

FHS Oral History Project – Brittney Keophoxay-Lam

Description:

Brittney Keophoxay-Lam was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, in 1993. She recollected stories that her family had passed down about their experiences in Laos, particularly how the Laotian Civil War, which lasted from the 1950s to the 1970s, affected them. Her father unofficially served in the Royal Lao Army and survived a harrowing incident in which he witnessed the death of his brothers, leaving him in a refugee camp in Nong Khai, Thailand. Brittney recalled her parents' immigrant experience and how the cultural mistranslations between Lao and America impacted her as a Laotian American at various phases in her life. She remembered how such a disconnect contributed to her family losing their home during the 2007-2008 recession, falling victim to a predatory lending scheme. Brittney reflected on the trauma from this incident and how it has inspired her to pursue law to protect other ethnic families from suffering a similar experience. She discussed how food proved critical in maintaining her Laotian cultural heritage in America and how the misappropriation of Lao food as Thai has motivated her to rectify the differences in their food vending business. Brittney recounted her collegiate experience in the Southern New Hampshire area, as well as her work as a paralegal during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Her father's death in 2024 prompted her to move to Florida, as she sought to recover her mental health through the state's longer daytime hours and warmer weather. In January 2025, Brittney and her husband, Daniel, launched Mae Tao & Son's, a Laotian and Cambodian food vending business as a way to honor her father's legacy, challenge the conflation between Laotian and Thai food, and promote her cultural heritage which often remains overlooked in the larger Asian cultural milieu. She discussed the early hardships of developing the business and what she seeks to accomplish over the next decade. Lastly, she shared her initial observations about Florida, how it compares to the Northeast, and what she hopes to achieve personally, professionally, and culturally in the state.

Transcription:

00;00;11 - 00;00;30

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: This is Sebastian Garcia interviewing Brittany Keophoxay-Lam on May 27th, 2025, at Panera Bread in Clermont, Florida for the Florida Historical Society Oral History Project. Can you please restate your name, date of birth, and where you were born?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: My name is Brittany Keophoxay-Lam. I was born on April 15th, 1993, and I was born in Woonsocket, Rhode Island.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So before we discuss your childhood in Rhode Island, can you just talk to me about your parents heritage, where they are from and what was their life growing up in their native homeland?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: My mom was born in the capital of Laos, Vientiane. But we call it Vientiane, Laos. And my dad was born in southern Laos, in the Khammouane province. We do not know too much about my dad's history other than, my grandpa, his father,

passing away and my dad ended up ordaining for most of his life. That was cut because of the civil war in Laos and also the secret war in Laos, which a lot of people do not know that Laos is the most bombed country in the world per capita. He ended up in a refugee camp in Thailand, Nong Khai, Thailand, which [held] Hmong and Laotian refugees. And he made his way to the United States and worked really hard, pick up really odd jobs, learned how to use the bus in San Diego. He worked as a baker in a little shop in San Diego. He was selling rice. And the reason why I am bring up my dad being in America was because he was the one that brought my mom over. He worked extremely hard, saving up money, because the immigration process, they want to look at your background. They want to know if you can afford to bring someone over. My mom, she was the oldest out of thirteen siblings. Unfortunately she ended up dropping out of school because my grandfather was in the military and my grandmother was a stay at home mom. And obviously having that much kids in the house, you need an extra hand to take care of them. So my mom, end up being, I guess, the second stay at home mom. And she took care of all of my aunts and uncles, and they ended up going to school, getting their degrees. And my mom was very proud of that. Life was a little bit easier for her in Laos. But coming to America, it was extremely hard, not being able to speak English. Same thing with my dad not being speak English, but they managed to navigate through life in America with what they learned and what they had. Unfortunately, with that, I was not given, I guess I would not say it was a bad childhood, but it was definitely rough. Having parents not being able to speak English made it really hard, like teacher parent conferences. You know, teachers would ask, “why do not your parents come to these conferences?” and I thought it was normal, like my parents did not really speak English. It was just going to be all staring each other in the faces like, we are all going to be lost in translation. And also, going to college, trying to explain to them, like books cost money, tuition costs money. And you get into these arguments, the parents be like, “I already paid for the first year, was that not enough?” I was like, “No, that was not enough at all.” So that was basically what my life was like. Growing up with my parents being from a different country, we definitely navigated through what we had. But it was definitely not the easiest growing up.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And you mentioned the conflicts in Laos, the ones that are well known and the ones that are a little bit more obscured—

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Yes.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: You mentioned to me that your dad was the only survivor from those conflicts. Can you just talk to me a little bit about that?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Yeah. During the civil war in Laos, there was a Communist Party and the Royal Lao Party. My dad was unofficially enlisted in the Royal Lao Army. And the last I heard from that situation with my uncles passing away was they were having lunch during their break. And I guess some sharpshooter got all of them, and my dad was able to survive. After that, he only had his mother left. But unfortunately, my grandma

ended up dying, too, because of a lot of health complications. In Laos, healthcare is very scarce. And I have talked about this in the past, especially with my law school applications. They are very reliant on faith. So the only form of health care is praying or giving their children very horrible names. A nickname that I had growing up was “Fat Girl.” And it had good intentions. It was to ward off evil spirits. That was my dad's life in Laos, and he did not really talk about it until his last year with me. And that was because he had stage four cancer. And I think he wanted me to understand that last bit of his life before, like, I was wondering, like, why did not he talk to me about certain things in his past? And putting the pieces together to get more of understanding why he was the way he was.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah, that was going to be my next question. How did you come to discover your family's own history? Because of course it was not like you were born with all this knowledge, you had to receive it somewhere or somehow.

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Right. Yeah. My dad picked up photography during my youth. And I would look through all these photos. I am like, “Who was this?” And “Who was that?” And I guess my dad was very experimental being in America, I mean, he learned how to play the guitar, and there were other refugees, too, that came over from Laos. They started picking up hobbies like playing the guitar and singing. And my dad was doing this little tour in San Diego, which is where a lot of Laotian Americans, ended up living. A lot of refugees came over, and a lot of them are residing there now, and there is a huge population. There is a lot of restaurants over there. There are lot of stores, a lot of resources. And, recently, I forgot what just passed, but they are implementing Southeast Asian history in the curriculum between K through 12 right now in California. And I am hoping that it will start making its way towards Florida and Rhode Island and Massachusetts at some point. But it is going to take some time because a lot of them ended up in California first. So, that is my goal. And hopefully we will be able to spread more of the awareness of our culture, our history.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So speaking of Rhode Island, just talk to me about your childhood growing up in Rhode Island. I know you mentioned how there were struggles in terms of not only with your parents, the language barrier, but just talk to me about the conditions that you grew up in culturally, economically, and otherwise.

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Well, my dad was a little bit all over the United States, to be honest. But he ended up in Massachusetts because of his friends who end up working in Massachusetts. And we end up residing in Rhode Island, right on the border of Massachusetts, because Rhode Island was a little bit cheaper, but Mass best paid a little bit better. We did go through a lot of struggles. My parents ended up buying their first home around 2006, but we did not have a lot of guidance in the home buying process. And there were not a lot of Lao-speaking professionals who understood financial and legal terms. Therefore, the 2007-2008 stock market crash, we lost our home. And I was not really sure how or why because I was twelve at the time. At that time, I would not really think that I should know any of what was

going on, my job was just to be a kid. As I got older, and I guess things come a little bit full circle, I got my first job at a title company. And in title, you have to understand real estate and the home buying process. I picked up the tools and I figured out exactly why we lost our home. I guess, my parents got caught in the whole predatory lending situation, and there was an adjustable rate rider on the mortgage, and you know, it was adjusting the interest rates. So we got to the point where we could not afford the home anymore. And we ended up losing it. That was a big traumatic point in my life because my parents they do not understand banking or legal terms, and that also inspired me to pursue my legal career and also I am applying to law school next year. I want to be able to help these communities that do not have the resources that I wish I had growing up. In 2018, I was able to buy my first home, and I did not get an adjustable rate rider on that, that was for sure, especially with how the economy is going right now. I have been a homeowner since 2018. My parents they have been living there. My dad died peacefully in hospice there. And there was a lot of memories that home gave me, and I am hoping that I will be able to help other families that went through the same struggles I did, because I know I am not the only one. It was just really hard for a lot of these young Lao and Cambodian Americans to talk about because they tend to feel embarrassed because, like, "Why is that happening to my family? Why do not my parents know? Why do my parents not know how to speak a certain way? Or why do not they understand certain terms? Why do I have to do everything for them?" So I want to be able to provide that bit of help for other families who are going through this same situations right now.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: That is inspiring. I was going to ask later on, what sort of has inspired your current career choices. And yeah, that makes total sense. Thanks for sharing. Were you an only child?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: I have an older brother. And again, it goes back to why childhood was very hard. He is autistic. So, even though he is my older brother, a lot of the responsibilities that came on to me were as if I was the oldest child. Mail coming into the home, reading whatever came in, not even getting a chance to eat your first meal getting back from school is like, "What is in the mail? What is this? This is like, am I in trouble?" "No, I will read it for you, but I wish I could eat my meal first." And I definitely know it is not just Southeast Asian Americans, it is a lot of Hispanic Americans like a lot of the first generation kids ended up coming to this country, and their first job being the family advocate and, yeah, it is frustrating, but you picked up a lot of thick skin from it, and you also learn a lot from it as well.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How did your family and you maintain your cultural heritage in Rhode Island?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: We maintained our culture definitely through a lot of food. Unfortunately, I did not pick up too much of the cooking from my mom because I was working like crazy. I was working my corporate job and also waitressing at night. But food was always something that I was very strong about. And this sometimes this becomes a big debate

where a lot of Thai restaurants, I would say a good chunk of their food is actually Lao, but it is typically a marketing tactic. No one really knows what Lao food is. And they know what Thai food is. So they are kind of gravitating to, like, “I am going to go to that restaurant cause there is Thai food there.” But the food is very similar. The only difference is Lao food, we end up using a lot more fermented fish sauce. And I know you are going to ask me at a later point why we ended up doing this business. Yeah, you will understand why we got there.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. So you spent essentially your formative years in Rhode Island, and even then some. Throughout your K-12 experience, were you aware of your cultural difference, your cultural uniqueness? Were there a lot of other kids like you growing up or not really?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: I feel like there were kids that felt like me, but they did not like talking about it. I guess it was a sense of shame or, it was embarrassing, and I have also mentioned in some of my applications in the past, where I wish I kind of aligned myself more with, I guess, acceptable Asian ethnicities. Japanese is very well known. Chinese is very well known. Korean is very well known, but you do not really know about Lao. So I think that was also why a lot of my peers who are also Lao Americans, did not really talk about them being Lao Americans. And I will even admit, I sometimes felt like I tried to change myself. Like I was very hyper-fixated on the Korean culture at some point. I wanted to start learning Korean. I started listening to their songs. The K-Pop wave, where everyone loves K-pop. I was part of that wave, too. I was trying to learn how to speak it. I was trying to learn how to read it, which I end up doing very well. But I appreciate the culture, but it is not who I am. And I start to understand that I had to stick with and be proud of who I am. So I started realizing over time that social media also plays a big role in representation. I did not see a lot of it on—I guess I will start showing how old I am—Myspace. No one really talked about being Lao American on Myspace. But now that we are in 2025, people are starting to talk about being proud of being Lao American, they are starting to see more representation. The last Summer Olympics, Sunisa Lee, she is part of the gymnastics. She is technically Lao American. A lot of people do not understand that Hmong is actually an ethnicity in Laos, and when she was representing the US, a lot of Lao Americans were extremely proud, and some of them even cried. They do not even know the sport. So I think social media definitely played a big role in how we perceive yourselves in this current day and age.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And where did you attend college?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: My first year, I actually was in Boston at Suffolk University. I ended up transferring to Southern New Hampshire [University] because I felt like I did not have the support there. I did not see a lot of people like me, again, in Boston, there is a huge population of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and I did not see anyone like myself. I did see that they were getting a lot of support from their parents. As with me, I did not. So I ended up going somewhere where I end up getting more emotional and academic support.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And talk to me about how that manifested in Southern New Hampshire, that emotional and academic support.

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: For instance, like applying for financial aid. At first, it was something I felt ashamed about, but I am like, “okay, everyone applies for financial aid.” And I think with the school being able to explain that to me felt a little more, like I am not alone. And it was kind of like a whole hand-holding process where I am like, okay, I do not know what I am doing in college because high school is a lot different. [In] high school, books are given to you. Your classes are kind of picked for you. You are kind of with the same group of kids for most of your ninth to twelfth grades. In college, you have to figure out your whole schedule for each semester. You have to meet up with an academic advisor, and I will be honest, some of them do not really care about you, they are just there really to do their job. But once I started realizing that there are certain schools I actually have that support, it made me feel like, okay, I really have to be my own advocate and really watch out for myself. And now that I am going to be applying for law school—and I know that is going to be a new beast that I am going to be taking on, and first year of law school, from what I have heard from, it is your toughest year. So, I am already building my support right now. And, surprisingly, a lot of it has been in Orlando. I have met two Cambodian attorneys already in Orlando. And they talked about these organizations that will give me a lot of support while I am in law school and that makes me feel so much better because I know that I am not going to be thrown to the wolves. And I am not going to be dealing with law school alone. Like, obviously I have family support, friend support, but having professional support makes it a lot easier knowing that, okay, I could talk to someone who kind of is in my shoes, like the attorney that I am going to be talking to on, actually, Thursday, she [is] Cambodian American, very similar background, had a death in the family, I was not in the foster care, but she was. But she was able to overcome all that and become a really successful attorney. And she was also voted Woman of the Year in Orlando. And it was a very inspiring story, knowing that if she could come out of that, I can come out of that, too. So, a lot of the things that I unfortunately had to go through during undergrad definitely helped me know what to watch out for, for law school now.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Yeah. And this person you mentioned kind of goes back to sort of how, present day, there is more of an awareness, more of a pride from Cambodia, from Lao.

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Yes.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And how it is now even trickling down to younger generations like yourself. So what was your major in Southern New Hampshire?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: My major was international business. And I was not actually going to be a lawyer. I dealt with lawyers in the past, and I thought my skin was not thick enough to handle being in law school or even being an attorney. Because you end up going against an opposing counsel one of these days and they are going to try to rip you in every direction. But I feel like just being Asian-American in general, you kind of learn how to take the hits and just kind of keep striving forward. So I graduate with my business degree. I thought I was going to be a very rich banker after, but I could still use my business degree, but, just for something else. When I go to law school, I do want to either do affordable housing or immigration. Affordable housing goes back to the whole situation with my family losing our home. I want to be able to help families have a roof over their head, no matter how much money is in their bank account. Again, everything ends up coming full circle and why I am doing the things I do nowadays.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What year did you graduate?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: I graduated in 2019.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: 2019. So then after you graduated, what was sort of your life trajectory then?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: During that time, I was working as a legal assistant during COVID, and that was a whole learning curve for me. But we managed. I ended up having, like, I guess, a quarter-life crisis where I felt like, "Okay, I got one thing done. What is the next thing for me to do?" So I ended up looking for a graduate program to attend because I just felt like I was not fulfilling life the way I should. So once you finish one thing you always feel like you got to do something else. So, I was like, "Should I go for my MBA? Should I go for some other master's degree?" Which I ended up doing. I end up going for my Masters of Legal Studies. However, I kind of wish I went straight to law school instead of going for my masters, but that degree did help me a lot with getting the kind of the basics about what I am going to be dealing with in law school and also building some good relationships with the professors who are actually practicing attorneys who have been helping me with a lot of my application process as well.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And shortly thereafter, you started your paralegal career. Talk to me about that.

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Yep. I started my paralegal career. Definitely a lot harder than being a legal system or a receptionist. You are definitely working under an attorney. You are basically kind of practicing law without practicing law. Obviously, I cannot give advice, but I ended up figuring things out. Definitely with banking, especially with a lot of money

involved. I do not know if it was ever going to be helpful for, like, my personal life, but it does make me feel smart, I guess, knowing that I could look up public records. I know how to look up who owns a certain house. Also, even with our business right now, who I should and should not do business with because, obviously, I can look up their business and see if they are in good standing or they are not and if it is going to be a big risk for my husband and I to pursue any interaction with potential people.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So what prompted you to arrive in Florida to leave the Northeast?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: I decided to come to Florida right when my dad was about to die. It was a lot of planning during the summer, and I wanted to be able to start working on my mental health. The weather, obviously, in Florida is a lot better, and the sun is out a lot longer, too. We also have four dogs. I forgot to mention that, and being able to just walk outside and play with them, was going to be a lot more beneficial to my mental health. So, I could not imagine myself having someone close to me pass away and being stuck in the house so often. I knew my mental health was going to spiral down. So we decided to make the executive decision to just move to Florida. And also my husband being, I guess, a half Florida native, it kind of made sense. He already knew the ins and outs of Florida. So, we were like, let's just go to Florida and see where we go. [**SEBASTIAN GARCIA:** And why Tampa specifically?] Tampa was because the legal arena over there had a lot more corporate and real estate, but my job ended up letting me work remotely, so I did not really have to move to Tampa, I could have moved anywhere, actually. So, we are hoping to move to Orlando at some point and have our business start booming a lot there because, we have been getting a lot of support. And also, we have noticed there has been a lack of representation with Cambodian and Lao food, which is what our business offers. We serve Lao and Cambodian food, and we try not to mask it as either a Thai or Vietnamese, because that is why a lot of these restaurants do nowadays. It is a marketing tactic for them to gain more patronage. So, if the customers know what kind of food is, they are going to end up wanting to come in and buy it.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So what is the name of your food business?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: The name of the business is "Mae Tao & Son's" We based it off my mom, which is "Mae Tao", which either means elderly mother or grandma and "Son's" is Daniel [Brittney's husband], actually. After my dad passed away, we wanted to kind of do something a little bit more entrepreneur like and also become our own bosses. We decided we did not really want to work for anyone anymore. So we started looking up all these recipes that our families usually cook for us for big festivals or a holiday. And we were trying to see if we could bring it to Florida, especially the Tampa Bay area. We tried looking for Cambodian and Lao food, and there was a huge lack in it, and there is a lot of Lao food, but it is masked as a Thai restaurant. We wanted to bring more awareness and bring more representation to Lao and Cambodian food. And Daniel was a chef for quite some time. He was doing sushi. But again sushi is Japanese, and we are not Japanese. We will appreciate the culture. But we wanted to

stick more to our roots and bring more awareness to the Tampa Bay and hopefully all of Florida at some point about why Lao and Cambodian food is so great.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So what year did you start the business?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: We started this year. So it was officially formed on, I believe, January 7th, 2025. But we were officially in business on February 1st, 2025. And a little plug. I also used my legal experience to get all the paperwork done, because this is all the stuff that I knew how to make sure we were operating legally and efficiently and also doing collecting, filings, and doing everything the right way before we get in trouble from the secretary of state.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: So how have you grown the business in these very infant beginning months?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Well, the first few months was definitely a lot of L's. We were not in the right spots. We were definitely over ambitious. And we also definitely overbooked in places where we knew we were not going to do well. But it has been a lot of testing out certain items. We started off doing a lot of fusion with was it sushi? And a lot of items that we think Americans would like, slowly taking those items off and then adding more authentic Lao and Cambodian food. And what do you know, a lot of consumers end up liking it, came to Orlando and a lot of people start ordering our authentic Lao and Cambodian food. And now we know where our market is. And we know, all the younger people tend to want to try, our food, also because they love vlogging. So we are slowly making our way to the right places. And I think the next few months are going to be picking up a lot more now.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Can you give me an example of certain dishes that you guys make and sell, authentic dishes?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: So, one of our best sellers is actually the Crying Tiger Beef. It is a play on a Thai dish. A lot of people, make it, too. But Dan puts a Cambodian twists on the beef with a lemongrass paste called kroueng, that he incorporates into the short ribs and I am pretty sure a lot of our consumers do not really know what it is, but once we start taking pictures of it and start introducing it and start really talking about what it is, a lot of people start getting very interested in, and the first week that we gave it a shot, we sold out within the first hour. And I think we are just figuring out who the crowd and what people like. So we definitely are doing a lot of tweaks with the menu. But we definitely noticed that, again, like, the Crying Tiger has been one of the best sellers, it even sold out yesterday.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: I met you both at the Asian Cultural Festival, in Ocoee about three weeks ago. Talk to me about the significance of events like that, not only for your business, but just personally as well.

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Events like that, I believe, is very important, especially trying to get each country to have some type of representation. It gives more awareness about the type of food that we provide in, and I did mention earlier about the little weird conflict between Thailand and Laos, we actually did get a few Thai people coming up to our booth, and they wanted specifically Lao papaya salad. And I think these events, it is really great to be able to showcase like our true authentic self and also incorporating a little bit of our history when we were selling our items too. It is not just, “oh, we are there to sell and make money,” we are there to represent and share a bit of our history while making some money at the same time. So I do strongly believe that these events are very important to us as Cambodian and Laotian Americans.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: And to that point, why is it important for you all through food to showcase and promote your culture?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: I believe it is important for us to showcase our food in our culture, because a lot of it is dying out right now. Unfortunately, I have not seen much of the youth caring about their culture or even trying to learn about how to make their food. I have also noticed a lot of our youth have been going out to restaurants more rather than making food that their parents made. So this is very important to us because we want to be able to see more of like, people younger than us, being able to say like, “Hey, I know how to make Lao food, I know how to make Cambodian food.” And at some point, if no one says or does anything, it is going to die out. And where are we going to be able to obtain the culture, the language and the food after that?

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: What do you hope to see in your business one year from now, five years from now, and ten years from now?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: One year from now, I am hoping for us to be more sustainable and hopefully quit my corporate job. In five years, I am hoping that we would have a food truck, so we could be able to not pop up all the time, because that is extremely hard on our bodies. And not load so much, just pop everything in the car and go. In ten years, I am hoping that Dan is able to have his brick and mortar and be able to do a tasting menu one day and hopefully get a Michelin Star.

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SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Absolutely. I know you have been here only for a few months, so I am going to frame my question in this way. What have been your thoughts about Florida and

how have they changed? You know, you were born in the States, and you were born in the North, so you must have had some preconceptions about Florida, maybe the South generally. Now that you have been here for a few months, what do you think so far?

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BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: So far, I do think Florida is great—other than the driving, that is extremely horrible. But I have been looking into a lot of the Asian communities in Florida, and it is there. I just do not see much of anyone trying to start something or I think it is kind of bringing me back to how I was when I was younger. Being a little bit ashamed of being Lao American. I think a lot of these communities are a little they do not want to talk about it because they feel like it is not important to them, and they are just trying to live their lives. But I am hoping that, as our business and my legal career progresses, that we will be able to bring a lot more of these small communities out and being proud of who they are and why they are even Florida and showcasing their businesses, either showcasing their food, their culture, history, etcetera.

00;34;39 - 00;34;46

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: From your perspective, how will Florida change in the next twenty five years?

00;34;46 - 00;35;46

BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: In the next twenty five years, I think there will be huge shifts with food definitely. I think at the end of the day, food brings everyone together and especially in, Central Florida, where Disney is, there is a lot of tourism. And I think a lot of Asian food will be able to get across more people, and there is still a lot of other communities that are not really talked about. Like, for instance, the Burmese, no one really talks about them. They often get excluded with the Southeast Asian New Year. You have heard of, like Lao, Thai, Cambodian. Everyone excludes the Burmese. They celebrate the New Year as well. And I have talked that to my husband so many times. I do think there is going to be a lot more inclusiveness in the next twenty five years and a lot more openness to different cultures and people.

00;35;46 - 00;35;57

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: How has your Laotian heritage influenced your perspective on life generally and living in the United States specifically?

00;35;57 - 00;36;47

BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: Being Laotian American in the United States was extremely hard, but I believe the people of Laos and the children, the refugees who were living here, definitely overcame a lot. And they were very resilient. And being Laotian American, I feel like I am able to overcome anything that comes my way, especially no matter how hard it is. I think I will be able to get through it. If I have gotten through foreclosure, my dad passing away, and my parents dealing with war back home, I could technically overcome anything while I am here and, it has definitely made me a lot stronger knowing that I am Lao American and also be able to be proud to talk about it as well.

00;36;47 - 00;36;57

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;36;57 - 00;37;22

BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: I would want them to know that Laos and the people are extremely hard working and some of the friendliest people out there, and their food is amazing. And as for Florida, I believe it was a great melting pot of diverse cultures, and the food will always bring people together here.

00;37;22 - 00;37;32

SEBASTIAN GARCIA: Brittany, thank you so much for taking some time out of your day driving from Tampa, I should say, to speak with me to share a little bit of your life story. I really appreciate it.

00;37;32 - 00;37;33

BRITTNEY KEOPHOXAY-LAM: You are welcome. Thank you for having me.