

Transcription of Gianna McDermott's interview with Jorge Alarcon

Gianna: I am here today with,

Jorge: Jorge Alarcon, people call me George.

Gianna: Oh okay!

Gianna: How was your life in Chile?

Jorge: In Chile, okay well, my life I mean I lived my first twenty two years of my life there. It was fun umm, peaceful, and ummm, a little bit challenging, and uncertain for me because I didn't come from an affluent family and the dynamics of the economics of the society, unfortunately the opportunities are selective to a certain group of societies so I wasn't in that group of the societies so even though my father worked for the U.S. Government, I was always looking out to live in the U.S. but going back to the question, it was a normal life you know, of course afraid of my future because the opportunities are not there for everyone like here.

Gianna: Yeah, no I understand. Do you have any memories that you have from Chile? What are the prominent memories that you remember?

Jorge: Well I remember enjoying the outdoors, going to the ocean, we had the Pacific there and the mountains, and one of the memories I have is going to school growing up always in the back of my mind, I always had that uncertainty you know, of not knowing what I was going to be because at that time, remember we're talking childhood here right?

Gianna: Yes!

Jorge: So I didn't know, everything is so uncertain, it's a lot of needs you know, and uh even though as a kid working, the resources were so limited that they didn't allow me to do pretty much anything. And even though when I finally was able to get a job as a 19 or 20 year old kid, a young man you know, that money really didn't help me to even sustain myself, support myself, so the money I was making was always pocket money they call it here, money that I was able to use to put gas in a car or to go out to buy clothes or stuff like that, so, it was very limited when it came to resources, those are some of the memories.

Gianna: Thank you for sharing that! What attracted you to visit the United States?

Jorge: Okay for the first time, well, right now we live in a global world, you know, the world that we live today is not the same that I lived when I was your age 30 years ago. Today, the youth, the youth generation have so much access to so much information from their phone, you can connect, learn a language, make friends, know everything about what's happening around the world, so back then, ummm, the only source of information was either TV, radio, and movies. Going to the movie theaters, so, even though my father worked in the U.S. Government, I was

always, uh, I always had that desire to come here, learn the language, and to have this conversation that I am having with you. So, this country's a beautiful country, when I see it in movie's, um, so when what really made me want to come here was looking for better opportunities, learning the language, making friends, and live the American dream, that was really pretty much, in being one more of this great nation, that was my goal.

Gianna: That's a great way of putting it, that's amazing! What made you fall in love with the United States during your first visit here?

Jorge: So many things, you know, I always say people to people when I started working as a driver, to take people to the airport, I always share my testimony with them because, you know, it was like living in fantasy land because my first job was washing dishes for a living, I was making 8 dollars an hour, and back in 1992, with that money I was able not only to pay my rent, but have my own telephone, back then there was no cell phones, they were very expensive, but I had my own TV set, buy my own clothes, name brand, fly, back then only rich people could fly. it was very expensive, to stay in hotels, for a moment I felt like a rich man even though I was washing dishes for a living, and sounds funny, but I found myself as still remember as I'm talking to you, I remember I was walking in a store and I saw a set of golf clubs, and I saw the price tag of those golf clubs, and I looked at the price tag and I looked at my wallet and said wow! I can even purchase these golf clubs if I want to, right, so and I'm washing dishes, so I tell people at that moment I felt like I was in fantasy land because It was, I mean, washing dishes in Chile will never be able to, the purchasing power of the American people I found that back then. I felt great I mean look, I mean I didn't have kids, I was full of energy, health, and strength, and I felt motivated to continue to do other things other than washing dishes , I bust tables, I work in the restaurant business, I cooked, managed restaurants, that's how I became who I am today.

Gianna: That's amazing, that's a great story, how that all motivated you to really become somebody, that's awesome! Coming to the United States as a young man all alone must have brought many challenges, what are some of those challenges that you faced?

Jorge: Okay, great, well number one, the language, that was the language, that was the first challenge, and the geographical location, because when I came in I didn't know, you see right now today you are so privileged and I hope people when they listen to this interview, they at least learn to understand how privileged we are today to have all this technology available to us, because I didn't know, I knew I was coming into New York, but I didn't know where geographically I was being positioned, so I landed in Long Island, Port Washington, so I was telling my friend, hey so we're in Port Washington, so were in Washington, and my friend said no, we are not in Washington, we're in Long Island. But, so and then she just run out of patience, you'll figure it out (chuckle). That was one challenge, geographically I did not know where I was, the language, and loneliness and that's it, because everything else was not a challenge, it was really a learning experience for me. Now, my breakthrough came when I came out of washing dishes and working at a private owned restaurant and I went to work at a chain owned and operated corporate restaurant, like a Friday's and that's where my break came, and thats where I really made a lot of friends, everybody wanted to be friends with me, and then the

image that people have from the United States changed because everybody think that the American people are nasty people, that they don't care about others, their all about themselves, and you know what I felt the opposite, I wanna believe that this is the true American spirit, that's what I want to believe in, I don't think I was lucky, I don't feel like I was lucky just to find myself in a place surrounded by good people, there was all different people from all ethnicities, different walks of life, some of them were Jewish, other one's were White people, African American or Black people, Spanish people, everyone was so really nice, the challenging was just the number one, the language, two the geographics, other then that that's it, I was able to manage my resources in a smart way, so that wasn't an issue for me, and the last I will say how to obtain my legal status here, that was a challenge to, took 18 years, during those 18 years, I was doing everything right, I didn't do anything wrong. But I waited, and at the end of the day, my waiting paid off, I'm not regretting 18 years from being able to fly to my country, you know, but I think it paid off, and it was the greatest investment, but yeah there were only three challenges, the language, geographic, and how to obtain my legal status here.

Gianna: Those are very understandable challenges, because if I came into a new place and I had to learn how to speak a new language and I didn't know where I was I would definitely be kind of scared, so props to you for adapting to all of that, that is definitely admirable.

Jorge: But you know what, just to add to the interview, this country I still feel like it is welcoming, a wonderful country!

Gianna: Perfect, can you elaborate on the working conditions when you arrived here?

Jorge: Working conditions were really nice, I was washing dishes at a local restaurant, in Manhasset, New York, publicans still till this day are still there in Glendon road, I was always be grateful for their opportunity, I actually thanks to the technology now, social media, I was able to connect, I went to visit them, and I make a post, I made a post, and by the way, they made a movie out of that restaurant. It's called The Tender Bar, it's about a kid, long story, but yeah wonderful conditions, I never felt discriminated against, or taken advantage of, I was paid a good wage for the time, and they gave me respect, I did my job, I worked hard, and then one day the dishwasher, one of the busboys called in sick, and they took me out of the kitchen and they put me outside to bust tables, and then I instead of getting a promotion financially, sometimes I hope this serves as a testimony, a learning experience, because sometimes we think that you have to invest, when you give yourself, you don't have to expect that your going to get a lot, I was making 8 dollars an hour which is not a lot today, but from there, they took me out, and they put me outside and then outside I was making 2 dollars an hour, but you see that you have to be smart because I was thinking and I hope people can somehow in a way try to compare my situation with your situation, this is my situation, I will explain it to you, you have to take the good with the bad, this world is not about give me, give me, give me, you got to give yourself to, by volunteering, by doing something, and you'll get something, so anyway I was making more money, right, but I was taken outside, but when I was taken outside I said, okay I will be making less money, 2 dollars an hour, it sounds like a joke but it is true, but outside I am going to be able to communicate, I am going to be able to learn to engage with other people, to

grow my personality, to learn, different things, items, for example, I didn't know A1 Sauce is, A1 sauce is very popular here, the first time they asked me, hey can I get some A1, I didn't know what that A1 was, I asked my coworker, American kid, hey they asked me for A1, what is that? And he took me downstairs to the basement and showed me the bottle with the letter A and then the number 1, then I knew what it was, A1 steak sauce. I said I'm gonna learn not only new skill, I am going to be able to maybe my personality, develop language, making less money, I knew the long run I was gonna gain more experience, that pretty much works everywhere, sometimes we don't want to take a job that pays less, because we think we are going to make less money, but you know what, if it pays less, go for it. It's not give me, give me, give me, take the good with the bad, at the end you see I took something that was at that moment, maybe, are you crazy? Your making 8 dollars an hour! Now you're going to make 2? But, yeah I made 2, but, with the potential to be more, developing skill, learn, and yeah, but the work environment was great, that was the question right? The work environment was great, friendly, I never felt taken advantage of, the pay was fair, the reward was great to because the more they see me working hard, I felt more, you see this is what is great about thai country, because when people see your intentions, your willingness, your devotion, your hunger, your gonna get rewarded, no matter what.

Gianna: Definitely, thank you for that, after working for years in the restaurant sector, you started a transportation business, what motivated you to start your own business?

Jorge: Okay, see, this world and this country I think it was meant for business owners, really, it really is, do you know Antonion Banderas? Spanish, well known actor from Spain. He's well known in Hollywood, he made a lot of movies, he was interviewed and he says you know, in Spain, the dynamics of the society, everybody wants to work for the government, everybody wants to work for the government, but the United States he says, he even said, you know who I am? When I was in Hollywood I thought maybe they'd support an actor, producer, director, he says I am the owner of Uber, ah okay, at that moment he didn't know what Uber was. And he says you know what, I owe so many people money, I was that drowning in the pool of debt, but you know what I le[t going, and you know what now I own Uber, you know what congratulations, good for you, so the next day, Antonio Banderas, he googled it, he says wow Uber is a multi-million dollar transportation company, then he says this is why I love this country so much because the survey in Spain and 70% percent of students on the survey wanted to become a government official, or a government employee, but they did the same survey in the United States, and it was the opposite, the reverse, the 70% of the young people who were interviewed wanted to become business owners, you know, that's why he says we have the googles, we have the maps, it's a wonderful interview that he made, this country is made for people, business owners. Here's what happened, I started working the restaurant business, did everything from washing dishes, busing tables, cooking, bartending, supervising, you name it, I did everything, so then I became a supervisor, then I started for hotels, then I started learning the hospitality aspect of the restaurant business. More things, you know, rooms, and all that, so I wanted to pursue my dream to become a general manager of a hotel, but then, I reached the ceiling, and that moment I felt that I wasn't really going anywhere, and then I decided to start this transportation company without knowing anything about receiving, because if you think

about it I was coming from the restaurant business and I didn't know anything about the transportation business, I didn't have GPS, technology, we didn't have anything so I didn't know how much to charge, I didn't know where the airports were, I didn't know anything about, so my intention were only to take to the airport, that's why I decided to start this transportation company, and again, I didn't know where it was going to take me, that's why I say this country is made for business owners because the moment you start your own business that business can take you places that you will never be able to dream of, because I was sitting down here today with you at this beautiful hotel, you see the lobby, beautiful right, and we're providing our services here, and never in a million years I would've thought somehow that the business that I started back in 2002, was going to bring me to places like this, and the connections, right now we are currently servicing a big pharmaceutical company, and that is all due to the fact that we do things right, we're polite, on time, responsible, we do what we have to do to make sure the customers are happy, and yeah I mean I reached a ceiling point where I didn't feel like I was going anywhere in the hospitality industry, hotel business, and that's why I was motivated to start something new, I wasn't happy in the restaurant too much, because I'm an outdoor guy, I wanted to be outside, I didn't want to be in the restaurant business because I found myself working New Years Eve, New Years Day, Mother's Day, Easter, so I said okay I am going to start something new and I give it a chance and I gave it my all and that is what motivated me to start my own business back in 2002.

Gianna: That is incredible! That is very inspiring just to see you come from all of that and now you're doing all of this. It is a great place, I came in here and I was very shocked! While developing professionally you also found love in the UNited States, how did you meet your wife?

Jorge: My wife I met her, actually we were dating back in 92, so, she's from Chile, and like me of course I came here first at that time, and I was living by myself and I was able to fly back twice, but when I went back twice we connected again and again, I love my wife, I love her, she's my partner and she's been with me for over 30 years, and yeah while we separated even though we were dating in Chile, we were still connecting via letters, and maybe phone calls, but back then it was very expensive, so yeah I met her in Chile at an outing, and um we connected, we liked each other, fell in love, and then she came back in 95 to join me, now the fact that she came made it easier for me, we have support emotional, emotional support, companion that you can share confidential, you can confidentiality, it made it easier for me to be able to achieve my goals, because being lonely is tough you know in this country, having her with me it made it easier

Gianna: That sounds incredible, that's a great story, 30 years!

Jorge: And that story, I mean I should've brought my wife here for the interview because she is like me too, from Chile, and again didn't know any english, you know, very basic, and after working for a bagel store, and a pharmacy in Great Neck New York, two months, I said I think you have enough english to put some resumes together and send them to New York, via FedEx, you know companies, she ended up working in New York.

Gianna: Wow, that's great! Reading your biography it is clear that you love the United States, how do you live your citizenship?

Jorge: How do I live my citizenship, okay, oh, is, is, I met through the years a lot of people that became citizens, okay, but everytime they become citizens, they changed, they changed they talk, the way they walked, you know, there's something that changed them, I mean, of course, they feel proud, I feel proud with humility, I am still the same guy, I haven't changed, having the citizenship and being able to move freely around this great nation is a sense of pride that I cannot describe to you, my kids I hope they don't take it for granted, my kids are teenagers and when I go and get them from school, I tell them you don't understand how privileged you're to be born in this great nation, the greatest nation on the face of the earth, so free, this country is so free I tell people that even illegal immigrants are free here, you know, because the Constitution protects them, because they cannot be stopped by anyone unless they're breaking the law, if they're not breaking the law, the Constitution of this great nation protects them because they don't need to tell anybody who they're, where they live, or reveal their identity, you know, it's a civil right, so I love it, I love it, even the birth of this great nation, think about it, I always put George Washington as an example, this was a man who was tired of paying taxes, being abused by the system, and he decided to break free from the British empire, you know, so one day we're gonna be celebrating in a few days, the crossing, December 25th, I don't get tired by sharing this, but, December 25th, what do you do on December 25th, you open gifts, people celebrate, people are free, they don't work, but this guy said you know what I am not gonna celebrate nothing on December 25th, I am gonna go for it, he went for it and crossed the river without fear, with his heart filled with courage, and he did the impossible, you know, it's dark, you have no electricity, no method of communication, he crossed with a bunch of courageous people, and he crossed the river, and then he crossed, that act of courage, he took action he created this wonderful reaction of giving birth to this great nation, the United States, I always tell people don't be afraid to be courageous and just remember, George Washington, in the middle of the night on Christmas Day, crossed the river to free this land from the British empire, to make it this beautiful, free, blessed, abandoned, wonderful nation.

Gianna: Yep, couldn't have said it any better, that was great, besides being a successful business owner and a proud citizen, you're also a person of faith. How was the process of becoming a religious leader?

Jorge: Okay, the process of being a religious leader, you see, I don't consider myself a leader, but with humility, I can tell you that this is the nation that was founded under God, you know, every dollar, every coin you see, you see the word God in it, so, it is faith right there. Now, I, uh, you know I was born in a Christian environment, just by, you gotta, when you hit rock bottom, you don't know where to go, and the only way that you can look is up, and you have to have faith, and the unseen is what made me have the faith that I have today. I had a deportation order, because I stayed my Visa over, after doing everything I could to become a citizen, to become a permanent resident, I got the letter from the government telling me that I had to leave the country, so for me was very disappointing, you know, that's the message to anyone who would listen to this interview, is because when you lose faith, you surrender, you wanna give up,

and you wanna not continue, but you know with faith and conviction, we wrote a letter to the President of the United States, Mr. George W. Bush and we explained our situation to him in writing, handwriting, and we got a response, you see how great this nation is, look who am I? No one, just a single individual with a great dream and passion, and we wrote a letter to the President asking him that to reconsider our situation, I wanna make this very long story short, I don't wanna extend the situation, I received my rink card in the mail without seeing a immigration officer, nothing, so that really became, that was the moment when I said you know what I believe in God, I believe in never giving up, and having the hope, faith, for a brighter future, so when that came about, I said listen, I gotta do something about this, so then, I joined a church, which happens to be here, the Zarephath Christian Church, right next to the church there's a radio station, I started listening to star 99.1, and I go to this church here back then in Somerset, and I said you know what this country has given me so much, so it is time for me to give to the country, so then I started visiting inmates, volunteering for the Somerset County Jail, and then to visiting the sick at the Saint Peter's University Hospital, then there was a organization called Urban Impact, it was being led by Willio Falso who happens to be today the New York Yankees, teh Chaplain. SO he and a pastor created this wonderful organization that was actually getting inner boys from inner cities, Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Trenton, Camden, and they brought them all here for camps to help them transform their lives, change. I was so grateful not only because I was a recent permanent resident going to become a U.S. citizen, proud U.S. citizen. My wife and I both decided to give, so we donated all of our transportation to them, we took them to baseball games, events, museums, you name it. That was really what made me become, I don't consider myself a leader, I really don't, but I do try to give me a good example, you know, set a good example, so yeah people look up to me believe it or not, with humility, everything I have is because of opportunities that was given to me, has been given to me, and of course, God whose has made the way for me.

Gianna: Yeah, that's incredible, that's a great story, based on your immigrant experience. What is something you learned to never take for granted? I know you touched upon this, but if you want to emphasize more.

Jorge: Sure, things I don't take for granted right, well freedom number one, this country's free, this country's free, we don't know how free we are, unless we see other or experience other realities, my own country Chile right now is going through a very tough situation, it's free right, but you know the country is taken by the crime, here we can move free, you can talk on your phone free, you can go in and out different places, free to worship, no persecution, so you know, well regards of where we live, you know, life, health, love from our families, Matthew Perry just died, 9 million dollars he spent trying to conserve his life, and he still lost it, so life is precious, we should never take it for granted, and another thing that we should never take for granted, even right now, here, which we do, believe me we do, a lot of people do take this for granted, that's why they don't do anything about it, is the opportunities that this country offers to everyone regardless of your color, look at me you know, educational level, um, if you only have the will power and desire to go for something, you will get it, and I feel like people, not me specifically, people take for granted how great this country is, and how abandoned it is, the opportunities are there for everyone that lives here can go get it.

Gianna: Do you make a point of sharing your immigrant wisdom with your children?

Jorge: All the time, all the time, I always tell my kids where I came from, I rented a basement apartment, I had nothing when Veronica, my wife came, her and I were living in a basement apartment with no mattress, and we had nothing, we were hungry, we went to the supermarket to buy groceries, and um, we bought canned food, we came to the apartment we found out that we didn't have a can opener and it was so cold it was snowing, we didn't feel like going out again, so yeah I do that all the time, it's a great thing to not forget the past, you know I don't want to forget where I came from. I with pride, has say, that I came with nothing and now I have something, but you know what, again more than having stuff, things, cars, buses, money in the bank, big house, you know, regardless of all that, my true American dream is really talking to you right now. Having an interview by someone who was born here, making friends, donating, giving my time, volunteering, paying my taxes, going to church, being a good neighbor, being a good person, if somebody needs help I can go out there and help, that's my true American dream, people think the American dream means driving a fancy car, and being loaded, but no, I mean if somebody is working as a carpenter, and is paying taxes and being a good person, and buying fuel, paying his bills, and he's being responsible and lives here, and is making it, he's already a successful person.

Gianna: I like that point that you touched upon, don't forget where you come from, that is something I live by, I always like think about don't lose yourself, I always try to maintain my character, and resort back to who I am and where I came from as the reason why I am able to do the things I do and that is why I never thought of materialists items, that stuff never mattered, yeah I can have a nice car, but that doesn't symbolize who I am as a person.

Jorge: That's wonderful that you say that, stay humble, you know what, it is difficult to stay humble today, because if you look at social media it is the opposite of what we're talking about today, you see beautiful that use their filters, and they try to show the world a different reality, you know, I mean I wanna be real, I wanna be real, and you know what I wanna be private, but it's more difficult today to really show your true self, because if you do that then people, the world will see it as a weakness, but if your true to yourself and your humble, like you said, don't forget where you come from, I love that better then being an influencer.

Gianna: It's always been something, I see influencers and I'm always like you want to be authentic, you want to give the best version of yourself.

Jorge: I think that, today for example, when we say influencers, social media, yeah there's good and bad, there's good influencers, he was telling me about this kid, he has a restaurant chain, Mr. Beast, that's the kind of guy who is worth following.

Gianna: Yes and he helps the community, he does a lot of things for the community, I like him as well, that is something that when I look at influencers, are they helping people, are they disrespecting people, that really gives my perception on them

Jorge: He took me to his restaurant in the American Dream mall, you gotta go.

Gianna: Just as a final question, do you have a message to those who are afraid of immigrants coming into the United States?

Jorge: Oh that is a great question, yes, yes, I have a message to those who are afraid, I mean it's good to be afraid, and be productive of the nation we love, yes it's true, we cannot deny the message, that's a great question... What message would I send to those people who are afraid of immigrants wanting to come to the nation, don't be afraid. Please, do not be afraid, those were the words that Jesus Christ said, don't be afraid, God is in control, God will protect this great nation, God is the God of all creation, and he founded this nation to be prosperous, to be welcoming, even though we live in a time where we see people crossing the borders, and we see people that don't have the way of life that they wish they had, but if they come in, I am sure they will become like me, a contribution to the country, to the nation, these people constantly to fill in the jobs that people don't want to do, so, no let us not be afraid, I think this nation will remain strong as we continue to be welcoming, hard working people/

Gianna: That's a great message, thank you for your time, I'm Gianna McDermott I am here with Jorge, and he gave us a great interview today, I would like to thank him again for his time, so thank you and if there's any last words you'd like to say to anybody watching,

Jorge: Sure I want to thank Professor Cristobal for making this connection, I don't think that this is a coincidence, I think there's a purpose behind this interview, and I think Gianna for reaching out to me, and I just hope and pray that my interview can serve as a testimony of how an immigrant with a big dream can make it here, again I have a long way to go, I haven't reached the top yet, and just pray that this interview can help you, and help everyone that will listen to it.

Gianna: Thank you very much.

Jorge: My pleasure.