrant families, they made all the sacrifice when they came to this country so that you

could have a better life. [laughter] It's also a guilt trip. [laughter] They've done all this. It's all for you. You have to do well.

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You *have* to do well. And the way you do well is you do well in school. So, it's drilled into you.

You have to do well, no matter what. But, on the flip side of that, they also work all the time because it's a family business. You have to put in the hours. In the beginning, you don't hire people. You do it yourself. So, we didn't have— they didn't give us time. We didn't have time together in the sense where you would think. And they didn't have time to provide us with like taking opportunities like sports or any extracurricular activities because, one, they didn't even know how to sign up or they didn't know where, or anything like that. So, I think I missed out on some of that opportunity that I wish— and, right now, I'm living vicariously through my daughter. [laughter]

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Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: I put her in all the sports I could think of. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: But that's just the way it was, but we were always respectful, and that's also drilled into us. But just the whole do well in school, don't work so that you don't have to work as hard as we are, that was just the way.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, that's the pressure, right. Do you remember, as a kid, ever like resenting the business for it taking so much of kind of the family's time, or, just like you said, the other side of that pressure where it was like the pressure to succeed, like, do you remember struggling with that?

Linh Garza: I don't think so. I don't think I ever—I can't honestly say I ever resented the business. It provided for us. It was great. [laughter]

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And I think the only thing—I guess I didn't know what I'd missed until later. I didn't know growing up that there was all these opportunities for different things that I could've done, and not just school. So, I don't think, growing up, that I really resented it. I don't know if it would be very much different if they had a 9 to 5 job, maybe. Maybe we would have more family vacations, and things like that. But they tried. We did go on some vacations, so it wasn't totally [laughter]—

Phillip Norman Reid: All at the bakery, yeah.

Linh Garza: Yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: But, like you were saying too, it's like you were able to enjoy the time at the bakery. Kids figure out how to have fun wherever. [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yeah, it was good I had my siblings.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Totally. Cool. There was another family question I was going to ask about that.

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Well, actually, you said, right, New Orleans East is kind of very far-flung from like Downtown New Orleans, and you said you kind of really started to come to know New Orleans like maybe later in school, going into high school. What high school did you go to, and what was it like to kind of get to know the city more fully?

Linh Garza: So, I have always considered myself a tourist. Once I go past the Highrise, over the Highrise, I'm like, oh, I'm in a different city. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: That's like the bridge.

Linh Garza: Yes, that's the bridge that connects New Orleans East to New Orleans proper.

[laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Got you.

Linh Garza: So, growing up, and I think my mom said it, we had no idea what Mardi Gras is.

[laughter] I don't remember the first time I even went to the French Quarter. It was probably later on maybe. I think we had some family in town, and they took us because they were from out of town, and we had to figure out where to take them [laughter] instead of just to the bakery.

[laughter]

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It's different. I have friends who would ask me, "Hey, what do you do? Oh, you grew up in New Orleans? That is so cool." [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: I'm like [inaudible 0:15:11].

Phillip Norman Reid: Like, I was playing on flour sacks. [laughter]

Linh Garza: [laughter] I was like, "If you say so." [laughter] So, I went to Benjamin Franklin High School, which is by the University of New Orleans. It's on the same campus, so it's by the lake. But, before that, I went to elementary school. I went to Lake Castle Elementary School, which is in the East but it was a private school. My parents sent me there when the business started picking up, and we had some resources available. My mom didn't like the public school that we were attending, so she— even though they could barely afford it, it was very important.

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Like I said, education was very important, so they were like, “We don’t care what we have to sacrifice.” So, my brother and I, this was in third grade when I attended, midway through my third grade was when I transferred, and my brother and I were the very first Vietnamese students in that school, ever.

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow.

Linh Garza: We were the pioneers. [laughter] So, it was definitely a shock, a culture shock for us and for them, I guess [laughter], my classmates. Most were nice, we're receiving— we had some— I guess that’s the first time I experienced, I guess, knowing that I was different in a sense because they would ask me questions that probably, looking back, I’m like, that is offensive, okay.

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Like, when we were dropped off at the bakery, and they saw the name of the bakery and the everything, or the restaurant, and they would ask, “So, hey, do you guys serve dogs there?” It was just— you know. At that time, I’m like, “No, we don’t.” But I didn’t think anything of it. Now I’m grown up, I’m like, hey, that was racist, okay. That was just not nice. But, now, that same school that I attended is over 50% Vietnamese.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, wow. Okay. What’s the name of the school again?

Linh Garza: Lake Castle Elementary School. My cousins who were like 12 years younger than me, they also went there. And by the time they went, there was a lot. [laughter] They send out communication translated in Vietnamese now.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, wow.

Linh Garza: I know, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: You're like, "We didn't get this." [laughter]

Linh Garza: Exactly. [laughter]

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What else? Oh, and I was talking to one of my friends in Dallas, actually my college roommate, about growing up Asian [laughter], growing up in an Asian community and family, and just how different that was. And one that stood out to me, parent-teacher conferences. My parents have never attended a parent-teacher conference like ever. They don't know what that is, or they don't— like, "Did you get in trouble?" [laughter] But, now, I don't— "Why do I need to go see your teacher?" [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: "Are you learning right? Did you do anything wrong?" But, now, as we're raising our kids, we attend every [laughter] parent-teacher conference, and we attend like all the open houses, just like just being very involved. It's just totally [inaudible 0:18:50].

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, just because of the cultural differences, and I'm sure language makes it hard—

Linh Garza: Yes, language.

Phillip Norman Reid: —to go to a parent-teacher conference if you're—

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Linh Garza: Yes, they wouldn't understand anyways.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's interesting. It is interesting that you and your brother kind of like integrated that school, and now that it's half Vietnamese now—

Linh Garza: Yes, pioneers, I'm telling you.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, yeah.

Linh Garza: Because we were so cool, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

Linh Garza: We were so successful in the school, so they were like, "We need to get some more of these Vietnamese." [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's awesome. Definitely something to be proud of, for sure. And then Ben Franklin High School, what was that like?

Linh Garza: Ben Franklin High School was one of the top-rated or whatever you do have— you have to take a test, you have to get in. But it is a public school, so it was quite diverse, in my opinion. Because the elementary school was still in New Orleans East, and Ben Franklin was not, so I kind of had more exposure to kids in other areas [laughter] of New Orleans.

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It was a limited [inaudible 0:20:07] and they came from different parts of the city. But there was still a group of us that are Vietnamese who grew up in the same neighborhood that I did, too, that attended. So, it was fun. I enjoyed my high school life, well, as much as someone can say they enjoyed high school. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, yeah. [laughter]

Linh Garza: I didn't have very major issues, let's put it that way. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, just the typical high school, right.

Linh Garza: Yeah, drama, typical [inaudible 0:20:41].

Phillip Norman Reid: Teenage drama, totally.

Linh Garza: Yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: Well, what did your interests become, like, as a high school student or just growing up? What were you interested in?

Linh Garza: I'm pretty boring, in that sense.

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

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Linh Garza: Really, I didn't know what to do. I had no specific passion or anything. My brother, [laughter] he joined choir. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh yeah? [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yeah, he could sing. He could sing. We were kind of socially shy in a sense, and not being exposed to any extracurricular activities younger, I didn't feel comfortable with joining any. I guess I was in Mu Alpha Theta, the math [laughter] club—

Phillip Norman Reid: That's something, right. [laughter]

Linh Garza: I didn't really [laughter] do much. But I didn't find myself, in a sense. I was just a typical student trying to make good grades, and I wanted to leave New Orleans [laughter] when I graduated. I wanted to go off in college. I want to see more of the world, in a sense.

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Phillip Norman Reid: Right, just because you'd grown up in sort of a small community?

Linh Garza: Mm-hmm.

Phillip Norman Reid: Even New Orleans isn't that big of a city.

Linh Garza: No, New Orleans is—

Phillip Norman Reid: So, where did you end up after there?

Linh Garza: I went to the University of Texas in Austin. To UT Austin. So that was a *huge* campus. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, totally, right.

Linh Garza: The size of a city. [laughter] Fifty thousand students from all over the world. It was great. It was a great experience. I met so many people from different parts of the world, and just learning, so I enjoyed college life.

Phillip Norman Reid: Awesome. And did your interests start developing then? What was your major?

Linh Garza: No, still no.

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: I majored in finance and business, because I really didn't know what else to do [laughter] because I guess my parents had a business, and I was like, well, business then. So, I kind of cruised— what I wanted to be [laughter] was a CIA agent. [laughter]

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Phillip Norman Reid: Okay, right. That doesn't sound boring at all. [laughter]

Linh Garza: I know, but I never made any strides towards it. But it's just I wanted to be a spy, I don't why. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Did you watch like spy tv shows or something?

Linh Garza: Yes, I did. I loved mysteries. I loved solving. I was like, "Oh, that would be so much fun."

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's awesome. I know it's like a crazy complicated process to become a CIA agent.

Linh Garza: It is, yeah—

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: —which I never even thought about, like, really seriously looked into it. It was just kind of like, oh. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, that's funny. Well, just talk a little bit about, like, in college, it sounds like you made some good friends there, and then like high school, obviously, and family, you were really close to. Who were, maybe besides your parents, because you talked about them, but like some people who were really formative mentors to you, or just friends? Does anyone come to mind like that?

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Linh Garza: Mentors?

Phillip Norman Reid: The people who kind of shaped who you are today.

Linh Garza: Shaped who I am today? I had a piano teacher.

Phillip Norman Reid: Hmm.

Linh Garza: That was one thing my mom did send me to, because she lived down the block, and she wasn't much older than me. I think she was about 10 years older than me at the time. And she's Vietnamese. She's a daughter of my mom's friend. Now, she really excelled. She went to Abramson High School in New Orleans East. Her mom worked for the city, so income-wise—and she could play the piano really well. She went off to Vanderbilt on a full ride. She was in the *Times Magazine*—

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Phillip Norman Reid: Wow, okay.

Linh Garza: —featured, I guess, because of her success. She went to UC Berkeley Law School. She was just someone I just really, really respected. She just had it. [laughter] And I think she inspired me in a sense that here she is. She's also an immigrant like us. She was born in Vietnam. She was a lot older than me when they left on their journey. Hearing their story about their journey, I would think, was even worse than ours [laughter] where they tried many times, and they were captured. They were put in jail.

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So, at that time, I took a few lessons from her. And I didn't really get to know her well until later on in life, because she was older than me, and she went off to college, and then I didn't see her for a while. But we reconnected years, years later, maybe when I was in college or something. And just having that different level, that more mature connection later on, and just hearing about what she's done, and her outlook on life, that was very inspiring to me. She was really cool.

Phillip Norman Reid: Sounds like an amazing person. What's her name?

Linh Garza: Domini Pham.

Phillip Norman Reid: Okay, cool, awesome. And originally your piano teacher, you said.

Linh Garza: Yes, originally my piano tutor.

Phillip Norman Reid: Cool. That's awesome.

Linh Garza: I think she tutored my brother.

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But we became friends. I guess when you're 6 and she's 16, that's pretty far off. But when you're 30, and she's 40 [laughter], it's not that.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, totally. That's like me and my— my siblings are nine years apart, so it's like they basically raised me. But then when you hit your 20s, it's like we're on the same page now.

Linh Garza: Exactly. We're all the same.

Phillip Norman Reid: We're adults. That's cool.

Linh Garza: I can drink as much as you. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, we're all good. Yeah. That's funny. No, I enjoyed hearing about her. She sounds like a really amazing person.

Linh Garza: Unfortunately, she passed last year.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.

Linh Garza: Yeah, she was very young. I think she was only 50.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's terrible. What was her ailment?

Linh Garza: It was an aneurysm.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, my god. That's terrible.

Linh Garza: Yeah, it was quick and unexpected. It was on my birthday, too. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, my goodness. I'm so sorry. That's tough. That's terrible.

Linh Garza: I don't know.

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When that happened, I was just like, “Wait, what?” I don’t know. It just shook me. It’s like, wow.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, of course, out of nowhere like that.

Linh Garza: Out of nowhere. It could happen to me, I’m not that far off from her. It makes you really think.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, appreciate things more, for sure.

Linh Garza: Mm-hmm.

Phillip Norman Reid: That’s crazy. You mentioned that her family had a very arduous journey.

We were just talking about how you’ve only recently learned about how hard it was for your parents to come here. You were 6 months old [laughter], so you don’t remember it. But what has it been like to kind of process that as an adult, like, what it was like for them to get to the US?

Linh Garza: To process that whole— just to learn about it, hearing my mom tell me in detail about what happened, because before it was just, “Oh, yeah, we took a boat to Malaysia.

[laughter] Then we got to Malaysia whenever.” But hearing the whole history behind it, about the number of times we tried, the officials we had to bribe to even get a ticket onto a boat, and it’s not like a Carnival Cruise ship boat or anything.

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It probably held more people than it should. I think my mom said it was a couple hundred people on that boat. And she was telling me how once you got to sea, all you could see was water. You can't see land. And she was telling me how the elation, happiness—? I'm trying to think of the word. When you do see land, you're just like, oh, my god. You survived. She told me about the pirate ship, and she was just— they separate you, the men and the women. And, so, my mom, she wasn't sure if she was ever going to see my dad and my brother again.

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So, it was me and my mom, and then my brother.

Phillip Norman Reid: So, these are like the pirates they encountered in Malaysia, right?

Linh Garza: Yeah, on the way to Malaysia.

Phillip Norman Reid: On the way, right.

Linh Garza: On the way to Malaysia. They separate you, they search you, they take everything that you have, and it's unbelievable that you would rob people who have nothing. It just makes you so angry. But she was just telling me how she was thankful how they only took possessions. They didn't take lives. They didn't rape, which happens on plenty of other boats. So, there's something to be thankful in that. But they dumped the water. But once they got to Malaysia, she was telling me how they were pulling them back out because there was just too many, and they didn't want to accept any more.

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And my mom said that my dad was the first one. He jumped in the water, and just kept— he was like, “No, I’m not going back,” and he just pulled— and then everybody else started jumping in [laughter] because it was just not an option for us to go back out to sea. It doesn’t matter.

Phillip Norman Reid: And especially because he’d been a prisoner of war, so I’m sure that gave him [laughter] a desire to not return.

Linh Garza: [laughter] Yeah, not return. She told me some about his experience that he told her about the war that I wish— because he passed in 2004, and I never really had an adult relationship with him. I never really had a conversation about his experience during the war, or anything. So, a lot of things that I know is just from what she has told me, now, about kind of his experience.

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[laughter] It’s just unbelievable how a human being can go through— but, unfortunately, people do go through it. In the Ukraine right now, they’re all going through it. It’s the same. How do you come back? I was telling my mom how going back to Vietnam now to see how developed it is right now compared to when we— the first time, I think, we went back was probably early 1990. So, how different that was until now, and I was just thinking how— I was telling her it probably took Vietnam probably 20 years to rebuild from 1975. So, it’s probably going to take

the Ukraine about that same amount of time, just thinking about how everything gets destroyed, and you rebuild, and you lose everything, and it's the mental toll.

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And you got to have [laughter]— you got to be pretty darn strong to make it. Next-level respect for my parents [laughter]—

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, absolutely.

Linh Garza: —and my family's like, wow.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's a lot of history to wrap your head around, for sure. She was telling me that where she was from, it was just like totally devastated. When y'all go back, does her family still live in that same area?

Linh Garza: They do. They still live there. She told me that she actually had an opportunity to go to college because she wanted to work in an office and wear nice dresses, right? [laughter] That was her goal. So she did, in Saigon. But I think she said she finished— was it a year or a semester? Before she had to go home because the bombs were falling too much. It was just too dangerous.

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And the travel, because our village, or our province, is six hours from— south of Saigon, at the time, and there's landmines, so just traveling is very— it wasn't safe, so her dad made her come home. So, she missed out on that. She really didn't have a chance on going to college. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: That's crazy. You were saying you were having that conversation with your mom after this most recent visit. But how would you describe your relationship to Vietnam, and what has it been like just like the times you go back? Do you identify with it? Does it feel really boring to you? How's it feel?

Linh Garza: How do I identify with it?

0:34:58

I feel a connection but I can't say that it's the mother country for me because I haven't really lived there, minus six months. But I feel the connection through the language, being able to communicate. The food, definitely, the connection with the food is amazing. My mom, she cooked, and we always ate pretty traditional Vietnamese food, so I'm familiar with all of it.

Nothing scares me. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: And seeing how well they are doing now, it is a sense of pride in that that they had come— and seeing how my family, my extended family, her brothers and sisters, how well they're doing now, it's great.

0:36:06

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, and what do they think, the family that's there, when you kind of shared the history of this business, and like the success that y'all have had here? What do they think of that?

Linh Garza: When we won the James Beard Award in 2018, the news made it back to Vietnam.

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow.

Linh Garza: I know.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's crazy.

Linh Garza: I remember one of our employees said her family in Vietnam called her and were like, "I just saw you in the paper," or something [laughter] over there, and we were like, "Wow, we made it over there."

Phillip Norman Reid: That's crazy, right.

Linh Garza: It's unbelievable just to realize this whole country is kind of supporting you [laughter], and they're like so happy and proud.

0:36:57

And they're like also shocked that a Vietnamese bakery can achieve that level of success or to be recognized as an American classic in America. It's like, really? [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: That's super special. And I read that you thought it was a scam when you first got the email from the James Beard Foundation or whatever.

Linh Garza: Yeah, I thought it was spam.

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: I was like, "Huh?" [laughter] I knew what James Beard was, but I was like, "That can't be right. Why would we get a James Beard Award?" [laughter] That's silly. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter] Oh, my goodness. So, did they follow up, I guess? [laughter]

Linh Garza: They called. Yes, they called. They called, and they were like, "Oh, why haven't you responded?" And I was like, "Oh, this is for real?" [laughter] So, I was like, "Oh, my god, it is for real. Wow. This is awesome." And, of course, they told us we had to be silent for a while until it's publicly announced, and I was like, "Oh, I have to tell somebody." I told my mom, and she was like, "James who?" [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. I was about to ask, did she know?

0:38:00

Linh Garza: No, she didn't. She was like, "James Beard, what?" [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter] That's nice. [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yes, let me get back to my King Cakes here. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: That's hilarious.

Linh Garza: It was in the middle of King Cake season. It was.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, wow, so she was busy.

Linh Garza: She was busy. So, they announced it towards the beginning of King Cake season, and that's when the line went down the highway, wrapped around Chef Menteur Highway onto the thing, so it was crazy.

Phillip Norman Reid: What was the presentation like? Did they do like a ceremony or something?

Linh Garza: They announced it but, yes, then they invited us to Chicago in May for the ceremony. They presented my mom with a medal.

Phillip Norman Reid: Wow.

Linh Garza: And she was like, "Oh, this is so nice."

Phillip Norman Reid: That's so special.

Linh Garza: And we met the other American Classics recipient. They were from other parts of the country. There was a Mexican Taqueria in Arizona, I believe. They were really cool. And an Italian place somewhere.

0:38:59

I think they were highlighting kind of minorities or immigrant businesses that had become, I think what they said, become a fabric of the community [inaudible 0:39:14] [laughter] It was really nice. It was really nice.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, and what you're saying about like becoming part of the American fabric, or whatever, how they put it, that's what's amazing to me about like even bringing like friends and family out here, and just like a friend— friends who brought me here, like you were saying, this used to be like close— I mean, it still is close to the Vietnamese community. But I'm sure a lot of people like me did not know about New Orleans East, did not come to New Orleans East.

Linh Garza: No.

Phillip Norman Reid: So, like you were saying, there was New Orleans proper for you growing up, and then New Orleans East was off here. But it's like y'all have really extended the border of New Orleans proper in the sense of, like, Mardi Gras is such a huge part of New Orleans, and now this is where people come from all different communities to get their King Cake. I just think that's really cool.

0:39:59

What has it been like to see those huge lines? [laughter]

Linh Garza: There's been huge lines, big tour buses. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, yeah. [laughter]

Linh Garza: There's been a few, we get a couple tour buses [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: For sure, yeah.

Linh Garza: And so we've become a [laughter] destination, in a sense. So, it's somewhat humbling but also we're really proud. It's just all that hard work that we put in. And we're just really excited that New Orleans is so open to us, to try new things. But we have some haters who think it's not a traditional King Cake. I'm not quite sure what that means. But, for the most part, it's been very accepting, and they have always been accepting. I think maybe because New Orleans have— we weren't the first immigrants to New Orleans. And, so, we have integrated into the culture here.

0:41:01

Viet-Cajun is coming up, right? It's popular. The whole idea of Viet-Cajun type of flavors.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, kind of the combination of Vietnamese cuisine and the Cajun cuisine in the Louisiana Delta.

Linh Garza: And it happens. It's just a natural progression once you live together for so long.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, start combining those flavors, yeah. The King Cake itself, you could call it like an immigrant innovation when it initially came around—

Linh Garza: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: —because, like you said, New Orleans is a city of immigrants from all over the place. It's always been very diverse.

Linh Garza: Exactly. And a—

Phillip Norman Reid: So, it makes a lot—

Linh Garza: —port city.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, yeah, so it makes a lot of sense that y'all were kind of the next in that continuation.

Linh Garza: Why not? [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Talk about the haters though. Who says that it's not a traditional King Cake [laughter], and what is their justification?

Linh Garza: I don't know what their justification is. I guess because, okay, a King Cake is a round cake with cinnamon and icing on it, and colored sugar, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

0:41:59

Linh Garza: We're doing the same thing. We have cinnamon. We have icing. It's a little bit different icing. So, I'm not quite sure. We didn't start out to make a Vietnamese King Cake,

okay? [laughter] That wasn't it. We never intended that, nor did we try to make a better King Cake. We made a good King Cake. We did try to adapt some of the tastes to our community. But, well. So, uh—But you see it on social. There's always trolls. There's always haters. That's the nature of social media these days, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right.

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: And it's been interesting for me doing these interviews because I think there are some people like to police it like, oh, this is what makes a King Cake a King Cake. But, to me, it's like what you just said. I've had so many bakers say, "Well, it's got to be round."

[laughter]

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: It's very basic criteria—

Linh Garza: Right.

Phillip Norman Reid: —that you're obviously fulfilling.

Linh Garza: Well, it originated from France, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah.

0:42:58

Linh Garza: And I seriously doubt the version that came from France is the version that is made, that people call tradition. I guess whoever the first one was established that, like a beignet, I guess. [laughter] If it's not Café Du Monde, it's not [laughter]—

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, authentic, right.

Linh Garza: Right [inaudible 0:43:17]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, when people talk about authenticity, it's interesting. The French one, I mean, the French bakery I was telling you about in Lafayette, they make the Galette des Rois, which is, like, in some ways similar to what y'all do because it's a different kind of dough.

Linh Garza: Right [inaudible 0:43:33].

Phillip Norman Reid: It's more like a puff pastry. So, that's very traditional. [laughter] That's interesting.

Linh Garza: It is. It's not like we add fish sauce in our King Cakes, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, yeah. [laughter]

Linh Garza: [laughter] I don't know. Maybe that is the secret ingredient.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. Hey, whatever works.

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Like, I've had it. It's phenomenal, for sure.

Linh Garza: No, we don't.

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: No, we do not add fish sauce. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Strike that from the record. No, no, totally.

0:43:58

I moved here, right before the pandemic, 2019. At that point, it was like you've got to try this King Cake, and I know y'all have only grown since then. Back then, I could get it before having to reserve it like January 3rd or whatever. [laughter]

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: So, it's definitely, in my experience, I've noticed the growth.

Linh Garza: It's been scary though. Every year, we're like, was it a fluke? Was it fluke? Are they gonna come back? And, so, you're like nervously prepping to make thousands of cakes, and you're thinking, what if this is the year something else better comes out? So, there's always the fear of that. But it hasn't happened yet. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, it's still onwards and upwards. That's interesting though. I didn't expect to hear that. But it makes sense, especially like with social media.

0:44:58

Stuff blows up so quickly—

Linh Garza: Exactly.

Phillip Norman Reid: —and there's like these trends, that kind of thing.

Linh Garza: Yeah, one day, when do you get to the point where you feel confident and stable in the demand?

Phillip Norman Reid: Well, I feel like y'all are getting there. It's been a few years.

Linh Garza: Yeah, it has been a few years.

Phillip Norman Reid: You sold 60,000 this year, so you're doing all right. [laughter]

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: So, talk about, I mean, just like that'll kind of help us get into like what is your role now with the bakery. It sounded to me, like, when I interviewed your mom, she's like, "Well, because I'm working with my daughter, she's able to handle everything outside of like baking and managing the bakers." So, have you kind of had to do a lot of expanding the business in order to meet this demand, and kind of market the King Cakes, and that kind of stuff? What do you do?

Linh Garza: So, I live in Dallas, so a lot of things I do is remote. So, I have moved us into more of a digital world. I started an online system.

0:45:59

Well, I didn't at first. I had to hire people. [laughter] But, sort of, in a sense, modernizing our brand a bit, moving it away from a mom-and-pop shop to a more kind of well-oiled-run, established company with systems in place, things like that, so that we can sort of ensure consistent quality. So, it's just evolving those types of systems, setting them in place, and hopefully doing that, we're able to increase efficiency, train new staff. Because one thing about King Cakes, as my mom said, we double our staffing level every year. And that's quite a pain, just being able to quickly train new— because not everybody comes— thankfully, a lot come back.

0:47:01

I don't know if they decide working two, three months of a year is good enough, and they'll come back. I don't know [laughter], but whatever it is. And to be able to have our systems in place over the year, through experience, so that when you come in, you're able to pick it up, and start working, and start rolling out King Cakes. That's how we were able to make so many cakes that we do now because of just learning this is how things need to go. That whole part, I call it a sort of a war plan, we're in a situation room here, and we map out like how many people we need to do this, how many people— and we start.

0:47:56

At first, it was kind of haphazard, in a sense, because we were reacting on the planning, because we didn't know it was gonna be so popular or there was gonna be so much demand, so there was a lot of reaction. But, now, I think we've gotten to the point where we are able to plan, like, okay, we can make this many cakes, and this is the resources we need, and this is how we need to do it to produce this many cakes. And, thankfully, we out. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. That's nice. How did you learn how to do that stuff? That's an impressive array of skills to be able to put those sort of systems in place? Did you just learn as you went?

Linh Garza: Yeah, maybe that was my calling. I finally found myself, right?

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yeah, I think it's just over the years, just kind of the experience you go through.

0:48:58

Well, it didn't work this way, and then let's do it— I think I do have this kind of a systematic mindset where I like to have processes and systems in place, and things, and developing those systems.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, kind of naturally being like a big-picture thinker like that and then, like you said, trial and error [laughter] [inaudible 0:49:23]—

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: —and a war plan. For those who don't know how intense King Cake season is [laughter], you're planning for war. [laughter]

Linh Garza: You should see our office. You should see our office when King Cake is in season. We have kind of maps up and moving— maybe I should do that one year. I should have icons for like our staff, and I can like move the pieces around. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, on the board, you're planning battles.

Linh Garza: Yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: Like pushpins. That's a good idea. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, keep it for next year, for sure.

Linh Garza: Yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: I like it. That's hilarious. I'm just picturing that right now. It's fun.

[laughter]

0:49:59

Linh Garza: Because we stopped making pretty much all of our products except for breads and *bánh mì* during King Cake season. So, pretty much everything else stops. It's a little bit easier.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's cool to hear about, especially for y'all since you make so many. It's fun to hear about the behind-the-scenes of like how does this all happen? Because any level of baker I talk to, it's like, yeah, there's a lot of business during King Cake season, but it's like stressful because people go crazy, and they want to try every King Cake. [laughter]

Linh Garza: People do go crazy.

Phillip Norman Reid: They have a lot of feelings. [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yeah, they're very emotionally invested, and they get very angry sometimes—

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, my goodness.

Linh Garza: —especially if they show up at noon, and are like, “You're sold out? What do you mean you're sold out?”

Phillip Norman Reid: You're sold out. [laughter]

0:50:59

Linh Garza: “Are you sure you don't have any more in the back?” “No, I'm not hiding cakes.”

[laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: “I have nothing against you. We’re not hiding them. I promise you we’re not hiding any cakes.” But [laughter] some people get pretty emotional about King Cakes, which, it’s a cake. I’m sorry. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter] Very funny to hear you say that. But, yeah, totally. And I mean, talking to your mom, and she’s like, “We don’t really celebrate Mardi Gras.” [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yeah, we don’t. It wasn’t part— my exposure to Mardi Gras growing up was I had to bring a King Cake when I got the baby to school on Fridays. And, like I said, I’ve always dreaded getting the baby because I didn’t know what King Cake is. My parents didn’t know what King Cake is. We had to go to the grocery store, and it’s probably not the greatest King Cake, and my classmates are going to be like, “Ugh.”

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, my goodness, yeah.

Linh Garza: One of my goals in our King Cakes was, you know, Vietnamese kids are going to be very proud to bring a Dong Phuong King Cake to their school.

0:52:03

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, I love that. [laughter]

Linh Garza: And like, “Mm-hmm,” they’re going to stand proud and be like, “Yes! [inaudible 0:52:10].”

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Forget the James Beard Award.

Linh Garza: [laughter] Yeah. This is it.

Phillip Norman Reid: You just want a third-grader to not feel self-conscious.

Linh Garza: Yes, exactly.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's awesome.

Linh Garza: So, that is the plan.

Phillip Norman Reid: I love that. Let's see. We've covered a lot. We sort of covered this. The last time the SFA had someone interview you about the bakery was 2015. Obviously, the King Cakes have skyrocketed since then. What else has changed since then just for you or for the business?

Linh Garza: What else has changed?

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We're always trying to develop new products. My mom, yes, she says she doesn't like it, but she does now, and she enjoys creating new products. She really hates the day-to-day [laughter] but she has to do it. But creating new products, and having seen people enjoy it, it just brings her so much joy. I'm not sure how she can retire. She says she wants to but—

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: —where are you going to get that joy, that same joy [laughter], that same feeling of happiness?

Phillip Norman Reid: She's used to being busy.

Linh Garza: Yeah. After COVID, well, I don't know if we're still in COVID, but during COVID, I guess, different things have changed. We had to do online ordering. We come up with new *bánh mì*. We've forayed into a more vegetarian line, using the Impossible plant-based, because my mom's become vegetarian over the years.

0:54:06

So, I think the next sandwich she's going to come out with is another vegetarian plant-based chicken [laughter] of some sort.

Phillip Norman Reid: Nice.

Linh Garza: Lemongrass chicken, I think, she has in mind. When we went back to Vietnam, we saw some products that we didn't think about that we're probably going to try to bring. So, it was also kind of an R&D trip for us too. And I don't know if she told you but her brothers are running bakeries over there, brothers and my cousins, so their kids. And they do it on various scales, different brothers. So, we're taking some pointers from them. But it was kind of different. She told you the main pastry that my grandfather made was the *pia* cakes, and that they brought that from China or whatever.

0:55:06

So, my mom did it the same way that he did it over here. But we could never figure out why is it so soft? The skin is so soft? I tried my uncle's. I was like, "This is much better than ours. What happened?" [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter] How do you do it?

Linh Garza: But it's also you have to take— if we're baking, what I learned from my dad, it's a science. It's not an art. [laughter] Unlike cooking, it's an art. But baking is really a science, and you have to take into the temperature, the humidity, the climate. So, it's like, yeah, Vietnam might be similar climate-wise but not exact. So, the water maybe, the wheat, the flour is just not the same, and you have to make your adjustments, which are different.

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So, even if we try to make exactly the way they do it, it probably still won't come out the same.

Phillip Norman Reid: No, I was speaking with a baker in Baton Rouge about that, with the climate, like you're saying, and she's like, "I have to check what the humidity's going to be like the next day. Like, I'll get up"—

Linh Garza: Oh, my god, yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: —"two hours earlier if I need to, to get my croissants to rise right." Like, so much goes into it.

Linh Garza: My mom does the same thing. She checks the temperature weather app every night so she can set the proofers for the bread guys to come in the morning.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, that's hilarious.

Linh Garza: It's like, oh, it's between 40s and 50. We got to bump this up, or if it's hotter, we got to turn it down.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's so interesting.

Linh Garza: Isn't it?

Phillip Norman Reid: People don't know or appreciate it enough.

Linh Garza: No.

Phillip Norman Reid: Baking is probably one of the hardest jobs [laughter] that I've heard of.

[laughter]

Linh Garza: Like, one thing can go wrong, and it will just ruin the whole thing. Sometimes, I remember, we had a bad batch of flour. It wasn't like bad as in spoiled or anything.

0:56:59

It just didn't have enough gluten or whatever [laughter] protein. So, all our breads failed. They didn't rise right, and we're like, what is wrong? We do this the same way every time, every day.

And then every single batch that came up, like, what is wrong?

Phillip Norman Reid: And I'm sure you buy in like a huge amount—

Linh Garza: Yeah. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: —so then you're stuck with really bad flour. [laughter]

Linh Garza: [laughter] You have to make these adjustments. You're like, oh, wow, so now we have to add more of this higher protein flour and mix it up so that you get the right percentage that you were— But it's like the baking gods just didn't like you then [laughter] Or something.

Phillip Norman Reid: They were frowning upon you that day? [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yes. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: That's tricky.

Linh Garza: I think that's why we pray so much. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, so we get the good flour.

Linh Garza: [laughter] The good flour.

Phillip Norman Reid: Totally. That's hilarious. Truly a science. Truly beyond me. I enjoy eating baked goods.

0:57:59

I could never crack the code [laughter] of how to do it. Well, I'm interested in the R&D trip to Vietnam. Any ideas you're excited to bring back, or is it under wraps? [laughter]

Linh Garza: Well, my mom is really excited bringing back this type of sponge cake. It's like rice flour on a sponge cake. I love it too. But it's a little hard to make. You need a starter dough, in a sense, and we're not sure we can recreate the same starter dough. Have you heard with the sourdough, you can't get the same sourdough like you do in San Francisco or whatever, because of the starter dough, the yeast, the wild yeast that they have.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, just in the air.

Linh Garza: Yeah, right. So, it's the same thing, so we're hoping we can be able to make that adjustment. And just kind of tweaking the *pia* cakes that we make, to make it better.

0:58:59

I think we'll be able to get that. We have seen over this past year or so with the mooncakes, our mooncakes, I've seen this trend of it coming back, becoming cool now. It's a very traditional cake, mostly like—

Phillip Norman Reid: Eaten at like the New Year, right?

Linh Garza: No, the mid-autumn, so around September. We were doing really well, like, early on in the bakery because it was traditional, and most of our customers were of that generation and enjoying it. And it's still very popular in the mother country [laughter], in China and such. But, over here, we have seen a decline in sales in a sense because the older generation have passed on. [laughter]

1:00:03

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: And the younger generation really didn't pick it up. It's not cool. It's like, ugh, those cakes that grandfather eats, or whatever. But I've seen it's coming back. And even with the younger generation just through social media, I've seen this just younger— they just want to try it or they just wanted to have it. I don't know if it's nostalgia. Oh, and then that movie from Netflix, *Over the Moon*—

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, I don't think I've heard of that.

Linh Garza: —it was all about mooncakes.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, really? Okay.

Linh Garza: But the bad thing was they released it after mooncake season, so we had all these Americans email us afterwards—

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

Linh Garza: —saying, “Oh, my daughter just saw the movie.”

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter]

1:00:59

Linh Garza: “Do you have any mooncakes?” We're like, “No.” [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: It's not Mooncake season, right.

Linh Garza: "It's over." [inaudible 1:01:04]

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, my goodness. Is it like a kids— it's like a cartoon?

Linh Garza: It's a cartoon.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, okay, cool.

Linh Garza: Yeah, it's an animation.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, nice.

Linh Garza: It's *Over the Moon*. [laughter] So, why couldn't you release this last month?

[laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, y'all and Netflix need to get on the same page. [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yeah, right. We should [inaudible 1:01:19]. But I like it. I like seeing this trend, and being able to bring back some of these traditional pastries, and open it up to a wider demographic, a younger generation. I've always felt that I personally like it, but of course I was much closer, I guess I am older [laughter], and so I was exposed to it as a child. It's still one of my favorite things to eat at the bakery. But I'm happy to see that the generation after me, they are open to trying new things—or trying old things, I guess, in a sense, not new things but new to them.

1:02:07

And I think they shouldn't be afraid to. These cakes have been around for the longest time. There has to be some appeal to it, right? You don't make it so far without having [laughter] without being good. You just have to be open and try it.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's so cool to hear about because I feel like it would be special for y'all to, like, sell this cake that's like more culturally significant for y'all than the King Cake, which is something that you've made, and blended with your own traditions, but to cater to an American audience. That's cool to hear about the resurgence of the Mooncake. I don't think I've ever had one. I've seen them. They're very pretty, right?

Linh Garza: Yes.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yes, very ornate.

Linh Garza: But, yes, it's different. It's mostly bean filling. Like, beans? Why is that dessert?

Phillip Norman Reid: Right, not super, super sweet, yeah.

1:03:01

Linh Garza: And there's a salted duck egg yolk inside, and you're like [inaudible 1:03:04].

[laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Now you mention that, I have tried one, and I was like, this is very different [laughter] from what I know.

Linh Garza: Exactly. So, this past year, we did have quite a few orders from non-Asians because we came out with a sample box, and we posted it on social media, and we got all these orders. And I want to say there were like all my King Cake orders, because they were like, “Ooh, they make King Cake, so let me try this mooncake. I don’t know what this mooncake is but if it’s anything like King—” [laughter] I don’t know how it was taken. We did have some good reviews. I was like, oh. She was like, “Oh, yeah, I love the red bean.” I was like, “Oh, I’m so impressed. I’m so happy. You tried it, and you liked it.”

Phillip Norman Reid: That’s so cool.

Linh Garza: It’s not that off, I guess.

Phillip Norman Reid: That’s how you catch Americans.

1:03:59

Give them something that fits their tastes, and then you reel them in.

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: All right. Now [laughter], try this.

Linh Garza: I think someone was like, “Oh, look, it’s a MoonPie.” I was like, “No, it’s a Mooncake.”

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, not quite. [laughter]

Linh Garza: “Go ahead and try it.”

Phillip Norman Reid: Don’t expect MoonPie flavor.

Linh Garza: Yeah. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: That’s so fascinating.

Linh Garza: Though I might make a chocolate mooncake just to kind of ease people in and make them comfortable.

Phillip Norman Reid: Totally.

Linh Garza: I’ve thought about it. I was like, what flavor could I make a mooncake that would be not as crazy?

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, to Americans, right. That’s so interesting. Well, I’m excited to track the progress of the Mooncakes. That’s super cool. I did not expect to hear about that.

Linh Garza: [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: But that’s really awesome. Anything else you want to add about King Cakes, Mooncakes, the bakery, yourself?

Linh Garza: We make an awesome crawfish pie.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, wow, I didn't know that either.

Linh Garza: Spicy.

Phillip Norman Reid: Can I get one right now or is it like a special?

1:05:00

Linh Garza: You can get one right now.

Phillip Norman Reid: Okay. Good deal.

Linh Garza: It has bamboo shoots.

Phillip Norman Reid: Bamboo shoots? I'm definitely going to get one right now. [laughter]

Linh Garza: It's good. It's one of my favorites. Let me think. No, I think we're just gonna keep doing what we're doing, and [laughter] who knows what the future is gonna be like? [laughter]

Who knows when my mom decides to retire? [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. [laughter] We'll see.

Linh Garza: We joked about it. She was like, "What are you going to do when I retire?" Because I'm not moving back to [laughter] [inaudible 1:05:38]. I don't know. I'm just going to shut down, no King Cakes for anybody. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, sorry, right.

Linh Garza: Who knows? I don't know. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: Well, that reminds me. Your siblings, are they involved in the business at all?

Linh Garza: Not really. My sister's in Baltimore. She was a true academic in the family.

1:05:59

She got two master's. She's going to go for a PhD. [laughter] So, she was a bookworm at school.

And my brother passed a few years ago.

Phillip Norman Reid: I'm sorry to hear that. Where was he living?

Linh Garza: He was living— we all— my brother and I actually pretty much— he was living in Chicago. He was an attorney. And I was living in Dallas. And then when my dad passed, we moved back home to be with my mom to support her [inaudible 1:06:32]. So, he stayed after I did, after I went to Dallas to marry a man. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: [laughter] Now, you're in Dallas, right. [laughter]

Linh Garza: Yes, I'm stuck in Dallas. [laughter] The things I do. You never want to— it's like, "Yes, I moved to Dallas for a man, I know." Sorry. That's not very—

Phillip Norman Reid: What you do for love.

Linh Garza: —liberating.

Phillip Norman Reid: Right. [laughter]

1:07:00

Linh Garza: It's not very women's—[laughter] So, he stayed and helped and my mom, and then he got sick, and he passed. This was 2010, I believe.

Phillip Norman Reid: Because your dad passed in 2004?

Linh Garza: '04, yeah, so it was weird. So, it took a toll on my mom to lose two that were so close to her. After he passed, I became a lot more involved. [laughter] Because I'm the only one left. But my mom has come a long ways from when my dad passed, because he used to take care of everything. She was like, "I didn't have to worry about anything." He took care of the finances. He took care of the paperwork. Everything was taken care of.

Phillip Norman Reid: And then your brother kind of helped out with some of that stuff?

Linh Garza: Yeah.

Phillip Norman Reid: And then you sort of took up the mantle after that?

Linh Garza: I did. But she has become quite independent.

1:08:00

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah, that's awesome.

Linh Garza: Her English has gotten better. She's started doing more things for herself. I'm very proud of her.

Phillip Norman Reid: That's awesome. And it sounds like she has really enjoyed working with you. That's kind of what she mentioned at the end.

Linh Garza: We kind of butt heads sometimes.

Phillip Norman Reid: Oh, for sure, yeah, that's gonna happen. [laughter]

Linh Garza: But I know I'm right. [laughter]

Phillip Norman Reid: You let her think she's right sometimes, but— totally, totally. So that's awesome. Well, thank you so much for sharing your story. I have so much enjoyed this.

Linh Garza: That's okay. This is fun.

Phillip Norman Reid: Yeah. And if there is anything else you want to add, we can.

Linh Garza: No.

Phillip Norman Reid: But if that's good, we can call it good. And leave 30 seconds of silence for the editor, and I'll let you know when that's up.

1:09:00

1:09:15

[End]