



**Regina Adame Galan
Dai-Sing Restaurant Supply
Charlotte, North Carolina**

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Interviewer: Tom Hanchett

Audio Engineer: Drako Hernandez

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[*START INTERVIEW*]

Tom Hanchett: All right. Beautiful. Thank you so much. I really appreciate it. I'm Tom Hanchett, and we are here at the Sugar Creek branch of the public library on North Tryon Street. We're close to Dai-Sing Restaurant Supply. Drako Hernandez is our audio engineer from Norsan Radio. I'm Tom Hanchett and our guest is Regina. Say your full name and spell your full name, if you would.

[00:00:28]

Regina Darshae Adame Galan: Well, my full name is Regina Darshae Adame Galan, but I go by Regina Galan. So I'm going to spell the short version. It's R-e-g-i-n-a, last name, G-a-l-a-n.

[00:00:45]

Tom Hanchett: And your middle names sound African. Are they—

[00:00:47]

Regina Galan: No, my mom was very inventive. I think Regina is my original name, then Darshae is D-a-r-s-h-a-e, and my mom gave me that name, and then Adame Galan is actually my husband's married names. You know, they take on their mother and their father's name when they marry. They don't drop it off; they take on both.

[00:01:16]

Tom Hanchett: And where's he from?

[00:01:17]

Regina Galan: He's from Mexico.

[00:01:18]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. All right.

[00:01:20]

Regina Galan: Guerrero, Mexico.

[00:01:20]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. And say again where.

[00:01:23]

Regina Galan: Guerrero.

[00:01:24]

Tom Hanchett: Guerrero. Okay, cool. What city in Guerrero?

[00:01:26]

Regina Galan: I don't know. I don't know, but later he was raised in Acapulco later, but I don't know exactly where he was in Guerrero.

[00:01:34]

Tom Hanchett: [*Laughs*] Cool. Regina works at Dai-Sing Restaurant Supply, which is, I think, Vietnamese-run. We'll find this out in a minute. And she is one of the people at the front who can speak any possible language and interface with all of the different kinds of international and not international groups who are starting restaurants here in Charlotte and keeping them going, often on a shoestring. It's a very affordable place. It's huge. It's in a former Woolco Shopping Center, and it's now taking up—I don't know—

[00:02:06]

Regina Galan: We originally started off with like 10,000 square feet down next to the Family Dollar, and now we have expanded to 40,000-plus square feet, and our inventory has tripled, quadrupled, actually.

[00:02:25]

Tom Hanchett: What do you sell?

[00:02:26]

Regina Galan: We sell everything for the restaurant. We sell equipment. We sell smallwares.

[00:02:32]

Tom Hanchett: And what is equipment? What is smallwares? Every time you say something, tell me what it is.

[00:02:37]

Regina Galan: Okay. As far as equipment, we sell anything in a restaurant that you see, refrigerators, stoves, salamanders. We have the tables, the tables and bases. That's as far as equipment, and then smallwares is plates and glassware, silverware. We also have pots and pans. We have everywhere from very small. Like four quarts. All the way up to 200-quart pots, and we have for the home as well as for the restaurant, which are NSF-certified so that way they can pass inspection and continue to help the restaurant.

[00:03:22]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. And various kinds of paper goods and takeout stuff and—

[00:03:26]

Regina Galan: Paper goods. Yeah, we have takeout plates to go. We have plasticware, we have foam cups and tops, and there's any size, anywhere from three ounces all the

way up thirty-two ounces. We sell the Chinese to-go plastic disposables, you know, that you get your Chinese, your hot and sour soup in. We have those, anywhere from eight ounces all the way up to thirty-two ounces. We sell them by the sleeve and we also sell them by the case. And most of our smallwares, our plates, our glassware, our forks and knives and things like that, we have them like buy twelve items, you get one free, and that gives you incentives to buy more.

[00:04:12]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. But it also allows you to buy less, and there are some other national chain outfits around Charlotte that do this kind of work.

[00:04:21]

Regina Galan: Yes.

[00:04:22]

Tom Hanchett: And the word from my restaurant friends is that [at those stores] you have to buy a whole case of whatever it is.

[00:04:27]

Regina Galan: Exactly.

[00:04:28]

Tom Hanchett: And if you're running a small restaurant, that's tough.

[00:04:30]

Regina Galan: Yeah, a lot of people, they don't have the space as well as the money, and so being able to buy small increments, come in and get one or two sleeves of something, cups or just a packet of plastic forks and things like that, it makes it so that way they can use their money toward other things other than having to invest all of it into just product.

[00:04:51]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. That's great. Let's get back to that in a little bit, but let me find out a little bit about you and how you got this amazing job, which I'll bet you nobody told you about in high school.

[00:05:02]

Regina Galan: No.

[00:05:04]

Tom Hanchett: If I may ask, when were you born and where were you born?

[00:05:06]

Regina Galan: Well, I was born July 12th, 1968, in Saginaw, Michigan. I was the youngest of three girls, so I was the baby girl. I was spoiled rotten, and I don't know how I turned out so wonderful. *[Laughs]* And I moved around a lot. My dad was in the military, so I moved around every—I can say I moved four times in a year at a given time.

[00:05:35]

Tom Hanchett: Wow.

[00:05:36]

Regina Galan: But normally about every three to four years we moved, California, Virginia Beach, I've been. Like I say, I moved to Mississippi. Actually, my mom moved me to Mississippi, and I moved from there, moved to California, went to Florida, and then back here.

[00:05:55]

Tom Hanchett: Wow.

[00:05:56]

Regina Galan: And I've been here about fourteen, thirteen years, and I've been at Dai-Sing for eleven.

[00:06:03]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. What was it that brought you to Dai-Sing?

[00:06:08]

Regina Galan: Actually, I was a hibachi chef for a short period of time. I was the kitchen manager and I was the backup chef for my husband. He was the head chef and I was the backup hibachi chef. I started off doing prep and I moved my way to kitchen manager, and then I moved my way to backup chef, all within like a six-month period.

[00:06:33]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. Let me back up one, because folks who are just listening to this, identify yourself ethnically. What—

[00:06:41]

Regina Galan: I'm African American, all black. [*Laughs*]

[00:06:44]

Tom Hanchett: Excellent.

[00:06:46]

Regina Galan: Uh-huh, African American. My mom and my dad, my mom was from Mississippi and my dad was from Michigan.

[00:06:54]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. Alrighty. So you're now getting into the restaurant business in your story. Have you met your husband already in this story?

[00:07:02]

Regina Galan: No, we were already dating at the time.

[00:07:06]

Tom Hanchett: How did you meet him?

[00:07:07]

Regina Galan: *[Laughs]* Oh, I met him—he was a friend of a friend. We was out kind of late and it got past time for alcohol, and she told me she knew someone who had something to drink. So I said, “Okay, we’ll just go over there and hang out for an hour or so.”

[00:07:24]

Tom Hanchett: Cool.

[00:07:25]

Regina Galan: And we ended up clicking, and I went back the next day and we started dating. *[Laughs]*

[00:07:29]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. And he ran a Mexican restaurant?

[00:07:31]

Regina Galan: He actually had a lunch truck, and he worked at the restaurant and he ran a lunch truck, so we were—

[00:07:40]

Tom Hanchett: What kind of food?

[00:07:41]

Regina Galan: Hibachi.

[00:07:42]

Tom Hanchett: Hibachi. I thought you said hibachi. There we go. Okay.

[00:07:46]

Regina Galan: Yes.

[00:07:47]

Tom Hanchett: So a Mexican guy and an African American woman team up to do hibachi.

[00:07:51]

Regina Galan: Hibachi, yes. And basically it was kind of a transition, because we were working at a restaurant that did hibachi and it was a Korean restaurant, and we were working fifteen-hour days and we were getting paid very well, we made a lot of money, but it was killing us, and so that's when we made the transition for the lunch truck.

[00:08:16]

Tom Hanchett: Wow.

[00:08:16]

Regina Galan: And then that didn't do well, so then my husband got a job at Dai-Sing.

[00:08:21]

Tom Hanchett: Ah, okay. Are you doing the lunch truck in Charlotte? Is this a Charlotte story?

[00:08:26]

Regina Galan: Yes, it's in Charlotte. It's in Charlotte, uh-huh.

[00:08:27]

Tom Hanchett: Ah! Okay. That's fascinating.

[00:08:28]

Regina Galan: And we only did that for like nine months, almost a year, and really we just poured money into it, poured money into it. [*Laughs*] And it was more of a passion and we were hoping we could make some money off of it, and it was during that time when they were really, really cutting down on lunch trucks.

[00:08:45]

Tom Hanchett: In the early 2000s, there was a Latino lunch truck thing, and—

[00:08:49]

Regina Galan: Exactly, yeah. And they was like everybody hated them. It was a bad [*inaudible*]. Everybody was like, “Oh, they’re taking our money.” I don’t know what happened. But during that same time frame per se, I want to say about seven years ago, somewhere that range, just before all that started happening, there was just a lot of things going on, and there was not really a lot of money like we thought it was, so we discontinued lunch truck.

[00:09:12]

Tom Hanchett: And what was the name of the lunch truck, do you remember?

[00:09:15]

Regina Galan: I’ve forgotten what it was called.

[00:09:17]

Tom Hanchett: And what kind of food was it doing?

[00:09:17]

Regina Galan: Like I said, we sold hibachi chicken, steak, and shrimp.

[00:09:21]

Tom Hanchett: Cool.

[00:09:22]

Regina Galan: And he made all the sauces. He made the white sauce by himself from scratch. He made the teriyaki sauce from scratch.

[00:09:29]

Tom Hanchett: Cool.

[00:09:30]

Regina Galan: And everything else, we [*inaudible*]. I mean, the food was very good. We had no complaints. Everybody loved them, loved it. But it was just for the quality of food, it was hard to keep up with the financial aspect of it. You have to cut back on some of the product that you put into it, and then that cuts into the taste, and then it's like catch-22. [*Laughs*] So that is why we gave up on that aspect of it.

[00:10:01]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. Who were your customers?

[00:10:02]

Regina Galan: Everybody. We had Hispanics, African Americans, we had Asian people. We had everyone. We were right on—there’s a tire shop right on Tryon, right next to a tattoo shop, I want to say—now [*inaudible*]. Albemarle Road. We were over there. There’s a tire shop and a tattoo shop. We were parked over there. And it was—as I said, it was okay, but it wasn’t a heap of money that we thought we would make. We weren’t able to live off the profit.

[00:10:37]

Tom Hanchett: So you went to work at Dai-Sing.

[00:10:39]

Regina Galan: My husband did, and I stayed at Sushiya, which is where I was working, and I was working fifteen-hour days, making more money, and, “Okay, you can do it.” I was on the grill, I was prepping, I was all over the place. And then I did that for like about three or four months, and then I said I couldn’t do it anymore. I used to drop my husband to work every morning, I said, “David, when are you going to get me a job?”

He was like, “No, no, no, no, no,” because he knew my boss. My boss was one of our customers. He said, “No, no, no, I don’t want him to think I’m stealing you from her.”

And I was like, “Well, I’m not—I want to go. You’re not stealing anything.”

“No, I can’t do it. I can’t do it.”

So I said, “Okay. I got a plan. I quit.” [*Laughs*] I quit my job and then every day, every day I dropped my husband off, I stood there, “David,” every day for two weeks.

And finally he said, “Okay.” He said, “I’ll give you a chance. One day.”

And I’m thinking, “Okay, I work two or three days and I go home and kick back. You know, that’s wonderful. I’ll work one day.”

And he goes, “Oh, can you work, come back tomorrow?”

I said, “Okay, cool, no problem.” I came back the next day. Okay, [*inaudible*]. And then the third day, I’m thinking I’m going to get a day off or something. I was like, “Well, he knows I can work [*inaudible*].”

He’s like, “Come back.”

I thought, “Okay.”

And then I was in and I started working originally in the back, wearing old clothes, scrubbing equipment. I was going on deliveries, pulling down hoods. I was climbing. I was in the back cleaning toilets. I needed the work, and it was convenient because I had to drive my husband anyway, so it was no problem for me.

And two years, I worked like two years, working the floor, you know what I mean, because when I first started working there, everyone used to run from me because I was the only African American person there. I would walk up and they would look behind and run, and I would chase them. [Laughs] I'd say, "Can I help you?"

And they were like, "Um, oh, you work here?"

I was like, "Yes."

It was like, "Okay. I need this and I need that."

That went on for about thirty days, and then within forty-five days, people were walking in there, "Where's Gina? Where's Gina? Where's Gina? I don't want you. Where's Gina? No, no, no, I don't need you. Where's Gina?" [Laughs] And it's been like that every since. I'm just accommodating. I help customers in any way possible. If I can't help them, I direct them to where they can be helped, and that's been like that consistently.

And then back to my story, two years later, the manager went on vacation to Vietnam, stayed gone one month, six weeks, two months, and there was like fifteen pallets of equipment, equipment and smallwares and everything in the back, about fifteen pallets. And I was like, "When is he coming back?"

My boss is like, "I don't know. I don't know. We just wait. We just wait."

I said, "I can do it."

He says, "You can do it?"

I said, "I can do it. Just let me know the multiplier and I can do it. Let me know the multiplier, how much freight that we pay on each pallet, and I can do it."

He said, “How you know?”

I said, “I just know. You let me know the multiplier, depending on what it is, if it’s for the smallware, the multiplier for the equipment, and how much you pay for each pallet, so I can divide it out after each one.” And I crossed off out those pallets out, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, one pallet, two pallets, three pallets, four pallets, got them out on the shelf, isolated what stuff that we shouldn’t have ordered, made a note not to order any more, and started expanding and asking customers what they want, what they need, and started building up inventory based upon the customers, not based upon what I see in the book. And that is what built our customer base, and the customers always come because they know I’m going to have what they need.

[00:14:34]

Tom Hanchett: That’s beautiful. That’s beautiful. Tell about Dai-Sing. Who started Dai-Sing? It’s related to the other businesses in this old shopping plaza.

[00:14:45]

Regina Galan: Yes. Actually, my boss is—his wife is the sister of the owners of New Century, the supermarket, the big supermarket, huge supermarket that was Winn-Dixie.

[00:15:00]

Tom Hanchett: New Century is the huge former Winn-Dixie that is now a Vietnamese—and everything else— grocery store.

[00:15:05]

Regina Galan: Mm-hmm. It's a Chinese market, the one that's right next to me. His wife is their sister, like I said, and that's the only relationship. They don't associate. They're completely separate. He's his own entity. They're their own entity.

[00:15:27]

Tom Hanchett: Can you write down on my notebook his name and her name, if you can remember that?

[00:15:33]

Regina Galan: I don't know her name.

[00:15:36]

Tom Hanchett: Okay. But his name, that would be very helpful.

[00:15:39]

Regina Galan: [*Inaudible*].

[00:15:43]

Tom Hanchett: And say that.

[00:15:43]

Regina Galan: Davis Ngo.

[00:15:45]

Tom Hanchett: N-g-o.

[00:15:46]

Regina Galan: Act like the *G* is not there.

[00:15:47]

Tom Hanchett: Okay. Davis Ngo.

[00:15:49]

Regina Galan: Mm-hmm.

[00:15:50]

Tom Hanchett: And he is from Vietnam?

[00:15:52]

Regina Galan: Mm-hmm. He's Vietnamese-Chinese. His dad is Chinese. His mom is Vietnamese.

[00:15:57]

Tom Hanchett: And how did he come to the U.S., do you know?

[00:16:00]

Regina Galan: His dad went to China [*laughs*], made a bunch of babies, and came back one by one and took them back. Dad took them back to China, taught them Chinese, educated them, and sent them to America.

[00:16:15]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. Okay. So it's not a Vietnam War story.

[00:16:19]

Regina Galan: The dad was a prominent businessman, a prominent Chinese businessman.

[00:16:20]

Tom Hanchett: Okay. Because I think of that as being a Vietnamese place.

[00:16:26]

Regina Galan: It is.

[00:16:27]

Tom Hanchett: And I'm partly right.

[00:16:28]

Regina Galan: It is.

[00:16:28]

Tom Hanchett: And so I assumed it had to do with Vietnamese war refugees. No?

[00:16:31]

Regina Galan: He was raised in Vietnam with his mom, and when he became of age, his dad took him back to China per se when he got to a—I'm not sure of the age, but I want to say thirteen, fourteen, somewhere in that range, where he was able to grow up in Vietnam per se and then had his latter education in China and in America.

[00:16:54]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. And when he came to America, how did he get into running Dai-Sing?

[00:16:58]

Regina Galan: Oh, Davis has a wonderful story to tell. I mean, he started off sewing clothing and doing jewelry. He opened up a clothing sewing shop originally, and he did watches and jewelry on the side, things like that.

[00:17:19]

Tom Hanchett: This is in Charlotte or somewhere else?

[00:17:20]

Regina Galan: In California.

[00:17:21]

Tom Hanchett: California, okay.

[00:17:22]

Regina Galan: And he made a lot of money off the sewing shop. He was able to send for some of his family, and they helped in the sewing shop as well as in other parts of his business. And I want to say when he was in California he made quite a bit of money and he made some contacts and was able to get a lump sum, and he came here. He originally opened up one of the original Chinese delivery companies for the fish and the chicken, you know, like Fast Horse and Flying Horse and all those, and Big G and all those. He was the originator.

[00:18:01]

Tom Hanchett: Are these wholesale delivery places?

[00:18:03]

Regina Galan: Wholesale delivery places.

[00:18:05]

Tom Hanchett: I don't know anything about that.

[00:18:05]

Regina Galan: He was the original person who started with one truck, and he ended up with ten trucks [*inaudible*].

[00:18:11]

Tom Hanchett: What's his company name?

[00:18:14]

Regina Galan: It's not in his anymore.

[00:18:15]

Tom Hanchett: But it was—

[00:18:16]

Regina Galan: There's some legalities involved with it where someone took it from him and said, "Thank you, bye," and wasn't anything he could do, so he moved on. And that's when he opened up Dai-Sing Restaurant Supply. And originally, he was right there—you know where the Family Dollar is on Sugar Creek? You know the one that's down behind the BP on Sugar?

[00:18:47]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah, yeah.

[00:18:48]

Regina Galan: That's where the original Dai-Sing was, and Dai-Sing was very small. And then he moved to the building that we are now at the other end, which was a little bigger, and then now he progressed to the larger building.

[00:19:02]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. Cool. You have seen it expand and expand and expand. It's expanding partly because you're good at what you do, but it's also expanding because Charlotte's restaurant scene is really changing.

[00:19:17]

Regina Galan: It has blown up. When I first started, I may have had like thirty companies and restaurants, like I said, that we were dealing with, like almost thirty, maybe fifty. That's it when we first opened. And now we're at maybe 1,000. I mean, that's like a large, large amount of increase in my contacts and the different restaurants, just the different mom-and-pop stores, lunch trucks, all that has expanded exponociously (sic). Is that a real word, exponociously? You know what I meant. [*laughs*]

[00:19:58]

Tom Hanchett: I like that word. I'm going to use it. What kind of restaurants?

[00:20:06]

Regina Galan: All kinds.

[00:20:08]

Tom Hanchett: I can remember—let me put it this way. I can remember in the eighties when there was one Mexican-run Mexican restaurant, and it's just so—

[00:20:18]

Regina Galan: No, now—

[00:20:21]

Tom Hanchett: Who comes to Dai-Sing?

[00:20:22]

Regina Galan: Now we have all restaurants. We have Caribbean restaurants, we have Guatemalan restaurants. I mean, there's different factions, like there's Guatemalan, there's Mexican. We have Puerto Rican restaurants opening up. We have Peruvian restaurants. Indian, a lot more Indian restaurants have opened up. When we first opened, there was like two. There was Woodlands and maybe one more downtown. I think there's one called The Bronze or something like that [actually Copper], something like that, over on East Boulevard. I think there was like three good Indian restaurants, and now there's thirty, forty. That's been an expansion of Indian restaurants for sure. And who else have I seen a lot of? A lot of more higher-end Hispanic restaurants, like [Pollo] Campero with the chicken. You know what I mean? Not just tacos. A lot of the more higher-end sit-down Hispanic restaurants, I've seen a lot of those. We reduced—some of the buffets have been reduced, a lot. There's been a lot of the buffets have been pretty much reduced quite a bit, and not like they used to be ten years ago when there was a buffet everywhere.

Tom Hanchett: Why, do you know?

[00:21:50]

Regina Galan: Because a lot of people are more health-conscious than they used to be with the food. A lot of the buffet food is reconstituted, it's reprocessed and all that, and then people are not eating to excess anymore, and so they don't need the buffet.

[00:22:08]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. Interesting. And also I think people are becoming more educated about a particular cuisine, so they don't just go to the Indian restaurant and pick the buffet because they've never had Indian food before.

[00:22:20]

Regina Galan: Exactly. They have more of a preference, so they're pretty much able to pick and choose more what they want, compared to—I notice a lot of people are afraid of the buffet, to a degree, dealing with the different illnesses, people are breathing over the food and all that stuff. Some people just have that phobia thing going on. [*Laughs*] But overall, that's what I saw the most reduction of.

And as far as growth, lot more mom-and-pops, lot more independent, not necessarily, because we don't really have many contracts with the Kentucky Fried and also with the bigger companies. They have contracts with their suppliers, and they sometimes do sneak into my store and they bring their sample. [*Laughs*] “Do you have one looks like this? Do you have one looks like that?” Because we are cheaper than U.S. Foods and all the other ones.

[00:23:17]

[*Interruption*]

[00:23:25]

Regina Galan: Well, we are cheaper, so a lot of time they come in and they bring a sample and they're like, "You have this? You have this? I can't let my supplier know I'm getting it." [*Laughs*] And I match it up and I get them what they need.

[00:23:38]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. When I came into the store a few weeks ago, you said something that was really funny and really smart about the questions that you ask somebody when they come and they may not have the language to ask for what they want. What are the questions you ask somebody?

[00:24:00]

Regina Galan: Oh, when someone doesn't know how to explain to me what they want, I normally have a few basic questions. The first one is, "What do you do with it?" The second one is, "What material is it made out of?" And the third one is, "What color?" And normally if they can answer me two out of those three questions, I can find it for them. And if I don't have it, I can direct them where they can get it.

[00:24:26]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. Cool. And how do you deal with all the languages? How many languages do you have?

[00:24:32]

Regina Galan: Well, I only speak English and Spanish, but I have an affinity for languages. I can talk to anybody and I can help them. I don't know why that is, but, I mean, I do have some words, some Chinese words in my head, some Vietnamese words. So like if someone says they need a *nap*, they don't want to go to sleep; they want a top.

[00:24:58]

Tom Hanchett: They want a—

[00:24:59]

Regina Galan: *Nap*. *Nap* is a top in Vietnam.

[00:25:03]

Tom Hanchett: And what is a top?

[00:25:03]

Regina Galan: Like a lid.

[00:25:04]

Tom Hanchett: A lid?

[00:25:05]

Regina Galan: Lid or a top, a lid is *nap*. So they will say, “*Nap, nap, nap,*” then I’ll look at them, say, “Okay, over here,” and I’ll show them, “This one here, over here?” And they’re like [*demonstrates*]. [*Laughs*] Things like that. But most times people come in there, they know what they want, they just don’t know exactly where it is. So that’s what comes in handy with me. That’s why I love my job. People come, they pretty much know what they want, and it helps me and it makes me easier to help them.

[00:25:36]

Tom Hanchett: Can you ask your three questions to Drako in Spanish?

[00:25:40]

Regina Galan: Yes, I probably can. Let me think. How would I say it in Spanish? I can’t think now. I’m under pressure. [*Laughs*]

[00:25:57]

Tom Hanchett: We won’t look at you.

[00:25:57]

Regina Galan: Okay. [*Spanish spoken*] The thing is, I can understand Spanish. I don't have to—you know what I mean? I can say [*Spanish spoken*] and things like [*Spanish spoken.*] I don't know. And then they can say what they need per se and I can—that's the best I can say. [*Laughs*]

[00:26:22]

Tom Hanchett: That's good. That's good. It works.

[00:26:25]

Regina Galan: Mm-hmm. I mean, [*Spanish spoken*], you know what I mean, as far as Spanish, and with the other ones, mostly sign language.

[00:26:35]

Tom Hanchett: And she's making signs with her hands [*inaudible*].

[00:26:41]

Regina Galan: Right? Yes, she's like, "No, no, no, no, no." Right? [*Laughs*] Okay? Like that, you know what I mean? "Okay, come, come, come." They'll say, "Miss? Thank you, thank you. Okay." Normally, I can get it. I just have to have patience. You have to have patience and look them in the eye, and I'll show them this, and, like, "No? Big or small?" I'll say, "Color? Color?"

And I have customers I've taught English at the given time when we're getting what they need. Like we have this seasoning called anise, star anise, and they called it star. And we were having a big, big problem trying to figure out what it was. They kept saying—and then one lady said [*Vietnamese spoken*], and that's the Vietnamese word for star anise, [*Vietnamese spoken*]. And she come in there and she said, “[*Vietnamese spoken*].”

I'm like, “I do not know what this lady is saying.” She's saying—I said, “Okay, okay, okay, okay, okay.” So it was something small, right?

So we went over there, and I walked over to the food that she pointed to, and she say [*Vietnamese spoken*], and I says, “Star.”

She say, “Star?”

I say, “[*Vietnamese spoken*].” She say, “[*Vietnamese spoken*], star.” And then she come up, she say, “Star!” [*Laughter*] So we've done that. Now I know what it is, and somebody can walk in, ask what it is, I have a really good memory for things like that. And a customer asks, she say she wants [*Vietnamese spoken*], I go [*inaudible*]. And I learn from them and that's why they learn from me. And I do it consistently, daily.

[00:28:30]

Tom Hanchett: That's beautiful. That's beautiful.

Drako, can you think of some questions to ask here? I've got two or three other ones that are right at the top of my head, but I'm looking to you to see if there might something that you're thinking about.

[00:28:47]

Drako Hernandez: I mean, the way she talk and the way she act, I [*inaudible*]. Every single day in this kind of community when you try to buy something and you don't know as immigrant when they came to the United States and you don't know the words, you use the sign language. I mean, I remember these time when my uncle tried to buy eggs. And you know what he does? He [*inaudible*], he started acting like a chicken.

[*Laughter*] [*inaudible*] and everybody was laughing, but they understand what he want.

The second [*inaudible*] you ask me a question so [*Spanish spoken*], it's like "How many you need?" and, "What do you want? What do you need?" The same way that you ask them is the same way that we understand is [*inaudible*] from the language part. You don't have these barrier where you don't know how ask. She already know what you want. The only thing is like, "How many you want and what color you want?" [*inaudible*].

[00:30:13]

Tom Hanchett: That's great. That's great. That's a wonderful testimony to the work I've seen you do so often.

[00:30:18]

Regina Galan: I had a friend who when they first got here from Mexico, they went to a restaurant and they wanted some chicken to go, and he didn't know how to say. He said he wanted, "Chicken bye-bye." [*Laughs*] And they understood, right? And no one was

laughing or anything, but sometimes you just have to use alternate words, and it's nice when someone actually understands you and doesn't berate you, and be like, "Ah, chicken bye-bye," and make you feel inferior, make you feel uncomfortable.

In our store, if you don't say it right, no one's going to just, "Oh, they don't know what they want. They don't know what they want. Oh, I can't help you. Oh, if you don't know what you want, why are you here?" things like that. Some stores are like that. Like the market next door, if you walk in there and you ask them, "Do you have this?" if you catch them on a good day, they might have it. Catch them on a bad day, "I don't know. You no find? You no buy, no buy? You buy. You no find, no buy? Goodbye. I don't know. I don't know." I mean, like really, really not helpful. And we've never had that problem at our store.

I taught—when I first started working there, actually the Asian people used to follow people around, like *follow*, like very closely and watch people very closely. And I cut that out. I said, "Do not follow people around. You approach them, approach them, you ask them if they need help. If they don't need help, leave them alone. If they do need help, help them. If you can't help them, find someone who can. That's your three things you need to do. Do not follow them. If you're not able to help them, why are you watching them? Why are you near them?" And I made it consistently like that.

And I had when I first started there, customers would, "He's following me around. I don't steal. I don't steal. I don't—," you know, because people can feel when you're watching too closely. Even if they are stealing, you know, people get agitated. [Laughs] And I explained, I said, "You can't do that." I said, "These customers walk in

this door to spend money, okay? Or if they're not going to spend, you can't catch people. People who steal, they know what they're doing. You're not going to catch them." I explained that to them. I said, "You cannot follow someone if you think they're going to do that." I said, "You need to relax."

And I told Davis, my boss, I said, "You need to tell them to stop following people," I said, "because you're going to lose customers. We're going to look bad." And I help them with their customer service abilities.

[00:33:06]

Tom Hanchett: Are there other things where different cultures have different ideas about what's polite or what's expected, and you've run into that, where you've done the wrong thing or somebody has done something that you didn't expect them to do, and you later realized that you were thinking differently?

[00:33:26]

Regina Galan: Well, the only thing that I can say that was differently before I started working there, they didn't talk to each other. They didn't engage in each other and they did not discuss their parts of the business with each other. So there were a lot of mistakes, like I'll order a special order and I'll order ten items of something that we normally don't order and it's expensive, they will send it back. "I don't know what this is. Oh, it's expensive." And they send it back, and my customer's waiting for it. My customer's already prepaid, they don't care how much it is, they just need it now. So I

get there thinking I'm going to be able to call my customer say, "Hey, it's here." I get there and it's gone. And that happened repeatedly because their way they do it, "Oh, that's expensive. Oh, it's expensive. Send it back. That's expensive." That's how they do it, but they don't know. Some people don't care if it's expensive. It's not about the money; it's about getting what you want. And that's one of the things that I've dealt with for a short period of time with them not consulting each other, not consulting me before they made a move. Everybody's big chiefs. And I've dealt with that consistently until now everyone's actually working together. If something comes in like a big piece of equipment or something, I'll notate, hey, it's a little expensive, who ordered this, [*inaudible*], and leave it at that. And then my boss say, "Oh, I didn't order that. I'll send it back," and then we can—at least it'll let him see what's going on. I won't just pick up the invoice, "Oh, my god, this is not going to work. Send it back," because you don't know.

[00:35:03]

Tom Hanchett: Right. And I think I have observed—I was raised in the North with northern parents, and when I came here, it took me a long time to realize that I needed to talk to people, that that was a southern thing, that chatter back and forth is—I think it's a southern thing, and I think it's especially an African American—

[00:35:26]

Regina Galan: It is. It is.

[00:35:27]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah, I think so.

[00:35:28]

Regina Galan: It is. We always have a rapport. I joke a lot. I have an extensive vocabulary, so I'm able to speak on a lot of things. Someone can bring something up, and I have a lot of anecdotes in order to put one in a comfort zone. I have an extensive, extensive—what's the word I want to say? I don't know what I was going to say. I've been around. *[Laughs]* I've been different states. I've been all the way from Mississippi to California, Virginia Beach, so I have a lot of knowledge in my head that I can pass on, that I can share, and I try to do that every day, do something, add something positive to people's lives and make their shopping experience easy and fun and inexpensive, save them money at the same time.

[00:36:25]

Tom Hanchett: Cool. Is there—I'm just fascinated. How many items are at Dai-Sing, do you think, how many *[inaudible]*?

[00:36:33]

Regina Galan: A million?

[00:36:34]

Tom Hanchett: Do you have any idea?

[00:36:34]

Regina Galan: About a million.

[00:36:35]

Tom Hanchett: Literally about a million?

[00:36:37]

Regina Galan: Literally about a million.

[00:36:37]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. And you kind of have all of that in your head?

[00:36:40]

Regina Galan: I have it in my head. *[Laughs]* Pretty much if you ask me right now where something is in the store, I could tell you where it is, and I could very likely tell you how much it cost.

[00:36:50]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. What is the thing that every different nationality wants from your store?

[00:36:57]

Regina Galan: Our pots.

[00:36:58]

Tom Hanchett: Is there one thing that everyone wants?

[00:36:59]

Regina Galan: Our pots. Our pots. Either the good ones for the restaurants, the NSF ones for the restaurants or the beautiful stainless ones for the home. They're number one. They sell very well. They're used for everything. We also have our nonstick pots that don't lift up—all the black doesn't come out of it and all that, and our marble, it's the new updated cast aluminum. You remember the old-school cast aluminum, the Dutch ovens and all that? Now they have—it's called the marble, and they have it in the frying pans and they have it in the Dutch ovens and they have it in the wok styles, and they're naturally nonstick, and they sell so well. And those are our number ones.

[00:37:39]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. So the pots are universal.

[00:37:42]

Regina Galan: Mm-hmm.

[00:37:43]

Tom Hanchett: What are some things that only one culture wants? I notice that the signs, the heart-shaped signs on the walls [*inaudible*].

[00:37:52]

Regina Galan: Well, some of—the only thing maybe the red tassel things like that are mostly Chinese, the most I can say, but everybody buys them because they're supposed to be for luck. But I want to say mostly only Chinese buy the Buddhas, the Buddha figurines and things like, because we don't—I don't worship. They do. So most Hispanics and Caucasian and African American, we don't “idol worship,” so we don't buy any of the figurines and things like that.

[00:38:25]

Tom Hanchett: Are there things that Latino people particularly are interested in?

[00:38:32]

Regina Galan: The tamale pots. Tamale pots, they fly out the door, tamale pots and the burners.

[00:38:37]

Tom Hanchett: And the tamale pots are the really huge.

[00:38:40]

Regina Galan: They don't necessarily have to be big, all sizes from this small to that big. Some people just want to make eight tamales, other people make eighty.

[00:38:48]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. Cool.

[00:38:51]

Regina Galan: So, yeah, and the burners [*inaudible*].

[00:38:52]

Tom Hanchett: How about Southeast Asian folks? Is there a thing that they particularly like?

[00:38:55]

Regina Galan: Rice cookers. Rice cookers. They buy the high-end rice cookers and the steamer, like the lightweight steamers. They like to steam a lot of their rice and things like that.

[00:39:12]

Tom Hanchett: Cool.

[00:39:13]

Regina Galan: We got the stackable steamers and the single steamers and then they have the bamboo ones that they use, mostly the steamer-like things.

[00:39:20]

Tom Hanchett: How about folks from Africa? We have more and more people coming from [unclear].

[00:39:24]

Regina Galan: Yes, from Africa mostly they buy the burners and the big pots. They mostly fry up their food. They make the rice in the big pots, mostly. And pretty much it, the burners and big pots.

[00:39:37]

Tom Hanchett: As an African American, have you had Africans come into the store and you feel something special, by any chance?

[00:39:45]

Regina Galan: Well, I feel something special with all my customers, but as far as the Africans, I have an affinity with them pretty much. I like to listen to how they talk, I like their accent, and I can help them out easily because they're pretty basic what they want. Their needs are pretty basic. Mostly they want the basic things, they want like the skewers for the meat, things like that, the pot, the burners. They're very inquisitive, they ask a bunch of questions, and they like to know—they really want to know a lot about the things they're buying, things like that, and I'm able to help them out.

[00:40:24]

Tom Hanchett: Folks from the Middle East?

[00:40:27]

Regina Galan: Mostly the few that come from the Middle East are—they own the restaurants, the Indian restaurants, and they come in for their—they buy the food pans like the hotel pans, because they normally have the buffet per se, buy a lot of the hotel pans, the big stirring spoons, things like that for the larger batches that they make. They don't really buy a lot of their curry and anything from me. They like their own. I don't know. There's a couple of Indian restaurant supplies around that cater to some of the Indian restaurants.

[00:41:13]

Tom Hanchett: Where are those, do you know?

[00:00:00]

Regina Galan: There's Gandhi's International—

[00:41:17]

Tom Hanchett: I know that, yeah.

[00:41:18]

Regina Galan: —right up there on Tryon, up that way.

[00:41:21]

Tom Hanchett: Right.

[00:41:21]

Regina Galan: And there's one on Central, a new one, a newer one that just opened up. I can't remember exactly what. There was one. I can't remember. It was one of my customers too. I can't remember. But I know Gandhi's for sure, and they're the ones who sell 100 pounds of curry and things like that for the restaurants, for the Asian restaurants. We don't really deal with that too much, mostly just the hardwares like hotel pans and spoons and knives and things like that.

[00:41:54]

Tom Hanchett: Excellent. Wonderful. I think I have asked most of the questions that I thought to ask. What would you—we have people who are interested in the South and its food, and they'll be listening to this. It'll be up on the web. Anyone will be able to access it. What should people know about you, about Dai-Sing, about your customers, about the South that I haven't asked?

[00:42:23]

Regina Galan: Let me think. Well, I would like people to know that we at Dai-Sing, we cater to our customers, they're number one, and we make sure that all their needs are met as much as possible, and if we can't meet them, we'll redirect them to where they can have their needs met, and been consistently like this throughout the years, and it's going to continue in this manner. And as far as the food, I think all the newer mom-and-pop restaurants just popped up. There's a lot of Caribbean restaurants. There's Caribbean Hut, they're expanding and growing. There's a newer restaurant, a Puerto Rican restaurant, right up the street. I forget the name of that restaurant. I wanted to plug them too. They're really, really good, and it's like it's a newer restaurant. I recommend people go check all the restaurants that are off the grid, not just the ones that you see every day, and give you a chance to expand your palate and help with the newer restaurants in order to keep them growing.

[00:43:40]

Tom Hanchett: I love it. That's great. That's great. Well, if you think of the Puerto Rican restaurant, let me know, because I don't know of a Puerto Rican restaurant in Charlotte. There's one on Independence that's in an old sports bar.

[00:43:53]

Regina Galan: There's one, Mi Abuelita? [5100 N. Tryon Street]

[00:43:55]

Tom Hanchett: Ah, the little tiny place on the right?

[00:43:59]

Regina Galan: Yeah, that one right there, yeah, that one.

[00:44:01]

Tom Hanchett: Okay. Is that Puerto Rican? I thought it was Dominican.

[00:44:02]

Regina Galan: That's Dominican, right?

[00:44:04]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah.

[00:44:05]

Regina Galan: But the Puerto Rican one is right there. Oh, the La Saona. La Saona is the Puerto Rican restaurant. It's right on the corner of East Way and the Plaza, Saona.

[Saona Dominican Restaurant and Bar, 530 Eastway Drive]

[00:44:16]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah, write it down. Saona. Oh, yes. That's a really good place.

[00:44:26]

Regina Galan: Mm-hmm. And—

[00:44:27]

Tom Hanchett: But I think that's Dominican as well.

[00:44:30]

Regina Galan: That's Dominican too? Might be.

[00:44:31]

Tom Hanchett: Well, it keeps changing and so—okay, cool.

[00:44:34]

Regina Galan: I don't know. I thought La Saona is Puerto Rican. Maybe that was the lady before. That was the lady before. There was a skinny lady, pretty nice lady. Maybe that was the lady before.

[00:44:44]

Tom Hanchett: They have wonderful stews. I go there on Sundays sometimes and pick up their stews [*inaudible*].

[00:44:47]

Regina Galan: And they have—what's the name of that doggone restaurant? They come in my store every day. Starts with four letters, got four letters, it's like literally right down that way. I could probably see it if I looked out far enough.

[00:45:01]

Tom Hanchett: I'll watch for it.

[00:45:03]

Regina Galan: Yeah, it's right there to the left. I can't remember what it's called, but, yeah, really had good food. Let me think.

[00:45:10]

Tom Hanchett: I just realized that I usually run my own tape recorder, and I wasn't doing that. If you could write down your date of birth and where you were born, that would help me a bit.

[00:45:18]

Regina Galan: You already wrote it here.

[00:45:18]

Tom Hanchett: Did I do it?

[00:45:20]

Regina Galan: July 12th, 1968, Saginaw, Michigan.

[00:45:22]

Tom Hanchett: Saginaw, Michigan. Okay, good. It's upside down. I can't read it here.

[00:45:26]

Regina Galan: No, that's close enough.

[00:45:28]

Tom Hanchett: Great.

[00:45:29]

Regina Galan: All right?

[00:45:29]

Tom Hanchett: Beautiful. And let's see. Go ahead and write down your whole name in your handwriting so that I can read it, and I will ask Drako if he has any one last question or more than one.

[00:45:44]

Drako Hernandez: Well, one of the last questions is about her personal life with her husband. They have truck. You say a lunch truck, right? How you see or what is the goal with that project? I mean, what is next? You already buy the truck, you already buy the husband. [Galan laughs.] What you have in mind to sustain that business?

[00:46:26]

Regina Galan: Actually, we have discontinued the truck because it was not profitable. It was enjoyable. I loved it. I mean, we worked very well together. We have no problem. We're good with the customers and the food was good, but it was just it became a money pit. If we put money in, we got a little bit out. We put a lot of money in, so that's why we discontinued it. But other than that, we had good ratings as far as the health department, because I know all the codes, I know what to do, and so as far as

running a business, it's easy for me, but if you don't make a profit, you have to make a decision.

[00:47:01]

Tom Hanchett: Yeah. So you sold the truck.

[00:47:03]

Regina Galan: So we sold the truck.

[00:47:03]

Tom Hanchett: Who did you sell it to?

[00:47:04]

Regina Galan: We sold it back to the guy we bought it from. [*Laughs*]

[00:47:07]

Tom Hanchett: Who was what kind of person?

[00:47:10]

Regina Galan: He was a friend of my husband's.

[00:47:13]

Tom Hanchett: So a Latino guy who was running a food truck? Okay.

[00:47:16]

Regina Galan: Yeah, Latino guy. He had a—

[00:47:18]

Tom Hanchett: Some places there are food truck brokers [*inaudible*].

[00:47:19]

Regina Galan: Yeah, I have a couple of those, too, I have a couple of good food truck brokers that are available, so any of my customers who want to come by Dai-Sing and needs to build a truck, I have a couple customers that can help you with that. [*Laughs*]

[00:47:30]

Tom Hanchett: Wow. That's great.

[00:47:32]

Regina Galan: But, yeah, we worked very well together. We worked together at Dai-Sing a long period of time, and then he moved on to start cooking. That's what he does.

[00:47:47]

Tom Hanchett: Where does he cook now?

[00:47:49]

Regina Galan: He doesn't cook now, but he was working at Zapata's, and it's behind the McDonald's near WT Harris and Tryon. [Zapata's Cantina Restaurant, 8927 J.M. Keynes Dr.] He worked there for a long period of time, made good money there too. But what it is is seasonal. During the winter, it's slow. During the summer, it's banging. So he worked all summer, made a whole bunch of money, and in wintertime there ain't anything to do, so he went over to the market. And I told him, "Go put an application at the market."

He say, "I don't want to work there."

I say "Well, you have no choice. Go put an application." And I say, "I'll put in a word for you, and if I put in the word, you got the job."

And he said, "Okay."

So I walked over there, talked to Mama, say, "My husband need a job."

She said, "Send him over." He started working that day.

[00:48:38]

Tom Hanchett: So he's working at Century Market next door to you?

[00:48:41]

Regina Galan: Yeah, he's at Century.

[00:48:42]

Tom Hanchett: Is that shopping center going to survive? Because the light rail has come and—

[00:48:45]

Regina Galan: It'll survive. They've already worked it out where it's going to go in front of us. It's not going to go—if anything, who's going to catch it is all those buildings in front of us. But our strip is safe. It's going to loop around.

[00:49:02]

Tom Hanchett: And the family that owns it is going to keep owning it?

[00:49:04]

Regina Galan: They're going to keep it. They're not letting it go. They have a big investment in that building.

[00:49:11]

Tom Hanchett: Can we get them to repave the parking lot?

[00:49:13]

Regina Galan: We've tried. They patch it. They've been patching it, patching it, patching it. It's going to be like—it's \$100,000 to pave that whole—and that's not going to happen. I don't see it. I mean, if they find a million dollars out of somewhere, it's possible. And if they find a million dollars, they're probably going back to China.

[Laughs] I would, going back somewhere.

[00:49:38]

Tom Hanchett: Thank you so much.

[00:49:39]

Regina Galan: Thank you.

[00:49:40]

Tom Hanchett: This is great. This is wonderful. So we're just going to be real quiet. We're going to let the air run and cars that are outside drive.

[End of interview]