FHS Oral History Project – Adrianna Tran

Description:

Adrianna Tran was born in Pine Hills, Florida, in 1998. She recalled memories of her upbringing, particularly the stories she learned about her family's Vietnamese heritage. Her maternal grandparents left Vietnam with their four children in 1985, experiencing the aftermath of the fall of Saigon in 1975. Additionally, Adrianna recounted her schooling experience across Central Florida and how she navigated her ethnic differences during this time. In 2017, Adrianna attended Florida State University (FSU), majoring in International Relations and English. Listening to National Public Radio (NPR) almost daily with her father while he took her to school sparked a curiosity to learn more about politics, culture, and the world around her, which subsequently inspired her to pursue such careers in college. After graduating from FSU in 2020, Adrianna worked for several institutions, including the Florida State House of Representatives as legislative aide for Rep. Camille Brown, Barry University Law School as the Director of Community Outreach and Advancement, and her current (c. 2025) position at Community Legal Services as the director of governmental relations in Orlando. She explained her motivations and roles in each occupation, particularly how her ethnic background informed her approach in her most recent position at Community Legal Services, where she helped immigrant and minority families in Central Florida with legal issues. Relatedly, Adrianna joined the Asian American Chamber of Commerce in 2021, discussing her involvement with the organization. Lastly, Adrianna shared her broader observations about Florida, its cultural changes, continuities, and challenges since the early twenty-first century.

Transcription:

00;00;03 - 00;00;19

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Adrianna Tran on May 21st, 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;19 - 00;00;43

ADRIANNA TRAN: Hi, my name is Adrianna Tran. My date of birth is October 29th, 1998, and I was born and raised here in the Central Florida area. When I was born and I lived in Pine Hills, we moved to Ocoee when I was about three or four, and now I have kind of moved around, but I have generally been in Central Florida since.

00;00;43 - 00;00;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Can you tell me about your childhood growing up in Central Florida in the late 2000, early 2010s, particularly as an American but Vietnamese household and heritage.

00;00;57 - 00;03;57

ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah, growing up we had always been told all the different stories from our grandma, who lived with us at the time, my mom and my dad, and about their experiences coming to this country. You know, there wouldn't be a day when you're sitting at the dining table, it was "Oh, well, you should be lucky that we are here because we did all these things to come to this country." We were constantly reminded of the stories and the heritage and the culture that we were raised in and the folks who came before and how they got here. That was a

very big core tenant. I grew up in Ocoee, for the most part. I went to Ocoee Elementary, Ocoee Middle School. I was there when it was a brick building, and they've knocked it down since. I mean everything from going to a friend's house for the first time and being like, “what is this?” and they are like “this is a SpaghettiO.” You know, even though I am American, I had never had a SpaghettiO before. Seeing somebody use a dishwasher for the first time, I did not know that they wash dishes, I thought it was a drying rack. To my amazement, I was like, “all the dishes in here are dirty?, why are the dishes dirty?” Well, you put them in and you put the soap in and then it cleans them. Definitely raised up in a culture that was very much American and also very much Vietnamese. Not forgetting who we were and experiencing a lot of different things. You know, my mom and my dad, they went to high school here in the United States. So their upbringing was also kind of a mix of the two cultures and it was always interesting to see, how it blended together. And I guess I did not really realize until I was older that that wasn't something that everybody experienced in their households, or some of the things that I had were unique experiences. Everything from my grandma's paranoia and maybe that's part American and part leaving a communist country. Her saying, “well I just want you in the backyard, do not look at me, make sure that you're always in sight, I need to be able to see you”. And I'd be like, “well, why cannot we play in the front yard?”, “No, you cannot do that. I need to see you, you can play in the front yard when I can go to the front yard.” So all these different fears, right? Even something in the household where I would say, “hey what's the alarm code?” And she would say “shhh do not say it.” And she would tell us in Vietnamese and she would whisper very quietly, and I am like, “grandma, they cannot hear through the walls.” And she would say, “yes, you never know.” So it was a lot of those types of stories, a lot of lessons where she would talk about her experiences. “Oh well do not play in a box outside on the street, because my sister's friend did that in Vietnam, and she got run over by a car.” And as a kid, you're like, “oh my gosh, that's terrible of course I am not going to do that.” But as an adult you're like, wow these are truly her experiences of being raised up with these stories that seem so out there, but are things that she really went through.

00;03;57 - 00;04;05
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And to that point, what year did your parents leave Vietnam?

00;04;05 - 00;05;38
ADRIANNA TRAN: I am not as familiar with my dad's timeline of when they had all gotten here, but I know with my mom, they had gotten here in 1985. It was my *bà nội* and my *ông nội*, so my grandma and my grandpa on my mom’s side, they brought their four children at the time over to the United States in 1985. They had tried to leave in 1975. They were residents of Saigon, but after Saigon fell and they tried to escape, was arrested, and he was in jail for a few years. By the time they were able to leave, it was in ’85 and my great aunt had married an American contractor and she moved them and sponsored them to come over here. When they came, they came here to the Central Florida area. They lived in Pine Hills. They lived in Ocoee. Pine Hills, where they spent the majority of their childhood and they got a lot of help, received a lot of help from the local faith organizations and nonprofits, getting them fridges. There's an Orlando Sentinel article that my mom still has, and it was little pictures of them crawling all over the furniture, new fridges, new dishwasher that we did not use and things like that. So yeah, they came here in ’85 and I think we've been in the Central Florida area ever since.

00;05;38 - 00;06;03
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And can you share any other specific stories that your grandma or your grandma or your grandparents shared with you growing up about life in Vietnam? And it was interesting how, they attempted to escape in ’75 when Saigon fell, but then they were there for ten years. So they did get to see that that transition of communist Vietnam. So just talk to me about that.

00;06;03 - 00;08;35
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah. You know, and my, grandma and my grandpa had passed when we were younger. She had been there when the French were in Vietnam. So she had seen that evolution of Vietnam. She saw after the Vietcong had taken over and coming here to America, everything since then. So a lot of her stories were not great. You know, she told me a story about her brother who used to own kind of a, like a pool hall, like billiards, over there and sold alcohol and had the pool tables, and the community would just come out, and that's where they would go. And when the Vietcong had taken over they shut down the bars, said hey, we do not want these kind of establishments anymore. Two weeks later, they pop up same exact thing. So stories like that, that she had experienced, stories about her running through the rice fields and being a tomboy. You know, there was a kid. She she always likes to tell the story. It was one of my favorites. He bullied her, and they all said “my *đầu bò* my *đầu bò*”, which means my cow head because her name's My and her mother was a butcher, and they owned, kind of like a bed and breakfast. And so she was like, “yeah and I go and I punch that kid.” And I was like, “you did what? Why?”. “Yeah, I punched that kid.” And she said, she jumped on top of him and she was just swinging and swinging and swinging, they had to drag her off of this kid. And she was like, “yeah, later I found out that he had actually had a crush on me.” So that did not really work out. But it was just funny to see all of her stories and hear all of her stories. And even when they had come over to this country, she has so many stories about working at Disney in the hotels. Her and my grandpa had two to three jobs each working at Disney in the kitchen and working at the hotels around just to make ends meet. You know, her coming home really late at night, getting six hours of sleep, waking up at four or five in the morning to go to her next job and go clean rooms at the hotels. So growing up, we've always been very grateful and very grounded because of their stories and, and the lives that they lived, because I would not be able to be where I am today without the work that they had done and the work that my parents had done.

00;08;35 - 00;08;58
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. And similarly, you mentioned how your parents had a mixed experience as well in terms of, they grew up in Vietnam, but they also came here for high school. So I am curious when you were older did they impart any sort of advice on how to navigate your Vietnamese ness and also your Americanness.

00;08;59 - 00;11;37
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah. You know, it is so funny because that's something that I think I have been very active in thinking about and reconnecting with because growing up there was no thinking about it. We are Vietnamese. We are American. Right? There was no question. There wasn't, “hey, we need to make sure our kids are Vietnamese enough. We need to make sure they are American enough.” There would be the times where before we would go over to a friend's

house when we were younger, they would say, “hey, just a heads up, here's a couple of things that you're not used to that you might experience at this house.” Or certain things like that but I do not think they ever thought, “oh we need to make sure that our kids are, tied to the culture.” And I think that's why so many people, in my generation, they just aren't connected to the culture. When I go out and I speak Vietnamese to people at all the great local businesses here in Central Florida, Vietnamese businesses, they go, “oh, wow, I cannot believe your Vietnamese is so good. How is your Vietnamese so good?” And I just kind of laugh. But a lot of people my age, they just do not speak Vietnamese. So whether that's kids going to school and forgetting the language, like a lot of my family members, or just not using it in the household, or maybe wanting to distance themselves from their Vietnamese culture in an attempt to fit in to American culture and have better job opportunities. Everything the stigmas, the, the fear that you won't fit in, I guess, and even growing up around here. I had a similar story about a little boy who had elementary school, kind of teased me and made fun of me. The kids would sometimes say, “oh, well know you have a flat face. You have small eyes. Oh, yeah. Your parents probably named you by throwing pots and pans down the stairs, right.” And at the time I was like, “oh yeah, well, you have a big forehead and you need to use lotion and all these things. It was just like, ha ha, kids going back and forth bullying each other making comments as you do as a kid and then now I am older, I am like, oh my gosh, wait a minute, that was racist. They actually said a racist comment. I do not think they had meant anything. I do not think that those kids were inherently racist or had any issues with Vietnamese people or Asian people in general, but I think that's something that they had maybe learned from their parents, right? Their parents, their grandparents, who were teachers and firefighters and police officers. So thinking about that now as an adult is a little bit concerning. You know, I definitely think we're moving away from that, but I definitely do not think we can ignore the fact that those things exist.

00;11;37 - 00;11;44
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. Absolutely. And you grew up in your household, you all spoke Vietnamese or mixed?

00;11;44 - 00;12;56
ADRIANNA TRAN: We kind of spoke a mix of both. So we would speak, growing up mostly Vietnamese. And then when I got to elementary school and started having to go to school, we started speaking a lot more Violetish or Vietnamese and English in the house. You know, my grandma still has a Vietnamese accent. My mom and my dad for the most part sound American. Honestly, their accents are very American. Maybe a little bit mix here and there, it'll come out. But I actually did not even know my name was Adrianna until I was about five years old, right before I went to kindergarten. My name is Kan. My Vietnamese name Adrianna Kan Bo Tran. So they would call me Kan or Kan Kan was a nickname that I had too and I never knew. And right before elementary school. Oh, hey, by the way, your name is Adrianna, here's how you spell it, and this is the name you're going to look for when you're looking at the nametags on the desk. And I was like, “oh, okay, cool. I have a I have a different name.” So that's always just kind of like a funny thing that I experience that I do not think a lot of kids who are, purely American households really think about.

00;12;56 - 00;12;59

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. Absolutely. Were you an only child?

00;12;59 - 00;13;07
ADRIANNA TRAN: No. I have a little brother whose name is Andre. He does not have a Vietnamese name.

00;13;07 - 00;13;10
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What did your parents do for a living?

00;13;10 - 00;14;34
ADRIANNA TRAN: So my dad has always worked, in kind of like computer stuff. It is so funny because when you're a kid, you do not really know what your parents do. But as you get older you kind of learn more. But he always worked on computers and infrastructure, building the computers. He did a lot of work, and he still does in higher education and computers. So helping them with their technology infrastructure, helping them pick out the best security Wi-Fi, how to put the internet cables throughout the buildings. So he does a lot of that stuff. My mom always worked in, medical. I think she always wanted to be a doctor. But it just never really worked out that way. And she works, in medical administration. So she's worked her way up from being, like, a medical assistant, and now she's a director of operations. So it was been cool to see her growth. And growing up she had us when she was probably 20, very early 20s, maybe 20, 21. So she was kind of in and out of school. She did not finish her AA maybe until I was about, I do not know, I do not even remember when. Probably high school. We graduated with our bachelor's degrees at the same time. I remember throwing her a big party and kind of surprising her with it. So that was really nice to be able to do. But just raising a family is more of a priority at the time.

00;14;34 - 00;14;40
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. You mentioned how you went to Ocoee Middle School. What high school did you go to?

00;14;40 - 00;14;59
ADRIANNA TRAN: I went to Olympia High School. So a little bit, further down. We had moved. My parents got divorced when I was in middle school so we ended up moving. And they are still good friends. They literally bought houses in the same neighborhood. Yeah. We ended up moving over to Olympia.

00;14;59;04 - 00;15;01;18
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What year did you graduate? What class are you a part of?

00;15;01 - 00;15;03
ADRIANNA TRAN: I graduated Olympia in 2017.

00;15;03 - 00;15;30
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Class of 2017. You shared that story of when you were in elementary of at the time, you did not know then but looking back at that racist encounter and the back and

forth, the banter. In high school, did that change? Did you experience anything different, similar? What was your experience like?

00;15;31 - 00;16;28
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah. You know, I do not think I really experienced, kind of that same level. Right. And I think as kids got older, they kind of had a better understanding. And growing up my grandma always calls me, "*thằng ngu*" which kind of means jackass. But they always said that I had a really quick mouth. So in elementary school, it was like you fired at me, I will fired back at you. But I was also really shy for a very long time. So in middle school, I made a choice to not be shy anymore. And I started doing theater, and I just loved it. And it got me out of my shell. And throughout high school, I kind of continued that. So I think by the time I got to high school, it was like, yeah, you can say whatever you want, but I am going to make a comment back and you're going to be sitting there with your mouth open. Most of the time we end up being friends, I do not think I had anyone who inherently was like, oh, let's bully this girl, you know what I mean? But I think a lot of that culture had also gone away by that time.

00;16;28 - 00;16;38
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Did you see an increase in Vietnamese students in your schools or was it relatively the same?

00;16;39 - 00;17;49
ADRIANNA TRAN: I do not really think I did. I mean elementary school, I was probably one of the only Vietnamese or even AAPI kids. Okay at Ocoee Elementary. When I got to a Ocoee middle school, it was really weird because a lot of the Vietnamese kids would just start coming up to me and already know my name and start talking to me, and I am like, I do not know who you are. Like, I am glad that we feel this sense of community, but like, this is kind of weird, right? And then high school, I think I saw people around, but I do not know what it is culturally or whatever, but I always tell my friends there's a lot of AAPI people who only hang out with other AAPI folks or tend to their friend groups tend to mostly be AAPI. And then you have the AAPI people who their friend groups are not typically, any other AAPI groups, or if it is maybe one or two, but it was not like the entire group. I do not know what cultural phenomenon that is, but I feel like there are those two groups, like, you only hang out with Asian people, or you hang out with no Asian people. But yeah, I do not really think there was much of an increase throughout. Yeah. I do not know, I just maybe it was not a big enough community.

00;17;49 - 00;18;01
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: It's interesting that you mention that. And certainly I think that, you can see that across other cultures as well. What camp do you fall in?

00;18;01 - 00;18;46
ADRIANNA TRAN: I feel like growing up here in Central Florida has been so diverse. Every walk of life, every background race, religion, nationality everything, right? But I do not think I ever really had too many AAPI friends growing up or even now. You know, I have a handful, probably. But I am also really close with my family. And I hang out with them, and I have a ton of cousins and stuff that are we're all around the same age. But yeah, I would say I usually do not typically, not on purpose. I am a part of a lot of AAPI groups, I am part of the Asian-

American chamber. I am part of the Greater Orlando Asian-American Bar Association. I do not know, kind of turned out to role out that way.

00;18;46 - 00;18;54
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So you graduated high school 2017. Did you go directly to college? What was sort of your life path then?

00;18;54 - 00;20;06
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah. So I, graduated. Growing up I always love to listen to NPR with my dad on the way to school. And I would always ask him questions and he would quiz me. I think that's where I first started to fall in love with politics and with government. And I love reading, I always loved reading. I have always been great at writing or tended to like to write. So I was like, well I like the government stuff. I like the writing and reading stuff. Maybe I'll go into journalism, maybe I'll go into politics. So I end up going to Florida State University for my undergraduate degree. So I graduated, weirdly enough, December of 2020, when the world was falling apart during Covid and I got a degree in international affairs and English. It was the perfect place because everyone's like, why did not you go to UCF? But I wanted somewhere that was far enough where I could have my own space, learn how to be my own person, and be more independent, but also close enough where, I could still visit. I am the oldest daughter of an immigrant family, so a lot of the things tend to lean on me, and I think I just wanted to maybe see who I was without a lot of that pressure expectation.

00;20;06 - 00;20;24
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, that that makes sense. Before getting into your college experience, since you mentioned at NPR, that's very interesting. You know, as an aside, my research currently is in radio history. So anytime radio gets mentioned, I just have to ask.

00;20;25 - 00;20;25
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah.

00;20;25 - 00;20;58
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So I am just curious. What did you learn about the state of the Florida, the state of the Union, so to speak, listening to NPR daily. In other words did you feel like that provided a space to sort of understand to be American or something like that? I may I might of frame that question poorly, but I think you get what I am saying.

00;20;58 - 00;23;10
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah. No, I think it absolutely did. And of course, growing up my family, they are the ultimate patriots. My mom has American flag everything, she has a 9/11 memorial in her house, and she has a statue of a bald eagle with an American flag in her house. Like, that's who we are. We were raised to be very grateful to be here in this country and grateful to all the freedoms and liberties that being an American provided us. So listening to NPR and I think part of my dad's reasoning for it was it was very “here's the news, here's the facts, here's what's going on.” You know, now it was 2025, you see a lot of polarization, no matter which way you lean. Everybody can agree that no one agrees on anything. So, I think it really taught me a lot about that and a lot of the values that I have today, especially when it comes to my

work in government relations. My dad, I had asked him, “so what's the difference? What's the difference between the parties? What's the difference between Republicans and Democrats?” And he said, “well, everybody wants the same things, right? We all care about the same things. We care about our communities. We care about housing, about jobs, about getting food on the table. We care about these same issues, but we disagree on how we go about those issues, whether that's, hey, we should fix this by going more international, by figuring it out domestically, doing infrastructure, going out, building trade relations, those types of things.” So I was like, “oh okay, that makes sense. We're all human. We're all American. We want the same thing. We want what's best for this country. But we might disagree on how we do that, about what that answer is.” So I think that kind of built this fundamental, understanding and value and hope that I still have for politics nowadays, we all care about the same things. We all have the same touchpoints. We're all human. We feel the same things, maybe about different stuff, different priorities, different lives. But we all care about the same things. And I think, I really learned that from him.

00;23;10 - 00;23;22
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What did you learn about yourself in college, since you especially since you emphasized how you, wanted to be far from home, in a sense, to discover yourself. So what did you learn about yourself during that time?

00;23;23 - 00;25;01
ADRIANNA TRAN: That's so funny. I do not think anybody's ever asked me that. I think that I learned a lot of adaptability, a lot of flexibility, a lot of being my own person. Right. Because being the oldest daughter in an immigrant family there's a lot of pressure and expectations and some of it is put on by your family and some of it is just stuff you put on yourself. So I think going there and being there, I am like, I can disappear. I can go to a coffee shop and I can drink my coffee, and I can study on my laptop, and no one knows who I am or ask me anything needs anything from me. I am just me. And I think that's the biggest thing that I had realized when I was there. I loved the flexibility, I loved adapting, I love doing new things. I love being able to do what I wanted. Even one of the biggest things that drew me to the international affairs major was that I can take whatever classes I want. They said, you have one required class and you can specialize in whatever you want to. So it was really cool because for me, I do not think it was about education a degree. I think it was more about what you learn out of life, whether that's through a degree or through a person or through, just living life. So I think that's that that's kind of a big thing. I learned is that you can be adaptable and flexible and just not focus so much on the actual thing, but focus on more of the value rather than the, the namesake of something.

00;25;01 - 00;25;06
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Well said. What did you specialize in?

00;25;06 - 00;25;40
ADRIANNA TRAN: Very random thing. I did, Middle Eastern studies. I took Arabic for about two years. I studied, Islam. I think one of the best classes I ever took was an Arab film class, And again, it was not about the class itself. I do not intend on going into film at any point. But I just love to learn about cultures and people and motivations and what makes people do what they want to do or care about what they care about.

00;25;40 - 00;25;46
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what inspired you to specialize in that route?

00;25;46 - 00;26;40
ADRIANNA TRAN: I feel like maybe part of it even goes back to all the time in the car and NPR. Growing up that was around the Bush era, we were at war in Iraq. And I think a lot of that really touched me, in a lot of the human part of it. War isn't good no matter what side you're on. It is not good and there are so many bad things that come out of it. It hurt me because regardless of what was happening, they are people that are being hurt and I was very interested to learn, learn the language, learn the culture, and learn about how we could all come together and, and fix these problems. And I have always, again, growing up somewhere so diverse, been drawn to people and different backgrounds and cultures and values and I just love it, you know?

00;26;40 - 00;26;57
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You mentioned how you experienced part of college during COVID. You know, for the record, since it was still so recent, what was your experience like going to college in the pandemic?

00;26;57 - 00;28;39
ADRIANNA TRAN: I was mostly only Covid, maybe my less than a year. You know, 2020 spring break, they sent us home and they said, “hey this Covid things happening, maybe we'll wait a week.” And it turned into two weeks and turned into a month. Then it was, hey, we're going to finish out the semester online. And at first you're like, oh, cool. We get extra spring break. Oh, we're finishing up online. It was fine. We only have another month or so to go. And then it was, wait a minute, this isn't going away. And wait a minute, we're getting locked down and wait a minute. And now all of our classes are online. So it was just kind of this time of uncertainties and of unknowns. And at the time I an internship that I was interviewing for, with the Smithsonian up in D.C. doing emergency management, because that's what I thought I had wanted to do. I also have a certificate, emergency management. The thing I loved about that was just the nonpartisan nature and about how the purpose of it was just to save lives no matter what. So I thought I was going to go into emergency management, and then Covid happens. And I had also been interviewing for a different internship in a future semester with the senator's office. And obviously that did not happen either. So, again, a lot of adaptability and flexibility and learning how to be like, hey, things are shifting or I got to figure out what the next thing is and not really letting it get to my head. And I think because I had built those skills and built that mindset, I might have bounced back a lot better than some of my people who had a very strict five year, ten year plan.

00;28;39 - 00;28;53
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Right. And you mentioned to me before we started recording how you wanted to go to, to law school, so just talk to me about that initial inspiration and what happened, why'd you switch?

00;28;54 - 00;29;59

ADRIANNA TRAN: Well part of it, in a lot of Asian families and cultures you can be a doctor or a lawyer. Pick one. But I had always been really good at and in love with reading and writing. I was quick witted. If somebody said something, I always had something to say back. I still do. So they were like, "yeah, duh, lawyer, that makes sense." And I was like, "yeah, I do not think I would hate that." But graduating my last year, I was like, well, I do not know if this is what I want to do. What do lawyers even do? Like what is the day to day actually look like? I had no idea. So I had already had questions. Then Covid happened and I was like, well, I do not want to do this really hard thing in the middle of a global pandemic online. So I did not and I just started working. And I am grateful that I did because where I am in my career, I feel like I am where I need to be.

00;29;59 - 00;30;42
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: That's sort of why I ask, because there is sort of those cultural stereotypes and across various cultures, and it was very interesting to see how people break those molds, when you do not fit the stereotype. So, very interesting. You also told me before that before your current position here, you worked at a nonprofit. Correct me if I am wrong. Talk to me about your professional journey.

00;30;42 - 00;35;02
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah so another big reason that I had picked Florida State was I knew I wanted to go into government regardless of if I went the journalism path or the more political or government path. I was in the capital of the state. It just makes sense. I had Florida pre-pay and Bright Futures. That definitely helped make the decision so I wouldn't be in debt for years. I had done a few internships, and after I graduated from college, I applied to every single job known to man because it was a global pandemic, and I did not know if I would find a job as many other people did. My grandma was in Washington state as well as my youngest aunt. I was like, well, let me go to Washington, live there for a little bit, I'll come back maybe two months, three months, however long. So I wore like six masks on the plane and I am there. And the day before I leave, I got a phone call, and I missed the phone call because I was on the road listening to the voicemail. "Hi, this is State Representative Camille Brown I would like to interview." And I was like, oh crap. The state representative is calling me. And I missed the call. And I called her back and we set up an interview. And of course, the interview was two days from then and I was going to be in another state, but I did not want to say. So I woke up at five in the morning for an interview at 6 a.m. because it was 9 a.m. here in the East Coast. I did the interview in my aunt's basement. The next morning I got woken up at 6 a.m, "Hey, this is the Florida house calling. We just need some additional information." And I was like, wait, did I get the job? So I did get the job, and I flew back early, and I started about a week before the legislative session, so I actually never even worked, remote or hybrid. I flew back to Orlando, I packed up my stuff. I still had my apartment from college, because it was in spring, so I had the year long lease.

I went back to Tallahassee and I was working in person in the Capitol. We got swabbed every week, they tested for Covid every single week. I had to do that before I came in. No onboarding, everything was crazy, totally different than it is now. I worked there for about two years as a legislative aide, so anything from helping to draft policy notes, press releases, talking points, analyzing legislation, putting together legislative binders, working with the different

analysts and committee staff to say, “hey, this bill's not moving” or “what's going on?” or going over to our Senate sponsors and saying, “hey, guys here's where the bill is out on our side. What's on your side?” It was a lot of figuring that out and that was such a steep learning curve. So many things that school absolutely did not prepare me for, but I am so grateful for the experience and for Representative Brown for giving me that opportunity. She has been an amazing mentor, and person in my life. After that, I left the house and I worked at Barry University Law School down the road from where we are right now. I worked there for about eight months, as their director of community outreach and advancement. But ultimately I was like, I do not really know if higher education is my thing. Then I ended up getting this job here at Community Legal Services as their director of government relations. I am the inaugural person in this position. There's never been a department before doing government relations specifically here. I get to work with a ton of lawyers, so that's been an interesting journey. Really building it up from the ground up and figuring out what the needs are. They are an amazing nonprofit organization. They serve 12 counties. We provide free legal services to low income families and individuals across those 12 counties, seniors, domestic violence survivors, and plenty of other vulnerable populations across the state. The need is so high and I am grateful to be a part of the mission and the journey of this organization.

00;35;02 - 00;35;08
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Several questions, what years did you work at the at the Florida House?

00;35;08 - 00;35;26
ADRIANNA TRAN: I was there, I think that was like late 2020, early 2021, through to the end of 2022.

00;35;26 - 00;36;14
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: A couple months at Barry and now you've been here for two years since 23. You just outlined the mission of Community Legal Services. I am curious, since you've been working here for two years and as you mentioned, you're the first person in this position. You really created it, starting from the ground up which is really impressive. What have you learned about Central Florida's vulnerable populations through your work? And, of course that connects to minorities, immigrants. So talk to me about that and about how you as a child of an immigrant can relate to that, if you can.

00;36;14 - 00;38;24
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah and that is exactly what I was going to talk about. At a point my family was the exact community that we serve. I can not imagine my grandparents not getting paid for their work and going, “oh, well, you know what? I need to call my lawyer.” We could not afford a lawyer. That was not an option that we thought we had. So to know about this resource and the work that they do is amazing because there's so many resources that vulnerable and underserved communities just do not have or do not have access to, like many other folks do. Right? So whether it was food, shelter, an attorney, they just do not, it was not an option. It was not something where it was like, “oh, I'll look into it.” It was like “I am not even going to bother to look into it because I do not think anybody's going to be there for me.” And that's part of the reason why I do what I do is because I am so grateful for the life that my family gave me,

and I am so grateful for the people and the community and all the folks here in Central Florida who helped them. Because, again, I would not be here without them, and they would not be here without the amazing community that has come together to help them. And so that is why I work in nonprofit, and I work in public service because I am proud and honored to be here because of those organizations and those people. And I also think, again, what I was talking about earlier, everybody is connected. Everybody cares about the same things. We want to make sure our families are taken care of. There is a roof over our heads, there is food on the table. So regardless of anything going on in politics that might tear people apart, I think that is the most important thing because we serve anywhere Orange County, Osceola County, Brevard, Flagler, Putnam, Citrus, Hernando. It was it was such a wide variety of communities and folks. They have different issues. They experience different things. Their backgrounds and lives and stories are all so diverse and so different from rural Florida, all the way down to the more urban areas here in Orlando. But they all face the same issues. You hear the same story over and over again. The details might be different, but the stories and the people, they are the same.

00;38;24 - 00;38;40
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I know there are some cases that are probably can not disclose. But can you share a specific story or a specific case from your two years serving here?

00;38;40 - 00;40;50
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah, and not to go into too much details, there's a lot of articles that I can share with you after, but there was this community out in Osceola County. During Hurricane Ian, it was disastrous. There were so many floods. There were all these major problems, during before, after the storm, and there was senior community, and they had been absolutely ravaged. I mean, you could see the water going halfway up the walls, and I hadn't, been here for the beginning of that. But those are cases that we're still fighting today where these seniors, their stuff is ruined. These houses and the complex failed to notify them. Failed to notify these seniors. "Hey, we are in a flood zone. You need to get out." I do not think anybody had lost their lives, but some of them had pets that did not make it because the houses were flooding. They did not make it. Their stuff did not make it. All these things they've been holding on to for years, just gone in an instant. And the complex was like, "not our problem." But it was, there was a lot of issues and liability and loopholes that they had tried to take advantage of and it was just not right. A lot of those folks could not afford the help, did not think they had anywhere to turn. So community Legal Services have gotten maybe a case or two and said, wait a minute. This is probably something that's going on in the entire complex. Eventually we collected more and more and more folks who are dealing with these issues and now that's one of the biggest, cases that we do. You know, we do civil legal issues. We can not do anything criminal. We do not do class actions. We do not do medical malpractice or the personal injury type of stuff. But, it was been really cool to see how they have impacted the lives of these seniors and those communities who otherwise would not have had these resources.

00;40;50 - 00;41;05
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Thanks for sharing. You mentioned earlier that you were involved with, Asian-American Chamber of Commerce. When did you join that organization and what's your role?

00;41;05 - 00;41;53
ADRIANNA TRAN: I had joined as a member of the Asian-American chamber and have been a member for like three or four years now. One of my biggest things about joining there, and now I am part of the greater Orlando Asian-American Bar Association as well, was that I just really wanted to connect with that AAPI community here because it was such a vast and robust community. And like I told you before, I do not really have a network of a lot of AAPI friends. And now through this, I have been able to build community with other folks who are in the same boat who are also professionals. I have been supporting these businesses my whole life, but I never really knew, the people behind it. So it just been a really cool opportunity as a professional to be able to reconnect with my culture, at my workplace.

00;41;53 - 00;42;13
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. Aside from college you have spent most of your life in Central Florida, and even in college, you're still in Florida. So, from your perspective, how has Central Florida changed?

00;42;13 - 00;43;43
ADRIANNA TRAN: I always used to make fun of my parents because we would be driving somewhere and they would go, “oh my gosh, that used to be in Orange fields. That's crazy that this used to be oranges.” And I am like, “okay, grandpa, like, there used to be oranges.” Now I am like, “oh my gosh, that used to be an orange field. Oh my gosh, there used to be trees there, now it was an apartment complex. Oh my gosh, there's a roundabout here.” So it was so funny because like I told you, Ocoee Elementary School, I was there when it was a brick building and some portables, and now they have redone the campus and it looks great, but there is that part of me that still misses the brick campus. But it was incredible to see Florida growing. I think that is just a sign of the times and something that we should expect in Florida and across the entire country. It is just this rapid growth and restructuring. You know, there's still a lot of parts of Florida that are very much the old Florida, not much has changed. But unfortunately, we do not know how long that is going to last and I know a lot of people are scared about the prospects of that, how that is going to change their lives and how they have lived for decades, and I understand that. You cannot really change that, but you can change how you react to it, how you're affected by it. Maybe get involved with the communities and do that type of stuff. But it was I mean, it is incredible to see how quickly a lot of things have grown and also how long the I-4 eyesore can still not be developed.

00;43;43 - 00;43;47
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yes. You're not the first person to tell me about the I-4.

00;43;47 - 00;43;49
ADRIANNA TRAN: Oh, yeah.

00;43;49 - 00;43;55
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: To that point though, what challenges do Orlando or Central Florida face today?

00;43;55 - 00;45;38

ADRIANNA TRAN: I think a lot of the problems that we see, especially with the my perspective with the work that I have done, as we grow and rapidly expand, there also needs to be some thought to these vulnerable communities. You see the stadium popping up, you see create village with Electronic Arts and all these other major companies. You have the semiconductors who are coming in. And I think that will provide an economic boom for the region, but we cannot forget about the folks who are underserved and not receiving the resources. Yeah, I am sure they would love to get jobs there, but they are not qualified because they cannot afford to get qualified. So we need to provide more workforce training. We need to provide more thought to those communities. Why are we pushing those communities out and further and further away from the city when you could be incorporating a lot of these folks and helping them gain more economic mobility and more resources. It was only going to make our communities a better place. It is just terrible to see because that could have been my family they had been pushing out, that could have been my neighbors, my friends, that is, my neighbors and my friends that they are pushing out. And I just think there is not enough attention as much as we see the prosperity and the growth. Not everybody is feeling that, so I hope that people are are more mindful of that in current and future years and continue to do so and not forget about us, about our communities, about the folks who have been here for decades.

00;45;38 - 00;46;11
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Staying on the topic of today, or this year more broadly. 2025 marks fifty years since the fall of Saigon. I am curious whether personally, your family talking about it amongst yourselves or community wide. With you're several affiliations with the Asian American Chamber, with the Greater Bar Association, how have you all remembered that event fifty years later, or reflected fifty years later?

00;46;11 - 00;48;18
ADRIANNA TRAN: That is the thing that is honestly really hard to reconcile, because on the one hand, you see people in Vietnam who are celebrating and calling it a liberation. And yet you have a lot of these Vietnamese Americans here in this country, whether they are born here in the States or came here during or after the war, who do not necessarily feel as celebratory about it. For them, it was a loss of culture. It was coming and finding a new home, building a new life. So it was been really hard for me as a Vietnamese American to reconcile those two different things because I do not believe that Vietnam now is necessarily a bad place or anything like that. But I also do not want to discount the experiences that my family had and that they had gone through. You know, so I struggle with that a lot. Orange County did a memorial for the Vietnam Veterans for the 50th anniversary, and I am there and they have the old flag, the yellow with the red stripes and my great Aunt Blan, the one who, sponsored my family to come here, she just passed away a couple months ago, and I was there. And I just start tearing up, and I am like, these people probably think I am crazy because they are like, she is too young to have been there. I am just sitting there and trying not to sob. And there is these beautiful Vietnamese women who had been there and who have a community and keep on the history wearing traditional dress, and being up there with the Vietnam veterans and it was just, such a heartwarming moment to be out there with them, and celebrate the people who fought for my family and that really kind of connected the part of me that is American and the part of me that is Vietnamese as well. But yeah, it is just hard to reconcile those two things, whether it was a celebration or a mourning.

00;48;18 - 00;48;31
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. How has your Vietnamese heritage influenced your perspective on life generally and living in Central Florida specifically?

00;48;31 - 00;51;15
ADRIANNA TRAN: I think the biggest thing that I have taken from my family and my culture is community, is family. We have so many family members and a lot of other cultures experience this too, where, "hey, I call you my aunt, but you are not my aunt. I call you my cousin. But you are not my cousin." So I think for that, it was really easy for me to build community or see community or see people as family, people that I have never met, to care about those people and have the sympathy, the empathy, to want to make this place a better place for everybody because it is the thing that drives me. I do this work because I do not think that anybody should ever have to suffer that much or work that hard as much as my family had, as my grandparents and my parents just to survive. I do not think that's right. I do not think anybody wants to go through that. It does not matter your background, heritage, whatever it may be, you should not have to work three, four jobs just to pay the bills to live in a tiny little house with your seven family members, living in a two bedroom. I feel like just drives me, and it gives me purpose, and it humbles me because I wouldn't be able to be here without them. Growing up there were points where it was frustrating because, well, my friends, they have these connections or they know this person or their neighbor is so-and-so, or their mom helped them get an internship. And I was like, I do not have any of that. I kind of had to start from the beginning. I did not have those professional connections. I did not have friends. My parents have friends who were lawyers. So we did not grow up with that. But thinking about it did not have anything. They learned English when they got here. They did not learn English in Vietnam. They had to learn about the culture, the language. My mom is still learning. We're kind of learning together about financial literacy, culture, investments, all those different types of things. We have had to learn together. And I think when I was younger, I did not really fully understand that and had a lot of frustration because it was like, well, your parents are supposed to be the people who guide you and tell you those things, but as an adult, you're like, they are people too, they had no idea. So now it is us learning together and being so grateful again for everything they did and letting that drive me and inspire me to do better for the next generation and to always make everything better for the next generation that comes after me. Not just my own direct family, but for everybody.

00;51;16 - 00;51;29
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Well said. Lastly, if someone is listening to this recording 50 or 100 years from now, what do you want them to know about your culture and the state of Florida?

00;51;29 - 00;52;43
ADRIANNA TRAN: I think something that you should know fifty years from now is that no matter how many things have changed, how many orange groves or now apartment complexes, that we are all still human, we are all connected. We are all family. We all strive for the same things. We all have hopes and wishes, dreams, frustrations, celebrations. And I hope that fifty years from now, I can listen back on this and be like, we did it. We did the thing we said we were going to do. We are a community. We all gotten together. Because it was so easy to get

lost in the traffic and in the noise and in the things that make us different. But at the end of the day, there are so many things that we have in common. There are so many more things that we have in common. And I think that that is the thing that we should all be focusing on now and for the next fifty years, is trying to reconcile our past, our present, our future, and really pave the path for those who come after us. And hopefully y'all don't have traffic on I-4 anymore.

00;52;43 - 00;52;52
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Adrianna, thank you so much for taking some time out of your work day to speak with me and share your life story. I really appreciate it.

00;52;52 - 00;53;07
ADRIANNA TRAN: Yeah. No, thank you for interviewing me. It has been such a great experience and it is so important that you guys are doing this work because I feel like oral history is something that a lot of people do not really think about. And I think this method is a great way of preserving that history.

00;53;07 - 00;53;08
SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. Thank you.