



mỹ linh

a vietnamese restaurant

Asian Inspiration - American Dream

Anh Diep | Linh Diep



SM: How did you arrive here from Vietnam?

AD: We escaped from Vietnam in 1978, when the communists took over after the fall of Saigon. We fled in a 45 foot boat with over 150 other refugees on board. I was pregnant with my daughter Susan at the time, and I knew that we had to flee Vietnam or suffer the communist takeover. We were at sea in perilous waters for three days before we landed on the Malaysian island of Paulo Bedong. Our dream was to come to America. We had to wait in Malaysia 4 to 5 months before we could apply to the US consulate for a visa to receive sponsorship to the United States. After one year, we were finally granted a visa and were flown to the US.

SM: Why did you come to Albany?

AD: It was not our choice. We were sent wherever the government wanted to ship us. We had a church family in Albany that sponsored us.

SM: When you arrived did you speak English?

AD: No we did not speak English. We knew no one, and had no means to make a living.

SM: How did you survive?

AD: My husband received training as a dental technician while I stayed home with our children. Shortly after, we had to hire a baby sitter for the children, because I needed to work. It was a tremendous struggle, but we knew that anything was better than staying under a communist regime in Vietnam.

SM: Linh what was it like when you first landed in Albany?

LD: I could not speak English, and it was a total cultural change. It was very difficult to be in school, having to learn the language while keeping up with the other students.

SM: Did you go to college?

LD: I studied hard. My mom was very intent on ensuring that I went to college. She recognized the importance of education, and instilled this in us. I graduated from Union College.

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SM: What made you become a restaurateur?

AD: I loved to cook. We would have a family gathering at the house on Saturday mornings. I would cook and people from miles around would travel to our home to eat my cooking. We started to have too many people coming into our home- it was crazy. Although I was charging a modest sum for the food, they kept coming. Finally I had to turn people away because the crowds were growing larger than a home could handle. Linh and I met with some family members and we decided to open our first restaurant on Madison Ave, Albany.

SM: How did you raise the capital to open your restaurant?

AD: Our family worked very hard through those years. We saved our money, lived frugally, and sacrificed a great deal. Our whole family put money together to obtain the necessary funds to open the restaurant.

LD: Once we opened our restaurant, we continued to work our day jobs. We would open the restaurant at night time and on weekends. We were cooking, waitressing, bar tending, and cleaning pots and pans till all hours of the morning- to ensure the restaurant's success.

SM: What work prepared you for the restaurant business?

LD: My mother was a merchant in Vietnam. She sold dry goods wholesale and retail. She worked very hard running her business.

AD: If you love what you do, apply yourself, and work hard everyday, you can do anything. I love to cook and I love working with our family and friends.

SM: How long have you both worked together?

LD: Since 1993.

SM: Working together must be challenging at times.

How do you get along?

LD: We are honest, reliable, and hard working people. We try to keep the emotional charge to a minimum, and we maximize our strengths. In eastern philosophy it is like the Yin and the Yang. We flow with each other and build upon the other's strengths.

SM: What are your strengths?

LD: My mom's strength is cooking. She is the creative force, the architect of every meal we prepare. She is an exceptional cook and focuses on great presentation and delivery of her food.

SM: And yours?

LD: Management of the overall day to day operation of the business, coordination of all aspects, and creating a vision for the restaurant which will take us into the future.

SM: 96% of all restaurants fail. Why has my linh succeeded?

LD: We are disciplined, and we work very hard. We are hands on. When people come to my linh, we greet them and go out of our way to make them feel comfortable in our restaurant. Mom has unique products and her cooking is exceptional. It resonates with our clientele, and our patrons love us. We are very consistent with our food, both in presentation and quality. Our restaurant is a warm hearted expression of cultural heritage and we worked hard to train our staff to treat our clientele like members of our extended family.

SM: What does success mean to you?

LD: It is not about the money per se. It is about being fulfilled and happy in life. Success is having great relationships with family, coworkers and clientele. Making them happy and working in harmony contribute a great deal to our success.

SM: What does the future bring for my linh?

LD: We are looking for progress. We have just begun marketing five of my mom's sauces. The product line is called m̃y linh: a taste of Vietnam. Her original recipes are now being packaged and are for sale here, and will be at gourmet shops in the area. We are going to develop our web site and sell these sauces online as well. We will continue to work hard as we always have done, to make our vision a reality, and let the future take care of itself.

