

January 29th, 2004

CBC News World

*Culture Shock on Thursday,
January 29th, 2004.*

*(This program was aired on
national television).*

*Gregory Charles:
You're watching Culture Shock; the
only bilingual television magazine
dedicated to cultural diversity.*

*Lana Starchuk:
I am Lana Starchuk, and I met the
king of ethnic foods, the legendary
Mr. Goudas, who serves up cultural
diversity in a can!*

*Gregory:
Hi! I am Gregory Charles and
welcome to Culture Shock.
Today, three of our young
filmmakers bring a story that
reflects our country's cultural
fabric.*

*When you go from Chinatown
and little Italy, or Koreatown to
little India, you realize that ethnic
restaurants are a real barometer
of diversity.*

*Now, it is up to neighborhood
supermarkets to become
multicultural.*

*Grocery chains now devote more
shelf space to lemon grass, curry
paste and black bean sauce.
And food distributors, like Toronto's
Mr. Goudas, make sure no one runs
out of papaya juice.*

*Here's the story from Lana
Starchuk:*

*Lana:
Remember when chili powder was*

*the most exotic spice you could
find at your local grocery store.
Well that was then and this is now.*

*No other city in the world caters to
ethnic diversity like Toronto.*

*You can find almost every religion,
music, language and food.*

*Because the population is so varied,
there is a high demand for exotic
foods. One company has met the
demand of the ethnic market and
makes everything from ackees to
bitter lemon to producing twenty
(20) different kinds of beans.*

*Goudas Foods is a multimillion-
dollar business. Not only does Mr.
Goudas have 600 products under
his own brand name; he distributes
another 600 exotic foods under
various other labels in Canada and
around the world.*

*To serve many communities at
the same time, he can have up to
fourteen (14) languages on one can.
So just who is this Mr. Goudas, this
emperor of ethnic food, this man for
all seasonings.*

*Peter Goudas:
I came to Canada in 1967. I never
heard of fruits like guava, mango,
papaya, star fruits, and I can keep
naming a hundred fruits.*

*Lana:
Peter Goudas left his home in
Greece over thirty (30) years ago.
He arrived in Toronto with little
cash and a lot of hope.*

*Peter:
"The Caribbean people thought I
was from the Caribbean, and the
Indians thought I am an Indian.*

However, in 1993 I got the “Best Businessman” award and at that time I was not able to hide anymore. So at that time maybe some people got happy to see me, I am Greek, and some of them got disappointed.

Lana:

Exotic fruits and vegetables, spices and grains are among tons of produce in his warehouse that are packed and shipped to customers of all kinds in Canada and abroad.

Peter:

Rice for instance, we have thirty-two (32) varieties ourselves. You cannot summarize all these rice into one brand and say, okay this brand is good for everybody. For instance, the Parboil Rice, which is the yellow rice, mostly grows in the United States.

It doesn't matter how much you cook it; it still stays separated in your plate.

Now, you cannot sell any kind of rice to the Chinese, because they use the chop-sticks.

And the Indian clientele use what is called the Basmati rice.

Lana:

And being a stickler for detail pays off. Mr. Goudas tests each and every product he puts on grocery store shelves.

If it does not meet his standards you will never see it.

His philosophy is to bring the world to the customer through food and grocers who cater to their customer's cultural needs are by far the most popular in some neighborhoods around town.

Food Cents Owner Josef Pedenelli:

And how do you like that?

How's that?

Food Cents customer: It's beautiful!

Joeseef: We dedicated a section for Mr. Goudas and it does phenomenal. He is one of our main suppliers!

Lana:

At Food Cents, an independent grocery store in north Toronto, owners Josef Pedenelli and Mark Zucasi have taken a hands-on approach to running their business.

Mark Zucasi:

You might as well give them what they want. They want ethnic foods as they have back home, they want the rices and the ackees, the sweet potatoes, yams and what not, and we get a good response by that.

Lana:

Mr. Goudas prides himself on being authentic. Here at Foods Cents, local customers are sampling his canned rice, curry style.

Lana:

How does it taste?

Customer 1: Very good.

Lana: What do you like about it?

Customer 1: Normal, same like our curry, curry and rice.

Lana:

And where are you from?

Customer 1: I am from Sri Lanka.

Customer 2: It is similar to our rice; we make briami and all that in Pakistan and India, like they both are same, and yeah, I think it is good for that, because it looks like that and tastes good.

Lana: Do you like it?

Customer 3: Yes.

Lana: What do you like about it?

Customer 3: The taste.

Lana: Is it a little weak for you?

Customer 4: Yes, because it needs a little more spices. If you eat our curry, you might cry.

You will get tears in your eyes.

Lana: Oh please!

Peter:

You can never have one product be good and satisfy everybody today. So if you can satisfy, let's say, 75 to 80% percent of the people then you know you have something good.

Lana:

The Food Cents grocers know about good marketing and just how to please their customers.

Josef and Marco:

We have had bananas nine (9) cents a pound; we were the only store to do that since 1954.

No one's done bananas for nine (9) cents a pound. We sold, Joseph how many bananas that day? 300,000 pounds of bananas!

Lana:

But independent grocers are not the only ones catering to Toronto's ethnic communities. For the major food chains, having the right type of food in the international aisle can make or break a store.

Tony Mirello, Senior V.P. of Banner Merchandising for A & P, Dominion and Food Basics, keeps tabs on their customer base through demographic research.

Tony Morello:

We really rely on census data quite a bit. So we look at the census data and get a good understanding of what consumers are in the area and

then we try and stay with the times so as when the area changes, we try and change with it.

It is a different tactic, if you will, for the location of the store. Some areas are primarily Oriental, some areas are primarily Arab.

You have to change.

The Muslim culture obviously has different needs and wants when it comes to shopping experience, than an Asian culture. So you really have to customize the 'micromarket' for those specific areas.

Lana:

If you're a Caribbean, you've got plenty of home's own yams, green bananas, and spicy bread to choose from.

A-ha, rough, hard dough bread, just like in Jamaica! If you're Muslim, a wide selection of Halal meats is readily available. Because of changing demographics in Ontario, food that was once considered exotic, has already become mainstream.

Italian and Mexican favourites are not found in the international section any more. (Walking by with a load of food boxes and shouting "Ole!")

Why wouldn't you experiment with exotic tastes and flavours that are available at your fingertips.

As if the international isle at your grocery store is your first step. What's comfort food for some, might be wild and exotic for others. In Canada, perhaps it won't be long before the two meet.

Lana saying goodbye in various languages:

Adios, Au Revoir, Ciao!