

FHS Oral History Project – Asawin “AJ” Jockkeaw

Description:

Asawin “AJ” Jockkeaw was born in Bangkok, Thailand, in 1970. AJ recollected memories of his formative years, particularly the linguistic challenges he faced when he and his family moved from Bangkok to Northern Thailand. At the age of eighteen, AJ worked as a professional musician, citing financial difficulties as the primary reason for performing in clubs and earning money instead of pursuing further education after high school. Continued economic hardships and improved working opportunities prompted AJ to leave Thailand and emigrate to Orlando, Florida, in 1998. AJ recounted his immigrant experience in Orlando, initially struggling with the linguistic and cultural barriers. After briefly performing for his mother’s church, AJ shifted his career to food service, beginning as a dishwasher and working his way up the professional ladder. After seven years, AJ reached the position of executive chef. He emphasized that working in several kitchens with other immigrant and ethnic individuals helped him acclimate to his new life in Orlando. In 2020, AJ established his restaurant, Meng’s Kitchen, and explained how the COVID Pandemic impacted this decision. AJ discussed how Meng’s Kitchen changed over the past five years, from different locations to expanding the staff from just himself to a group of five. Lastly, AJ shared his broader observations about Orlando and its cultural and culinary changes since 1998.

Transcription:

00;00;00 - 00;00;14

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: [This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing] Asawin Jockkeaw on May 22nd, 2025, at iFresh Market 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;14 - 00;00;24

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Okay. My name is Asawin Jockkeaw. I was born on December 3rd, 1970, in Bangkok, Thailand. And by the way my stage name is “AJ.”

00;00;24 - 00;00;35

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Exactly. So I will be referring to you as AJ now, but I want to introduce [you], thank you for that. Talk to me about your childhood growing up in Thailand.

00;00;35 - 00;01;17

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Born in Bangkok, and my parents moved to Northern Thai when I was six or seven years old. Because my dad worked for [an] insurance company, the headquarter [was] in Bangkok and they had a spot open up north, more like [a] promotion. So he took it. So we all had to pack everything and move up there. Yeah. For me is different because the weather is different and the language was different. You know, over there they speak Northern Thai dialect, so I had to learn that. And I have lived in Chiang Mai for about twenty years. Yeah.

00;01;17 - 00;01;24

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Twenty years. Wow. Okay. We will definitely talk about those twenty years. But were you an only child?

00;01;24 - 00;01;27

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Yes. I am the only one.

00;01;27 - 00;01;31

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you just told me what your father did. What did your mom do?

00;01;31 - 00;01;59

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Back then, I think my mom [worked] part time, and also a housewife. But my mom is a hustler. She [helped] people, her friend at a restaurant, the salon, anything. Anything can make money.

00;01;59 - 00;02;08

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you mentioned how you had to learn the new dialect in Northern Thailand. What were some other challenges you experienced moving to northern Thailand?

00;02;08 - 00;02;50

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Well, the language is totally different. Even though we used, Thai language as the official language, a lot of the kids still [spoke] the northern dialect. But the thing is, my mom and my grandma actually from Chiang Mai, that was their hometown. So I had to ask my grandma pretty much every day when I come back from school, like “what this word means because I do not understand.” But [I] moved there when [I was] little. So [I] picked up fast, you know about a year. So I [became] very fluent in the Northern Thai.

00;02;50 - 00;02;53

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How was your schooling education like?

00;02;53 - 00;03;28

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: I just graduated high school because when I became teenager, my mom and dad kind of separated. And we had financial hardships. And I started working when I was eighteen as a professional musician, we played in the club at night while I go to school in daytime. So as soon as I graduated high school, I [did] not pursue full college because money [was] tight.

00;03;28 - 00;03;33

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Absolutely. What instrument did you play?

00;03;33 - 00;03;39

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: I played keyboard in the band. Yes, but now I am also a drummer as well.

00;03;39 - 00;03;46

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Nice. Did you perform in various locations, or you had one spot?

00;03;46 - 00;04;01

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Back then, it was one spot, you do a contract, like six months a year, and then you move to a next city or if same city, maybe different club, different bar.

00;04;01 - 00;04;18

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You know, I am curious, what did you learn about yourself during that time when you [were] post-high school trying to make ends meet living and also, what did you learn about your country, the people?

00;04;18 - 00;04;59

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: People very friendly. But for young boy to try to go to school and working is pretty hard because now I am get older, probably I can do it because I can get a few hours' sleep, but back then, it was so hard to get few hours' sleep and go to work. But people are super nice in Thailand back then. But now things have changed but still, still nicer than the other country, you know?

00;04;59 - 00;05;01

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What do you think has changed?

00;05;01 - 00;05;23

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: I think because the way people living and also the world changed a lot and living expenses going up, maybe that has made people's routine change and personality change that could be—a lot of people get angry at the world.

00;05;23 - 00;05;44

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You know, I am curious. You went through your primary and secondary education towards the end of the Cold War. I am curious if you know, did sort of your teachers at school or the curriculum reflect that atmosphere of the Cold War, the end of the Cold War?

00;05;45 - 00;05;56

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: No, not at all. No, not at all. We just like a normal school. Just normal kids. Learn and then have fun at the same time.

00;05;56 - 00;05;58

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You said you lived there for twenty years, and you left?

00;05;58 - 00;06;10

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Yes. About twenty years. Then I traveled for a few years around the country for work, as a band. And then I moved here.

00;06;10 - 00;06;11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: To Florida?

00;06;11 - 00;06;12

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: To Florida, yeah.

00;06;12 - 00;06;16

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Orlando? What year was this exactly?

00;06;16 - 00;06;21

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: I landed here on May 17th, 1998.

00;06;21 - 00;06;22

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Nice. You know the full date.

00;06;22 - 00;06;24

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: So is about twenty seven years now.

00;06;24 - 00;06;32

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. 1998. Wow. Did you ever envision leaving Thailand?

00;06;32 - 00;06;48

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: When I was growing up, no, not at all. But when I get a little bit older, in my twenties, I think maybe let's give it a try for better opportunities.

00;06;48 - 00;06;54

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So your primary motivation was working opportunities, better financially?

00;06;54 - 00;07;33

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: And also my mom moved here ten years before I moved. She would love for me to come and try. Just give it a shot. If you do not like it, not fit you, you can go back. But let me say this—the first couple year, it was hard because everything different language, food, surroundings, everything different. But after a couple years I know how to get around [and] I can call it home. Yeah, I can call Orlando home.

00;07;33 - 00;07;37

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: When do you think you could start calling Orlando home?

00;07;37 - 00;07;45

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Maybe a few years after, maybe after living here for four or five years.

00;07;45 - 00;07;50

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How did you navigate that immigrant adjustment?

00;07;50 - 00;08;29

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: I think the first thing is language. You have to learn English, have to get over the language barrier. So I think [that was] the key to open my door because when [I] came here, [I] cannot speak English, [I] cannot go anywhere. [I] cannot talk to no one. It was like [I] trapped in [myself]. And the key to open it is language. So after my English [got] better, it was more like I opened my door to the world, to Orlando.

00;08;29 - 00;08;43

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: In what ways did your perceptions about the United States change once you got here? Like what did you think of the US when you lived in Thailand?

00;08;43 - 00;09;22

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Right. Back then, everything supposed to be like in the movie, like LA or Times Square or those places. But reality, when you come to Orlando, this twenty seven years ago, that's it? This is really? It was not like on the movie or on the TV, but still different than Thailand everything different. I was so excited to go to work, like wow. It looked different. You know everything different.

00;09;22 - 00;09;30

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: When you arrived here in 1998, did you continue performing? Was that your immediate job or do you find other employment?

00;09;30 - 00;09;59

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: My mom got me a job as a dishwasher for food service, and she took me to church, and I became one of the church band members. So we played every Sunday service and then my career kind of shifted to full service at first as a dishwasher. And I worked my way up.

00;09;59 - 00;10;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Can you talk to me more specifically about that process of you working your way up?

00;10;03 - 00;11;40

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Okay. At first washing dishes, but there was no dishes all day. There was some downtime. So the chef, like, "Hey, come over here, I will show you how to cut some food or vegetable or meat" and that time how I did not know what to do with my life, with my career. So I just kept working. And one day it just came to me that maybe the food business, the restaurant business or the cooking, that I could do. I kind of like it, but I never [thought it would be] a career, yet at that time. But after washing dishes, cut some fruit and vegetable, the chef moved me up to, back then they called prep cook or prep person. Basically just cut a fruit vegetable, peel some carrot, cut onion, cut potato for those cooks to use to cook and after that maybe a year I got to move up to be a second cook they call you know they have a lead cook second cook, that kind of stuff. And my highest position was executive chef. It took me about seven years.

00;11;40 - 00;11;44

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you went through this process in one kitchen like one location?

00;11;44 - 00;11;52

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: No, various. I would say about five kitchens.

00;11;52 - 00;11;54

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And these kitchens were all Asian?

00;11;54 - 00;11;55

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: No. American.

00;11;55 - 00;12;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: American. Can you name a couple of the restaurant?

00;12;00 - 00;12;48

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Well, it is actually not the restaurant, it is mostly like cafeteria inside office building, I can name one. Back then there was a cafeteria inside SunTrust parking garage. Downtown is on a parking garage, second floor. And then I moved from there to Hewitt Company by Research Park, close to UCF. Yeah, that was an office building too. Then after that, a couple places. And then I landed Orlando Sentinel, used to be right before downtown. They had a cafe there, so, yeah, a few places.

00;12;48 - 00;13;03

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And do you think learning those skills, but also being involved in the kitchen helped you acclimate to living here?

00;13;03 - 00;13;48

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Absolutely, absolutely. You work different kitchens with all kinds of people. A lot of kitchens are very [diverse]. Like, people from Africa, from South America, from all over, but not many I worked with [were] Asian, which I do not mind. But yeah people from Mexico, from Colombia, from Brazil, all over the place. [It was] good for me to learn different cultures. Oh, some, people from Haiti as well.

00;13;48 - 00;14;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So you said it took you about seven years to become an executive chef. So once you earned that title, what was your trajectory at that point in your life? Where did you head next?

00;14;00 - 00;15;12

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: You know, sometime when you get to that point you do not know what is your next goal is because, for my food service company, I think that is a max. Unless you become district chef or regional chef, which is mostly handpicked for the regional people or vice presidents in the company. It is not like you apply for it. But when I came to that point as, exec, I kind of enjoy my job doing what I supposed to do for a few years. I did not think about my next goal in life is going to be I just go with the flow there for a few years until, COVID.

00;15;12 - 00;15;27

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Since you mentioned how in a lot of the kitchens you worked in there was a diverse group of people, did you all ever share your immigrant experiences and relate to each other?

00;15;27 - 00;15;45

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. You know, we always have some funny story like, “Oh, when I first came, I cannot even pronounce this thing, or you go to supermarket or school places, and you pronounced it wrong. That kind of stuff.”

00;15;45 - 00;15;51

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So when did you establish your restaurant?

00;15;51 - 00;18;48

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Okay. When COVID start, I call my company late. “What I supposed to do for claiming unemployment.” So my manager told me to go on a website and they will have a company's name come up. So we have to choose—whatever the process is. After I submitted that, I still had to wait for money. And that was when I was thinking like “I am not going to sit here and wait for money. Maybe I will be able to do something to make some extra money.” And I did not know what to do. I am thinking about driving Uber, but somebody made a comment on Facebook that, “Hey, when are you going to make chicken and rice again? You know, I would love to buy it.” And that was what gave me an idea, to start a business based on the Hainanese chicken and rice. Just one dish. When we first start, we just do preorder. I set up the page on Instagram and Facebook and just post [randomly], like, “Hey, I am going to make chicken and rice. If somebody want to buy it hit me, DM me, and I make it, and we can meet somewhere, and I drop it off.” And that was how I started. I [did] that for about five months. Once a week or sometime twice a week. Then I look at the business. If you do that as a pop up once or twice a week, it is not sustainable. So at that time, one of my best friend owned a sushi restaurant by Sam's Club. So I talked to him if I can rent a part of his kitchen to run my business. And he was super nice enough to let me rent his restaurant. And also his set up the LLC for me and set up a website for my business. So we started business as a kitchen, but mostly we sold to Uber Eats and DoorDash and Grubhub, and also we had our own website as well. I was at that spot for a year and a half until my friend decided to no longer want to do business. So he sold a place. That was why I ended up here.

00;18;48 - 00;18;53

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So, to be clear, what year did you start?

00;18;53 - 00;19;01

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: As Meng's Kitchen, I started in May 2020.

00;19;01 - 00;19;01

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: May 2020.

00;19;02 - 00;19;23

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: And we became Ghost Kitchen in mid of October 2020. And then we moved in here [iFresh Market], June 1st, 2022. And then we opened on June 17th, 2022.

00;19;23 - 00;19;25

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So it has been almost three years—

00;19;25 - 00;19;27

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Almost three years. Yes.

00;19;28 - 00;19;37

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: —in this location [iFresh Market]. So I could paint the picture: the first five months you were cooking this in your own home, that one dish?

00;19;37 - 00;19;57

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: One dish. I ran one of my friend restaurant, which he closed on Sunday. So I paid him, like fifty bucks to use his commercial kitchen. One of those days, if the order was not big enough, I do it at home. But it just kitchen small—

00;19;57 - 00;19;58

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Not sustainable.

00;19;58 - 00;20;13

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Yeah. So [I did] that for a few months and then moved to Ghost Kitchen. And still when I moved to the sushi place, the whole business [was] just me by myself until I moved here.

00;20;13 - 00;20;20

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So what does that entail? “Me by myself.” Just explain to the listener what does everything mean? Do not shortchange your work.

00;20;20 - 00;20;21

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Everything.

00;20;21 - 00;20;24

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So from what?

00;20;24 - 00;21;03

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: From go to grocery store, buy some grocery, bring it to a restaurant. Prepping, take a picture, post on Instagram, upload a picture to a website, to Uber Eats. You know, do the booking account, accounting, count all the money to the sales, go to the bank, pretty much everything. Washing dishes, everything. Yes. And yet, someday, if you have catering, somehow I deliver catering as well.

00;21;03 - 00;21;08

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Your name is AJ, but it is called Meng’s Kitchen. Tell me the story.

00;21;08 - 00;23;11

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Tell you the story of Meng’s. When I [lived] in Bangkok, five, six years old, every morning my dad took me to kindergarten school, [and] we [walked] from my house to the school. It was about a mile, maybe less. But between the house and school, there was a restaurant selling chicken and rice. It was called *Meng’s Pochana*. *Pochana* in Thai means food and restaurant. So actually “Meng Restaurant,” the gentleman, the owner named Meng, so he [sold] Hainanese chicken and rice. And that was the first time I had chicken rice

ever and obsessed about it. So me and my dad pretty much eat every day like Monday to Friday. And then when we moved to Chiang Mai, we always go find Hainanese chicken to eat. And every time we came to Bangkok, we always go to that place. Believe it or not, forty-five years later or fifty years later, that place is still there, but under a new ownership. But the place still there. And also the Hainan chicken originated from southern China and spread out to Southeast Asia. It is considered national dish in Singapore and, it is big in Malaysia as well. Also Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, even Vietnam. So when I think about the name for the restaurant, I think nothing fit [better than] Meng's. So here we are. Meng's Kitchen.

00;23;12 - 00;23;12

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Nice.

00;23;12 - 00;23;13

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: So.

00;23;13 - 00;23;42

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Thanks for sharing. That is a great story. Food is obviously one of the most apparent ways to maintain culture. So I am curious as a restaurant owner and someone that has been in the kitchen for years, how has this space helped you personally maintain your cultural identity?

00;23;42 - 00;24;35

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Even I from Thailand, but to be honest with you, Thai food is kind of hard to cook. I am not really expert on Thai food that much. So that is why my identity is this Hainan chicken and the other stuff that I think I did the best. So my restaurant probably different than most Thai restaurants. Because we do not have Pad Thai and we had only few Curry, we did our special curry stuff, which is represent myself that what I do best and what I would love to eat. If you come to my house, I will make you chicken and rice.

00;24;35 - 00;24;38

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. So you would characterize the plate more to—

00;24;39 - 00;24;58

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Yes, to who I am. Not like where I form like Thailand. But if you put “Meng’s Kitchen Thai Restaurant” people going to expect Pad Thai, papaya salad, that kind of stuff. I want to stand out from most places.

00;24;58 - 00;24;58

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Make sense.

00;24;58 - 00;25;08

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: And I want people to think of Hainan chicken, this is the only place that you can get.

00;25;08 - 00;25;14

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: But I am curious. I actually do not know where Hainan chicken come from.

00;25;14 - 00;26;01

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Hainan chicken is actually originated in Hainan Island, like in southern China. When people migrate from Hainan Island to Asia, they brought it with them. So, a lot of people from Hainan Island, immigrant, when they come to Thailand or different places, they start selling that and also, as I said, it is considered as national dish in Singapore. I mean, big. If you go to Singapore, you have to Hainan chicken and rice. And also Thailand, I think is more comfort food for us. You can find Hainan chicken pretty much anywhere in Thailand.

00;26;01 - 00;26;11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How has your business grown over the past three years? Are you still running everything? I mean, I am talking to you now. That means this would be [*pointed to restaurant*] shut down right now for this interview.

00;26;11 - 00;27;19

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Since we moved here the first month, one of my best friends [helped] me in the front house and I still have [ran] around cooking. Just two of us. And I am fortunate enough, my second month here, I hired one of cook, and then after a few months when business picked up a little more, we hired another cook slash kitchen prep. And then a few months after that, we hire a front of the house, cashier, help packing food. Right now, [the] operation is getting a little bit bigger than just one person, one man show. So now, each day, operation is about five people, including me. Also we have a dishwasher in the back slash kitchen prep as well.

00;27;19 - 00;27;32

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And I should have asked before, I know you mentioned it, but tell me more explicitly, how did your business get here in iFresh Market.

00;27;32 - 00;28;19

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Oh. We just random walked in. When I heard that my friend selling his restaurant, I called my best friend and told her and she said, "Let's go look for the place." And one of the place she mentioned was iFresh. And I am like, "No way! Kai Kai used to be here." Kai Kai is big right now in Mills Market. Kai Kai used to be here, and the lease was up, and Kai Kai left, and nobody took the spot. I was so surprised. So it has been emptied for six months, probably waiting for me. Just the right moment. Yeah.

00;28;19 - 00;28;26

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Have you received any feedback from the community about your place, like reviews? Like what has been the reception?

00;28;26 - 00;28;54

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Oh, absolutely. I would say we get very good review. You know, we cannot please everybody. Of course we are going to have some bad reviews as well. But we try

to do the best we could. I would say if, ten point score, we make it like eight or nine. Pretty good review.

00;28;54 - 00;28;58

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I met you at a cultural event at the AACC [Asian American Chamber of Commerce]. Do you often cater at those events?

00;29;02 - 00;29;31

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Not all the time. I used to join AACC as well, in the past, and she [Via Ma, former president] just reached out to me, like, if I want to donate some food for the event, and for me is kind of give back to Asian community.

00;29;31 - 00;29;35

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: As the AACC helped you with your business?

00;29;35 - 00;29;36

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Absolutely.

00;29;36 - 00;29;38

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: In what ways?

00;29;38 - 00;30;04

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: When you go to event, you meet so many people. It is getting people to know you. When you present like, "Hey, my name is AJ nice to meet you." "What you do?" I own a restaurant," that kind of stuff. It is meeting and also helps promote your restaurant at the same time.

00;30;04 - 00;30;15

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. You have been in Orlando since 1998. So for almost thirty years. How has Orlando changed since you have been here?

00;30;15 - 00;31;45

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Oh. [It has] changed a lot. First of all, I-4 get bigger, 408 get bigger. You know, more cars the way I see, a lot of crazy drivers out there. A lot of people texting and use the phone while driving is kind of dangerous. But overall, more tourists come to Orlando, more restaurants open the last three years, especially Asian restaurant. A lot, which I think is great because it is everything for everyone. The last year or two, I see a lot of dumpling or Chinese restaurant open, kind of new modern, pretty good like it is something for everyone, like I said. But I still love Orlando. Maybe our food scene is a few years behind New York or L.A. or Atlanta, but it is getting there. And also, I want to shout out to Sonny [Nguyen] from Domu, Johnny and Jimmy Tang from Bento, who [brought] all the new concept to Orlando.

00;31;45 - 00;31;49

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What challenges does Orlando face today?

00;31;49 - 00;32;34

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Right now, I think the pricing, the restaurant, the costs. We have to increase the price a little bit because the tariffs, whatever. And also we are far away from LA and New York. So a lot of people ask me like, why Asian food in Orlando more expensive than New York or LA? Of course, LA, the port is right there. But you think about like, you have to ship from there. You know, another five hours fly, five days driving is going to cost more. And also same with New York.

00;32;34 - 00;32;40

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From your perspective, how will Orlando change in the next thirty years since you have been here for thirty?

00;32;40 - 00;32;43

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: You mean overall?

00;32;43 - 00;32;45

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. Overall how do you think—?

00;32;45 - 00;33;16

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: It will change for good. I think you know, get bigger, more restaurant more people, more tourists. The last few years in COVID, the malls or bigger places, chain restaurants kind of closed now. Right now, it seems like more small business, as a restaurant business, more of those open up, like moms and pop. So on business, which is what I love to see, not many chain restaurant.

00;33;16 - 00;33;26

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I mean, speaking of small business, how has your experience in Orlando been as a small business owner?

00;33;27 - 00;33;49

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: It is hard. Not only small business. I think any business nowadays is hard because a lot of competition is there. But I believe that if you work hard and keep doing the best in what you do, you will succeed.

00;33;49 - 00;34;00

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How has your heritage from Thailand influence your perspective on life generally and living in Central Florida specifically?

00;34;00 - 00;35;28

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Oh. As long as I live here, now I am kind of mixed. Like the way I do things probably like half American and half Thai. I think every culture, some have good and bad. So I kind of like bring all the good, mix it up, you know? Like, let's say, in Thai culture or Asian culture, one bad thing is, not purposely, but body shaming. Not purposely, but if I have not seen you for few months, I may say, "Hey, how are you? Oh look like you get bigger, you get a little fatter," that kind of stuff. I think back then people did not think that much like nowadays. The new generation thing is more like a body shaming, which for me I did not think of anything, but I try not to do those kind of stuff.

00;35;28 - 00;35;37

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;35;37 - 00;36;26

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Oh. Florida is great, has something for everyone. Yeah. If you have a chance come and visit Florida. We have hurricane. We have tornado now. Yeah, we have pretty much everything. We have a lot of good restaurant. We have a lot of things like Gatorland. If you never see an alligator in your life, we have a lot of airboat riding, see the swamp. Not far from Orlando, we have a farm. You can see alpaca. There is a lot of things to do.

00;36;26;22 - 00;36;30;11

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And what about your Thai culture?

00;36;30;13 - 00;36;31;28

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: My Thai culture.

00;36;32 - 00;36;35

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What would you want them to know if they are listening in fifty, a hundred years from now?

00;36;35 - 00;36;57

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: Well, Thai food is great. If you have a chance, try Thai food or visit Thailand. I think Thailand is maybe number one capital for street food. And Thai people are very nice. Yeah. You should visit if you have a chance.

00;36;57 - 00;37;08

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: AJ, thank you, for taking some time out of your day here, providing a space in your restaurant. I really appreciate it. Thank you for sharing your life story.

00;37;08 - 00;37;09

ASAWIN JOCKKEAW: You are welcome. Thank you so much for having me.