

FHS Oral History Project – Hana Son

Description:

Hana Son was born in Grozny, Chechnya, Russia, in 1986. Hana recounted her upbringing, particularly how the increasingly violent circumstances in Chechnya at the turn of the 1990s prompted her father to move the entire family to Kazakhstan. Hana explained her Koryo-Saram heritage and how it presented unique opportunities and challenges in all phases of her life, whether growing up in Kazakhstan or living in Orlando. Hana studied international relations at Kazakh National University by Al-Farabi, citing her passion for learning about different cultures and peoples as the underlying reason. In 2011, Hana earned her master's degree in business administration from a university in South Korea. She recalled the emotions she felt returning to her homeland. After her MBA, she worked as a contractor for the World Bank. Marrying her husband, who worked in the US Foreign Service, unexpectedly shifted Hana's career trajectory to suddenly representing the US abroad and executing its foreign policy mission. Hana shared details about the various roles and places she had worked, including Russia, Pakistan, and India. She reflected on how each location strengthened her emotional resiliency and deepened her understanding of the US, its global projection, and the politics and culture of each country she served in. In approximately 2016, Hana and her husband returned to civilian life. Since then, Hana has worked to promote awareness of her Koryo-Saram heritage in Central Florida, primarily through her involvement with the Central Florida Korean Association. Through her cultural work, Hana seeks to challenge stereotypes about the state of Florida, such as perceptions of "Florida Man." Additionally, Hana discussed how South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's declaration of martial law in 2024 has affected Koreans living in Central Florida. Lastly, Hana outlined her observations about Central Florida and its cultural changes and challenges over the past nine years.

Transcription:

00;00;00 - 00;00;16

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Son Hana on May 25th, 2025, in Orlando, Florida for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Can you please restate your name, date of birth and where you were born?

00;00;16 - 00;00;26

HANA SON: Hello, I am Son Hana, born in 1986, born in Grozny, Chechnya, Russia.

00;00;26 - 00;00;48

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So can you tell me about your childhood growing up in, and you can correct my pronunciation—how do you say the state you were born in? Chechnya. Can you tell me about your childhood growing up in Chechnya or the circumstances that led your family to be in Chechnya?

00;00;49 - 00;01;29

HANA SON: My parents were doctors. And my dad, after graduating from the university was sent there to work as a doctor. That was where he met my mother. I was born there, but I did not grow up there because, when I was five years old, the war was about to break out. So my parent, one of them was unfortunately killed, but my father was able to take us to Kazakhstan. And that was where I grew up, starting from the age of five.

00;01;29 - 00;01;31

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Were you an only child?

00;01;31 - 00;01;34

HANA SON: Oh, I do have a sibling. Yeah.

00;01;34 - 00;01;39

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And did your dad continue to practice medicine in Kazakhstan?

00;01;39 - 00;01;51

HANA SON: Yes he did. He was a doctor all his life. Unfortunately, he has passed away, shortly after COVID Pandemic. Yeah, but he has been a doctor all his life.

00;01;52 - 00;02;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what was it like, your childhood in Kazakhstan?

00;02;00 - 00;02;47

HANA SON: It was good. I was the very only Korean in the class. I grew up in the country where there are 125 ethnic minorities. However, I always had a trouble fitting in because I am Korean and everybody else is not. So growing up, raised by one single parent, it was a little bit challenging. However, you take a pride that we were able to maintain our Korean traditions and heritage. I am Koryo-Saram, not a Korean who was born in South Korea. And I am able to cook all the Koryo-Saram food. And I know I am the only one in Orlando when we meet, I am the only one who can cook that specific cuisine adjusted to the climate.

00;02;47 - 00;03;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And can you explain for our listeners what Koryo-Saram means? You were telling me earlier; it is the Korean diaspora, correct? Can you just explain that to people that may not know?

00;03;00 - 00;03;57

HANA SON: Koryo-Saram is one of the world's oldest Korean diasporas. They are similar to Hawaii, 122 years ago, the immigration to the Russian Far East started, more than 160 years ago and that includes the big wave during, March First Revolution against Imperial Japan. And those Koreans who ended up in the Far East were deported by Stalin in 1937. Each single Korean in the cattle trains and that was how we ended up in the Central Asia. And my parents got an education in Russia, cause that was where you could get it at the time. We are calling ourselves Koryo-Saram because we unfortunately did not have a privilege to be born and raised on the Korean peninsula.

00;03;57 - 00;04;15

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you mentioned how you were the only Korean in Kazakhstan. Can you share any specific examples of how difficult it was to integrate yourself in Kazakhstan society as a Korean?

00;04;15 - 00;05;15

HANA SON: It definitely has a lot of challenges because when you are the very only Korean in the class and in your town, there are so few of you, you always have to prove more or be— unfortunately, sometimes in order to be equal you have to be three times better in certain fields. But that is okay. I guess it is not really okay by American standards, but sometimes there is no choice. And I am very proud of my dad, who was able to persevere and did well. And he was able to provide us the childhood that we were able to get the education. I got myself a master's degree and, it was all because of my dad, who really put a lot of hard work and many hours to make sure we are educated, and that we are successful members of the society.

00;05;15 - 00;05;20

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: But by the same token, you mentioned how in Kazakhstan there was over a hundred and—

00;05;20 - 00;05;21

HANA SON: Twenty-five.

00;05;21 - 00;05;30

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Twenty five ethnic minorities. So I am assuming, correct me if I am wrong, that diversity also somewhat helped you.

00;05;30 - 00;06;20

HANA SON: It did actually, it did because we all minorities, we all support each other. And that is how I feel we are here in United States. We should be all supporting each other, not competing with each other, collaborating with each other, not making we all as Asians, as ethnic minorities, as representatives of color, we all might be a little different, but together we are stronger. And I really feel like coming from my experience in Kazakhstan, that was how all minorities sort of like, many of them were deported. Koreans were not the first ones, but so many of them were also deported. We all have to be together and work together for us to represent the power and success.

00;06;20 - 00;06;35

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: In what ways did Kazakhstan's society, politics, culture, sort of those larger developments affect you and your family?

00;06;35 - 00;07;47

HANA SON: Kazakhstan is a very relatively young country. It gained independence in 1991. That was when we came there. And I got Kazakh citizenship as a result, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Because it was being a developing country, of course, there were things that were getting better and better. And it is still developing country. But for such a young country, I do believe they do well. It is run by a professional diplomat as of right now. And the challenges? The challenges are that Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world, and the population is unfortunately small. It is only about twenty million people. So I guess, while there is more room for growth it is still also always constraints due to the geographical location of the country.

00;07;47 - 00;08;10

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: As you rightly pointed out the dissolution of the Soviet Union in '91 prompted Kazakhstan's independence. I am curious, I know you were very young at the time still, but do you recall any memories of the shift away from communism?

00;08;10 - 00;08;53

HANA SON: Oh, absolutely. It is definitely not a communist country anymore. And they are building their own identity and pride. The Kazakh language is now, you will see generationally, the twenties, they all speak Kazakh language. When I was growing up, it was not the case. I had to graduate from the Russian speaking school, because that was where all our books are in order to get education at the time, and they are not a communist country at all. They have never been, since independence, a communist country. And those values are not my generation. We do not even know what they are. It is just we were not exposed to it. We can read on the history about it, but we were not raised in the communist climate.

00;08;53 - 00;08;55

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. You were raising the post—

00;08;55 - 00;08;58

HANA SON: Yeah, exactly.

00;08;58 - 00;09;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You attended university in Kazakhstan, correct. What was the name of the institution?

00;09;03 - 00;09;13

HANA SON: It is the oldest, university in Kazakhstan. It is Kazakh National University by Al-Farabi. I was able to graduate from international relations.

00;09;14 - 00;09;15

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Why did you pick international relations?

00;09;16 - 00;09;33

HANA SON: I was always curious about cultures, different countries, diversity. And that really attracted me. And I studied language. At the time, there were no tutors. I studied English on my own. Like there were no Americans or, you know—

00;09;33 - 00;09;34

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How did you do that?

00;09;34 - 00;09;35

HANA SON: It was just—

00;09;35 - 00;09;37

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Pre-Internet. How did you do that?

00;09;37 - 00;10;14

HANA SON: You probably can tell I have an accent because I was not exposed to native speakers. So literally, the Soviet books, unfortunately, they were not quite, so you have to scramble. Actually, that is a good question. Myself, looking back, I do not know how I did that because it was a lot of perseverance. And I really [had] a passion, because I love the sound of English. And I was intrigued by the whole world out there. And I really enjoyed it. And foreign Affairs always attracted me.

00;10;14 - 00;10;17

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you said you then pursued a master's, correct?

00;10;17 - 00;10;38

HANA SON: Yes. I had a stint in the private sector after this. And then got my MBA in financial management. I did get in South Korea. That was where my exposure to South Korea came, [went] back to my historic roots. Right in the heart of Korea, Daejeon.

00;10;38 - 00;10;39

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What year was this?

00;10;39 - 00;11;08

HANA SON: I graduated in 2011. That was where I got my MBA. It is actually an American University. So it is an accredited university in the United States. So my MBA is accredited. Same with my international relations bachelor's degree. Anyway. I spent two years in South Korea getting my masters, and I felt, yeah, I am Korean.

00;11;08 - 00;11;18

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What was that like for you going back to your historic homeland, after being in the diaspora? What was that like for you?

00;11;18 - 00;11;56

HANA SON: It was actually very emotionally touching for me. I really felt, like, special. And I know when I brought my dad there to South Korea, it was very special for him because we are Koreans and there are so many Koreans out there, and we really felt reuniting with our historical motherland [was] very special. So I am grateful for the opportunity, really. And I feel like, we as a Korean diaspora, should be all united and proud of who we are and of our heritage and culture.

00;11;56 - 00;12;15

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: But on the other hand, however, I am sure when you went back to Korea, you realize that there were some differences because you grew up in Kazakhstan, you know. So can you just describe to me some of those differences?

00;12;15 - 00;13;22

HANA SON: Oh, absolutely. It really depends on the people who meet. I met really good people, and sometimes I met people that for whom it was very hard to accept us, because we were different. And they do not know the difference between Russia. They think we are

Russians, or they do not know much about Kazakhstan. So to them, or we might even look like Japanese or Chinese or so right there, on the street like in the cafeteria. There will be all sort of boxes that are totally wrong and missing the actual identity completely. But overall, for the most part, I really feel like people are very accepting and curious and kind. And I really felt the warmth in my heart that we all Koreans. And maybe it is just me being kind of in the honeymoon stage for the two years while there. You are doing projects, you are involved with the—so I was happy and but for the most part, I met really good people in South Korea.

00;13;22 - 00;13;28

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And so after 2011, once you graduated with your MBA, what did you do?

00;13;28 - 00;14;00

HANA SON: I worked for the World Bank as a contractor. I started my career there and I did not plan to get married, but then my husband showed up and played piano for me, and all my career plans went bust. So that was how I ended up to be American citizen. That was not something I ever thought about, but he really stole my heart. And that was how I am here in America.

00;14;00 - 00;14;06

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: But your husband was part of the—

00;14;06 - 00;14;07

HANA SON: American embassy in Kazakhstan.

00;14;07 - 00;14;10

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: American embassy in Kazakhstan, which then led you—

00;14;10 - 00;14;34

HANA SON: To become the spouse of the Foreign Service Officer. And that was quite an interesting life, I must say. We went to Russia after that, to Moscow and very challenging environments. In the Foreign Service, it is considered one of the hardest post to be, certainly to start with.

00;14;34 - 00;14;34

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah.

00;14;34 - 00;14;57

HANA SON: But it was very challenging. I cannot go into all the challenges faced there, but it made me stronger. I got prepared to just about any situation because it really trains your emotional resilience. It trains your endurance.

00;14;57 - 00;15;01

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You started in Russia, then you moved to Pakistan?

00;15;01 - 00;15;54

HANA SON: Yes. Pakistan was next challenging posting where terrorism was a real threat, unfortunately. I was working for International Narcotics and Drugs Administration, and my colleague was killed there unfortunately in a terrorist act. It was very sobering event for our entire embassy, for our entire mission. And there was a grief in our section, and I really felt like I could just be there for the guys because it was very, very tragic. You do not want that to happen to anybody. But again, that was one of the things that make me stronger. I feel like I always try to learn from every experience I have in life, whether it is a positive or a negative. So I feel like, that was challenging, but it was worth to be there and make a difference, especially in a country like...

00;15;54 - 00;15;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And then you went to India, correct?

00;15;57 - 00;16;00

HANA SON: Exactly. New Delhi.

00;16;00 - 00;16;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: As you mentioned, you cannot share too much detail about that life for security concerns. But can you give me a clearer picture of what you had to do specifically in those positions?

00;16;19 - 00;17;12

HANA SON: Well, I worked for three sections in the Foreign Service. So the spouse, consular, section, the Financial Management section, and International Narcotics and Drugs Administration and, also hosting the events, hosting the contacts at our house, accompanying my spouse. It was always part of the job that we all have to do. And it does come with constraints, and it does come with certain protocol rules and everything, but that was what we sign up for. I found it very fascinating and interesting, and I really enjoyed that. But now I am in the new chapter, and I enjoy my freedom, freedom of movement, freedom of speech because you cannot really talk to journalists freely when you are part of the government.

00;17;12 - 00;17;25

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How did the Russian invasion of the Crimea in 2014 influenced or impacted your Foreign Service occupation?

00;17;26 - 00;18;44

HANA SON: Well, personally, I was really struck, as a war survivor, [a] similar [thing] happened to my family. That really triggered the trauma, unfortunately. That my the environment very challenging to work in, during Crimea invasion because everything went sour, and all the work we put in to building trust and to building relationships and to building partnerships, unfortunately, was just fading away. American [inaudible] were getting closed. That is all public information. It was just sad to see all the work done, just disappear in front of you. And now it is even worse. But I still hope that one day things will get better because it is just very unfortunate that all these lives, including Koryo-Saram on both sides. There is a famous actor, Ukrainian, Pavlo [Li], who was killed in on being Ukrainian citizen. There are

famous, Russian citizens who are Koryo-Saram, just follow the order as a part of military. So on both sides, people are dying. And it is very unfortunate.

00;18;44 - 00;19;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Two questions. I know you have emphasized how these experiences sort of strengthened your emotional resiliency and character, which is important and beautiful.

00;19;00 - 00;19;02

HANA SON: Probably aged me a little bit too.

00;19;02 - 00;19;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, certainly. I could imagine that. But I have two questions. What did you learn about those countries that you served in, so Russia, Pakistan, India? And also what did you learn about the United States serving in those positions?

00;19;19 - 00;20;02

HANA SON: My husband was a public affairs officer. We promote the values, democracy, all the best of America represents. So I learned that unfortunately it can be fragile, and we have to fight for it every single day. We cannot take it for granted or else it will be slipped away or taken from us. We should always be on guard and protect it because freedom is not free. We have to do our best, every single one of us, to make sure we do not lose it. All the values America build up for years, can just disappear if we are not doing anything.

00;20;02 - 00;20;07

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And when did you and your husband retire from the Foreign service?

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HANA SON: He retired a few years ago. But now we are citizens, we are residents of Florida. We have been residents of Florida for thirty years because we own the property here. And I am a proud Floridian, representing diversity, representing Koreans.

00;20;37 - 00;20;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: To clarify the chronology, because you say thirty years, but when did—so was that when you also—

00;20;45 - 00;20;46

HANA SON: Born.

00;20;46 - 00;20;51

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Came to Florida?

00;20;51 - 00;21;15

HANA SON: Oh, no. We married in 2012. So we came a few years ago. I cannot exactly recall the exact time we came to Florida. Once we finished in India, we came to the Florida. And that was where we have established—we have a house in Colorado. Sometimes during hurricane seasons, we go there. But we are residents of Florida.

00;21;16 - 00;21;26

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So is it fair to say you have been in Florida for fifteen years almost, twelve years?

00;21;27 - 00;21;27

HANA SON: Nine years.

00;21;27 - 00;21;53

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Nine years. Okay, perfect. You know history, we need the dates. So, so you say, now you are citizens. And so what have you done? How have you transitioned out of those very intense foreign relations occupations into now more civilian life? What have you done here in Orlando for the past, since you retired?

00;21;53 - 00;23;34

HANA SON: Pretty much everybody who served the country has a transition period, which is a bit challenging because it is a bubble we live in that is kind of far from the real conditions. It was a pandemic that hit, unfortunately, everything was on a lockdown. And I was not able to visit my dad, and unfortunately, he passed away and that was probably my biggest trauma because I was not able to say goodbye to him. He was in Kazakhstan, and I could not visit him. And there were all these restrictions and all this uncertainty, and I could bring the virus in, so it was all that. Transitioning, that probably was the most challenging part. But other than that, I will be honest, I really enjoy being a free citizen of the free country and just enjoying that no air pollution is here. Just enjoying the good weather, enjoying the fact that I can go anywhere without having a permission signed or asking for official authorization to go to a certain place and, meet people I want and talk to a journalist, which is speak my mind and talk about myself without being worried that I represent more than—and it is not about me. Never really. So all these things are maybe American citizens are taking for granted. But once you have been in the Foreign Service, you will learn to appreciate all these opportunities. So I am really appreciating all the American freedoms that we can have here in living in America.

00;23;34 - 00;23;41

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What have you done in Central Florida to promote awareness about your culture?

00;23;41 - 00;24;42

HANA SON: Koryo-Saram Korean I just feel like, it is important for all of us, as Koreans, to be promoting our culture more, to represent our culture and to have representation on all levels. I feel like even though I do not have a privilege to be born and raised in Korea, I am still trying to be active. I am still trying to contribute, and I hope to inspire other Koreans to do the same. I have been volunteering with the Central Florida Korean Association here in Central Florida and, I feel like there is a lot more that we can do, but there is definitely a huge potential in Orlando, where there are so many of us, but we are underrepresented. So that is what I am trying to address. We need to get more active. We need to be out there more. We need to talk to journalists. We can do that just, right now we are a little quiet, but we can do more. We are able to do more.

00;24;42 - 00;24;48

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And can you give me some examples of what exactly you have done to promote this culture?

00;24;48 - 00;25;59

HANA SON: For example, as somebody whose heritage comes from March First Revolution, which is something even the younger generation probably need to increase awareness about, I give speech, I participate in the event, and it is a historic event. It is not something that, kind of a KPOP or kind of like all the dancing. It has a historic meaning that Korea was, they were Koreans who had a struggle for independence, for their identity from imperial power. And as my ancestors were part of that. So that was where my identity is. That part of history is common with South Korea, with the Korean peninsula in general. So I feel like that I was participating proactively in promoting that. But there is more, of course, that can be done. In the city event, I, of course, represent Koryo-Saram as well, because that is my heritage. Koryo-Saram Koreans. We all should work together as Koreans to promote everything Korean.

00;25;59 - 00;26;04

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How did you discover the Central Florida Korean Association?

00;26;04 - 00;26;32

HANA SON: I found it myself. I looked it up because they were doing the event the March First. I thought it was important to be a part of it and to represent Koryo-Saram Koreans. I thought that was important also for us in general, to be representing Koreans in general. Like, really we need to work on that. I found it online.

00;26;32 - 00;26;40

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I am curious when you talk about Korea, and all the Koreans, of course, there is also the North Korea.

00;26;40 - 00;26;40

HANA SON: Yes. There is.

00;26;40 - 00;26;56

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So just please explain, maybe not you specifically, but just generally how to integrate them into the cultural programs that you all are doing.

00;26;56 - 00;27;42

HANA SON: I hope to find more North Koreans in Central Florida. As of right now I do not have any I know of. I am sure there are here, though, because we are a little insular. There are North Koreans. There are six examples of successful integration into United States or into South Korea. They are in, I cannot speak for the government, but North Koreans are the same Koreans, they are people, unfortunately, brought up in a regime filled with propaganda and filled with disinformation. But they also are proud Koreans and with the right kind of exposure, with the right community, they can do well as well.

00;27;42 - 00;27;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You know, Just a few months ago, South Korea experience—the president got impeached.

00;27;52 - 00;27;52

HANA SON: Oh, yeah.

00;27;52 - 00;28;09

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And he tried to implement martial law. I mean, very unprecedented and then tumultuous events [followed]. How has that event in the peninsula impacted Koreans in Central Florida?

00;28;09 - 00;29;24

HANA SON: Unfortunately, I feel like there was a direct impact. I feel like, even though many of us are American citizens already and do not really vote, we are still very deeply affected. And just like in South Korea, we have divisions over the candidates, and the parties. Unfortunately, I do see it in our community as well. Politics does divide. I am trying to address it. For me, it is easier because I probably kind of like more neutral. I am not really raised in South Korea. I am really trying my best to be that neutral force. Emotions are very strong. And the elections are coming in June, so it is a little heated and it causes unnecessary divisions, which I think especially [as] American citizens, we should not have, we should be together. We should be united. And we cannot do much about Korean society being divided as of right now. But we can do something about our community to make sure we do not have this animosity or divisions because of politics.

00;29;24 - 00;29;32

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And how are you planning on addressing, maybe navigating the elections in June?

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HANA SON: I know that the Association were looking into an opportunity to also have elections like the overseas elections to conduct that. And they will be a voting booth. I am not quite involved with that because I am staying away from politics, like completely. That is what our association does. But I also, know that, well, there are many that probably that will not vote because they are American citizens and from what I know, I do believe that dual citizenship is not quite allowed with South Korea and America.

00;30;13 - 00;30;47

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I met you at an Asian cultural event, [the] Asian-American, Pacific Islander [AAPI] Celebration Month event [hosted by the Asian American Chamber of Commerce]. Are you involved with sort of organizations that serve Asian Americans more broadly, or were you there just as a civilian? Like, what is your role within the broader Asian community not just Koreans?

00;30;47 - 00;31;28

HANA SON: I actually am reaching out. And I would like especially heritage, all the non-profits that are related to heritage, I really would like to increase my and, willing to contribute, obviously financially and my volunteer time, because I do believe it is important. Our heritage is important, and that is what I am trying to shift the focus from politics to heritage and culture. So I know there is a lot there is a wealth of organizations in Orlando, and I am so grateful to Orlando for being what it is. I am just happy, and I am very thrilled to have this network of very enthusiastic people who care.

00;31;28 - 00;31;41

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And speaking of Orlando, you have been here now for nine years. So almost a decade, which is a long time. From your perspective, how has Orlando changed culturally?

00;31;41 - 00;32;38

HANA SON: Oh, it has been actually impressive because, obviously when I came, of course pandemic also affected the perception because you really could not do anything. And I recently met a person from New York. They were impressed themselves when they came. And like it really grows every year. And I know twenty years ago, Asian Heritage Month was not even celebrated. So it started about twenty years ago. And look where we are now. There is more to do. There is always a room for growth, but it is very impressive what we are doing, and we should really keep doing a good job because it makes our community richer, happier. And it is our heritage. We should be proud of that. Really. All of us. Not just Koreans, all Asians, all people of all ethnicities, all the richness of this diverse network that we have, has to be celebrated in my mind.

00;32;38 - 00;32;44

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What challenges does Orlando face today?

00;32;44 - 00;33;25

HANA SON: Well, as a city urban area with a highly educated population in our state, it is a little different from other areas and I feel like it is important to keep our vibe, and it is a lot of work, as I said, to make sure it is not taken away from us because a lot of work was put in to make it what it is and to be where we are. But we should never take it for granted and should never let it go. It requires a lot of perseverance and work to keep it going as it is.

00;33;25 - 00;33;29

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From your perspective, how do you think Orlando will change in the next twenty five years?

00;33;30 - 00;34;27

HANA SON: I see a lot of potential. I am always thrilled to meet, like every time I go out, new people and full of enthusiasm and full of good ideas and I feel like we are growing. We are not quite New York yet, but we are getting there. But I feel like there is a lot of potential and it is all capable and inspiring people come to Orlando. I really feel like this is our island to where we can thrive and inspire each other. And I do see a lot of potential in the city, in a way, it is actually better than New York because the traffic is still better. We are actually in a nice spot

where we can take pride and really be a good environment for people, young people and educated people.

00;34;27 - 00;34;38

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How has your Koryo-Saram heritage influenced your perspective on life generally and living in Central Florida specifically?

00;34;38 - 00;36;34

HANA SON: Well, it certainly made me appreciate the heritage that we kept. We were able to preserve our heritage, which is our oldest Korean newspaper outside Korean Peninsula and the oldest outside Korean Peninsula, professional Korean theater that is in Kazakhstan. And of course, our cuisine, which is unique. We were able to maintain that and to preserve our connection to the ancestors. So I feel like that made me really appreciate the heritage and we paid a high price. It came really at a high price because the environmental, unfortunately, was not quite as favorable. Still, we were able to do that. And I know here it is a little bit easier because I feel like we are in the foreign country and nobody prohibits us to keep our heritage alive, so that is why I feel like we need to do more. And living in Orlando in particular, or like living in Florida in particular, made me feel like, like here I meet so many new people with different backgrounds, and I feel like we enrich each other by being different, by bringing something new to the plate, by having all these diverse experiences. So it enriched me. And I am proud to have connection. I even look a little bit like Chinese, and I am proud of that. You know, some people think I may be Japanese, and it is hard to tell. And the Central Asian, those identities, our mission, and I feel proud that I can fit so many spots.

00;36;34 - 00;37;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I am curious, part of your life, you worked in the Foreign Service. So you were a proxy of the American government to certain extent. You are an immigrant, and now you live in Florida. So what does America and Florida mean to you?

00;37;03 - 00;38;45

HANA SON: I must confess, when I came first to Florida, I was a little, there was a transition period where I felt like, it was a little different, in terms of like, the values promoted. Of course, we represent the very best values of America. Sometimes we tend to be in the bubble and sort of like that is how we view it. But there is a reality that unfortunately, sometimes things are not quite as good. And we have to fix them. We have to address them; we have to work on them. So Florida, when I first came, I was a little bit of challenge to see that it was actually not quite, let's say, by book. But after a while I really got adjusted. And again, I find so many inspiring people that was really, truly, led by example and serve such good community roles. And I feel like there is so much out there and there is so much that can be done. And I feel like, Florida actually has way more. It might get some wrong reputation, but it is very unfair. And we have to fight those stereotypes because there are lots of sophisticated, lots of progressive thinkers there, lots of doers here, lots of active people. And we kind of have to promote that because that is who we are. And unfortunately, not everybody knows, like out of state, it is hard. There are still unnecessary stereotypes, which are very unfair, because there is so much more beneath what it seems like from the outside.

00;38;45 - 00;38;52

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. And if you are referring to stereotypes like “Florida Man” and “Florida Women.”

00;38;52 - 00;39;38

HANA SON: Exactly. That is exactly what I am talking about. So we have to fight that because we do have instruments and tools, and we have real figures that we can present. I was impressed with Orlando crowd. My husband recently also met Orlando World President. So all these people, they have so much substance, and I feel like people do not know it. And we have to promote such people. We have to know that this is who we are. This is what kind of people we have. And there was just so much more. Unfortunately, disinformation we have to fight that.

00;39;38 - 00;39;53

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Lastly, if someone is listening to this recording fifty or a hundred years from now, what do you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;39;53 - 00;41;36

HANA SON: About the Koryo-Saram Korean culture. I want them to know that 162 years ago, Koreans immigrated, but they still manage, despite hardship, to maintain their heritage. Unfortunately, it was broken. It was not fully preserved, but still they managed. And I feel in Florida, it is important to remember that we all come with a very rich heritage that we should not forget. We should cherish, and we are all each single one of us is a part of our community. And we all have something to bring in, something valuable. And we should continue doing that. And, so, hundred years ago, that is a good question. I am very grateful that you guys exist. And you make the historic recording because, I do not want anybody's heritage, not just Korean, to become irrelevant for next generation, for generations to go like, hundred years from now. I really do not want us to become irrelevant. I really feel like we need to promote, maintain and be proud of who we are. Of course, fully being integrated Americans as well. But it was very important to not forget our roots, where we came from and what we represent and all the good things that each culture represents, it is enriching, it is really enriching the fiber of our network, community.

00;41;36 - 00;41;46

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Son Hana, thank you so much for taking some time out of your day to share a little bit of your life story. I really appreciate it. Thank you.

00;41;46 - 00;41;50

HANA SON: Thank you for having me. It was my pleasure and honor and privilege.

00;41;50 - 00;41;51

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Thank you.

00;41;51 - 00;41;52

HANA SON: Thank you for your hard work.