

# **AN INTERVIEW WITH SANJE SEDERA**

An Oral History Conducted by Kristel Peralta, Cecilia Winchell, Ayrton Yamaguchi and Stefani Evans

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Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islander  
Oral History Project

Oral History Research Center at UNLV  
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University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

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The transcript received minimal editing that includes the elimination of fragments, false starts, and repetitions in order to enhance the reader's understanding of the material. In several cases photographic sources accompany the individual interviews with permission of the narrator.

The following interview is part of a series of interviews conducted under the auspices of Reflections: The Las Vegas Asian American and Pacific Islanders Oral History Project.

Claytee D. White  
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## PREFACE

“In 2007 something happened... I met then-Senator, Barack Obama. I was completely inspired by his presence. I was in a very vulnerable position in my time. He really inspired me to do something completely different.”

Born in Sri Lanka to modest-income parents who worked in academic settings, Sanje Sedera used education as a path to open a series of doors that ultimately lead him to call Las Vegas home starting in 1996. Sedera first went abroad for one year of high school to study—and play cricket—in Australia. Self-motivated and driven, Sedera was a leader in student government, the cricket team, and debate team, earning a spot in an American school in Sri Lanka. After graduating, he accepted an admission offer at Idaho State University in Pocatello, choosing the rural, small-town environment so he could study, work, graduate and start earning money as quickly as possible.

With a keen sense of humor that transcends his words, Sedera speaks of his experiences as a Buddhist in rural America, its temperate influences later a stark contrast with the conspicuous capitalism and the expansion of Las Vegas. Mindfulness, the importance of family, spices, languages and cricket are some of his favorite topics. Sedera talks of his political activism, forged at home in Sri Lanka, including interest in race and gender equality issues; and how he met then-Senator Barack Obama, checked out his frayed pant hems, became convinced Obama was a grounded candidate and went to work for him. After two years on the Obama campaign, Sedera ran for public office, supported Kamala Harris’s campaigns, and founded the “powerhouse” organization known as the Asian American Democratic Caucus. Sedera remains close to the Nevada political scene, advising U.S. House Representative Dina Titus, the co-chair of the Sri Lanka American Congressional Caucus.

Sedera and his family have thrived in post-9/11 America, resisting labels and outcries of racial discrimination and rationalizing divisive political times by contrasting U.S. society to the corruption in “third world” countries like Sri Lanka. Sedera, whose first full-time job was as a store manager in the Kmart management training program, proudly operates several businesses in Las Vegas today, including a naturopathic medical clinic with his wife. His story ends with a reflection on the Dutch, British, Spanish and Portuguese influence on his home country; and leaves a reader feeling that Sedera is a quintessential representative of the modern-day melting pot that is Las Vegas.

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April 20, 2021

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Kristel Peralta, Cecilia Winchell, Ayrton Yamaguchi and Stefani Evans

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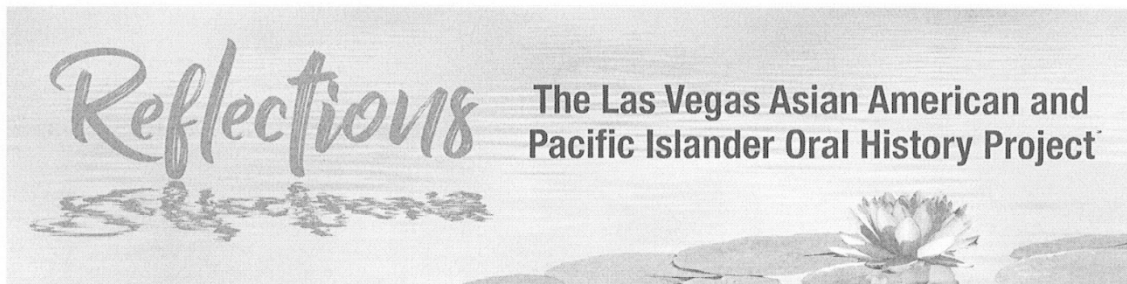
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**Good morning. This is Kristel Peralta. Today I am with Cecilia Winchell, Ayrton Yamaguchi, and Stefani Evans. The date is April 16, 2021. We are with Sanje Sedera.**

**Could you please spell your first and last name for the recording?**

Sanje, S-A-N-J-E. Last name Sedera, S-E-D-E-R-A.

**Thank you very much. Our first question is to tell us about your family and your childhood—parents, siblings, where you grew up, and anything you can remember from growing up.**

I was born in Sri Lanka. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the country, Sri Lanka. It's a small island beneath India, a small island. When I say small, population-wise it has about 24 million people right now. I was born there. I just turned fifty. I lived there until I was sixteen years old, and I moved to Australia. I lived in Australia for a couple of years and then I went to the United States. What I remember about Sri Lanka... I make my visits to Sri Lanka pretty much every year still because I have a lot of extended family there. The primary visit recently was to visit my grandma. She passed away a couple of years ago. I would make that visit every year. I went to the biggest Buddhist school in the world, they considered it. I went to that school almost up to my high school, and then I would go to Australia—that's what I remember.

**SE: *Where in Australia did you live?***

I lived in Darwin in the Northern Territory. I was an exchange student, so that's how I moved. I played cricket there.

**KP: Could you tell us more about what it was like growing up in Sri Lanka and Australia?**

Growing up in Sri Lanka, my mother was a school principal. My father was actually a multifaceted individual. He did so many different things. He's an author. He still writes. He has written almost eighty-plus books on various subject matters. I have another brother, a younger



brother. He is a professor at the University of Queensland. Our household was not a normal household by any means because we are a lot of different personalities, different types of personalities, and we were very much a middle-class family. We did not know what it was like to not have anything because we grew up in our environment—it was a very happy environment for us because we didn't know anything better. We were very content with what we had. Education was a primary thing in our family. My mother was the first in her family to go to college. She became a schoolteacher at the age of twenty, and she retired being a principal at the age of forty. She had twenty years of service being in the education sector, and then she retired. Then she joined the insurance industry. My father got into the insurance field in Sri Lanka when he was in his mid-forties, and he became an instant success at it because he had a lot of connections that he made when he was a journalist. That actually triggered the way for us to come to the United States, because that provided the financial means for myself and for my brother to pursue higher education.

Higher education in Sri Lanka is extremely competitive and it's not about whether you could afford it financially; it's about being the top student to get into the university system in Sri Lanka. I was not that top student by any means. I was an average student, but I was an okay student. Even though my mother was a principal of a school, she never really pushed us like, "Hey, go study this much." She was like, "No, enjoy your childhood. Go play. Go do your classes if you have to." Until I was age nine or ten or so, if there were twenty-five kids in a classroom, I would be the twentieth in the ranking. I was not... because I didn't care.

But at the age of ten, you have to go through an exam called a Scholarship Exam. It's all MCQ, multiple-choice [question] answers. That age and the grade-five exam is a crucial one, because at that point you can choose to go to a different school if you get good marks. I think it

was luck that played out for me. I got the highest marks in the first level because of the MCQs in my school. I got the highest marks in grade five. Now, all of a sudden, my friends are looking up to me, like, “Man, you got the highest score. How did that happen?” [laughter] That was so much pressure on me. It actually caused me to become a better student. Seriously, to this day I don’t know how it happened, but it was just divine hand or whatever. It was just MCQ. I got the highest marks in my school.

I went to a different school. Now I felt some pressure on myself because my father is an academic, my mother is an academic, and now I’ve got to figure out how to play this right because I’ve got a second chance. At that point, I started studying a little bit better, but still, I played a lot of sports. I played cricket; that got me to go to Australia. I played very well. I became a more-than-average student at that point.

Then at the age of fifteen, there was a grade ten exam. You had to study eight subjects, and they gave you the grades based on your academic performance. A “D” for distinction, “C” for credit; those are the two highest ones you can get. I got six distinctions, two credits, okay, I was happy with it. I didn’t care if I got eight or not. I was happy with six.

Then at that point in that school, there was a program called American Field Services, AFS. This was back in 1986, probably before you were born. In ’86, Sri Lanka was going through a lot of turmoil, youth unrest, as far as the youth were rising against the government, and I got caught up with it, too. At the age of sixteen, you’re ideological and your testosterone levels are higher, I think. You’re just going crazy. But we were believing in certain changes to happen, so I got caught up with it. My father also thought my life was in danger. I was outspoken. I was becoming an organizer in the school, doing more than noticeable, so becoming a youth leader. This college came along. It was a great time for me to transition out of the country because had I

lived there for two more years, I would have gotten killed. That's what my parents thought. At that time if you were to wear the color red outside, you get killed. It was that bad. There was almost a hundred thousand youth were killed during that time in Sri Lanka, ages of sixteen to twenty-five.

I applied for this scholarship. About thirty thousand youth applied for it. They only selected twenty people. I was the only one who was selected from my school. I was the last one to go on that scholarship program. After that scholarship year, the program ended. Twenty of us got selected from the whole country to go to...some went to New Zealand; some went to Australia. Here I am, sixteen years old. I didn't speak much English; I still don't. I went to Australia. I lived with an Australian family and didn't speak much English, but I was playing—do you know the sport cricket? It's a British sport. Sri Lanka was a British colony, so one of the gifts that came to us here was cricket. I joined the cricket team in high school. I ended up representing the state in the state tournament. I was the only brown-skinned person. Everybody else had white skin. It was fun. I got to know a lot of friends. I made a lot of friends through playing cricket. I toured all over Australia.

I came back to Sri Lanka after two years. When I came back all the schools were still closed because of the uprising, no schools. By this time my father was doing pretty well in the insurance industry. He's an amazing person. It [his success] allowed us to pursue other options of higher education. I still couldn't get my high school diploma because I didn't finish. My dad said, "There's an American school that just came to Sri Lanka, the first year. Maybe you can try to look at it to see whether you could join it." And I said, "I don't even have a high school diploma." [My dad replied,] "Well, you'll figure it out." I said, "Okay."

I went and asked for the requirement, and they said, “You need to do the SAT to join the school.” [Ed. Note: Introduced in 1926 as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the name changed 1993-1997 to Scholastic Assessment Test; since 1997, the test has been known as the SAT.] I said, “What’s an SAT?” I never knew because I studied in a different medium. You had to do TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language]. I went to take classes. There were tutors that were available. Somehow my SAT scores were good enough. I’m good at this guessing game. [laughter] My SAT scores were good enough to get into the school, so I got in. Then I spent about a year, a year and a half there. My grades were good. I was on the dean’s list from the beginning.

Then I applied for some schools in the United States to transfer out from Sri Lanka. I picked some rural schools for a reason. I wanted to study and didn’t want any distraction. I chose Wyoming; Laramie, Wyoming; some schools in Montana; and Idaho. I ended up going to Idaho State. That’s how I ended up in Idaho. August 18, 1992, I landed in Idaho. That was my first time coming to the United States. I made some friends on the plane and he ended up being in my dorm, actually. That’s how I came here.

**KP: Thank you for that. Before I move on to your thoughts about what it was like being in the United States for the first time, I’d like to circle back to your childhood. Is there anything you remember about your grandparents?**

Oh yes.

**Could you please tell us about them?**

Obviously, we have two sets of grandparents, right? I was privileged to see them live and associate with them for a long time. For some reason, I became very close to my father’s side, paternal parents. I would say my father and my grandparents especially played a huge role in

shaping me in my activism side. My grandmother from my father's side was a woman organizer politically. That's very unheard of back then in Sri Lanka. She was very active. I thought of her like Margaret Thatcher, always searching, wouldn't take no for an answer. I always spent my school holidays with my grandparents, for three or four months sometimes. Holidays are long and Sri Lanka has the most number of holidays in the whole world. Seriously, there are about a hundred holidays. I spent a lot of holidays with my grandparents.

On my father's side, he has ten brothers and sisters, ten. All of them ended up going to college, but they were not very wealthy or anything like that, because they valued education so well. My father is the one who supported other brothers and sisters to go to college. He opted out of going to college so he could work, so he could earn money to help the brothers and sisters. His younger brother is also the secretary of education from where I come from in Sri Lanka, and he ended up getting a Fulbright Scholarship in 1975 and came to the University of Iowa. He had only fifty bucks when he came to Iowa. My grandparents really instilled the idea of education, education, education, whatever the reason, because that is the ticket to get to the next level. My father ended up getting a Ph.D. about ten years ago for the work that he has done for the U.S. in different fields. Grandparents actually instill all the values that you inherit right now.

I was just talking to a friend of mine. The environment we lived in back home, because it's a predominantly Buddhist country—Buddhism is a beautiful religion—but it also tells you certain things; live within your means, don't rattle things around, be calm. This doesn't really help you if you're a driven person. It kind of suppresses you, like an immune system, like "Don't do it!" If you are a younger person, if you just take risks, it's the other way around. I have a friend that I talk with every Friday—we go and have a cup of coffee, we talk, the childhood friend that I have; we were just talking about it today, "Hey, Buddhism is good, but also, it's a

downer. It's like you're taking marijuana, like don't do anything, just stay back, don't make any...Isn't it true?" Yes, it's so true. Had we been born in this country, we talked about, "What's the difference between us and Zuckerberg?" The entrepreneurship. That's also driven from the back, but the country of origin plays a huge role, the culture, and the religion.

***CW: Now, if we could move back to when you first got into the U.S., what were your first reactions when you landed in Idaho? How was the culture shock?***

Well, I landed at night. I came in a little Cessna. I came in a Cessna plane because Pocatello, Idaho is a very small town. It's a college town. I didn't know it was a college town. It was the first time in the U.S. Okay, you are here. I get into a motel at night. It was ten o'clock at night. The next day I got up and went to the student services and, wow, this is different. You're on your own. You didn't have parents or anyone. You just walked around with the foreign students there. I had my transcripts. They said, "Okay, you've got student housing." I went there. It was kind of shocking. I jammed my hand in the door. I didn't know the door would close by itself and I caught my finger. I had to go to the health center and get six stitches because I was bleeding. I was like, okay, now this is different.

I didn't have money to pay for my next semester. I had enough money for that particular semester. My next thing was to find a job. I got a job the very next day as a dishwasher. I made four dollars and fifteen cents per hour. The next day I had a job lined up. I got my credits transferred. I was set. I was ready to go to school the next day. But I had all these things kind of set up and I had a checklist. Okay, do this, do this, do this. I didn't have time even to absorb everything that was going on around me because I had to mark my checklist. Okay, did this, did this, did this. Now I am ready to absorb. I didn't have time to enjoy that or have the pain or pleasure of experience at that moment. Does that make sense?

**KP: Yes. Were there any clubs that you joined in school? Were you part of any organizations?**

In high school?

**In high school or college.**

Yes, I was part of every club and caucus out there. I was the captain of the Debating Society. I was the captain of the cricket team. I was the publisher of the school newspaper. I was the prefect; they're student leaders. We had about nine thousand students in my high school. Every year they select some [for] interviews. I was a senior prefect, meaning that you are one of the senior prefects. I was the vice president of the Buddhist Student Association. I was part of the Sunday School Student Association; I was the chair of that. That is going through the school. And many other organizations. I was the announcer; every morning people have announcements coming out, so I was part of the broadcasting unit for the school.

Then I came to Idaho. I joined the Foreign Student Association, but I wanted to run for the Student Senate next year. I was like, I don't know. I was not really sure. I was trying to finish school. I was on a dean's list throughout Idaho because I was only driven by just to finish school, get out. The reason I chose Idaho and Montana and Wyoming, I didn't want to have any distractions. I was the very singular mind of finishing school. I was not there to party. I just wanted to get out, finish school, and maybe go back to Sri Lanka. I was on a student visa.

***CW: When you first came here, what were the hardest things to leave behind back in Sri Lanka?***

Back then telephone calls were very expensive, very, very expensive. My family was there working. We wrote letters every week. I don't know whether you know there's something called aerogrammes. I still have those, every letter. My grandparents wrote letters to me, my parents,

and my brother. It's a big box. Leaving the family behind was the biggest part. I didn't go to see them until 1996, so four years I was without seeing them. Phone calls were very expensive, so we couldn't make calls. Back then there were phone cards; these were stolen numbers. You probably remember this. Stolen phone numbers from AT&T. Some engineers would pass out these numbers. Every student will get this and you go to these calling booths and you sit there and call and call. Somebody answered. I don't know how the number comes up. That's how we had to make calls to our parents. We didn't know any better. But I couldn't make any calls; they were so expensive. My parents didn't have a phone back home. They will send a message through a third party and say, "We're going to call you in three days. Be at that house."

**KP: You said that you didn't get to see your family until when you graduated, right?**

Yes.

**How did you spend your holidays and summers in Idaho?**

Holidays and summers I worked. Every summer I took eighteen credits—eighteen credits, two sessions, nine and nine; that is the easiest way to take more credits, and I had three jobs. I was a cook early morning. I got a job at the student services. Summertime there are no students, but the U.S. Army would come and do their training. I got promoted from being a dishwasher to become a cook. I learned how to cook, so I would make breakfast every morning. That's from four-thirty until almost nine o'clock in the morning, four-thirty to nine. Then I go to my class. I'd take the classes and then I'd come back and work for a couple of hours. Then I also became my dorm assistant manager, so I got free housing. Then I would go and paint at night because summertime is when you paint the student housing—it's very hot—because students are not there. We are doing maintenance. Then at night, I did the restaurant again and I also did tutoring. That's how I earned my money to pay for my—I didn't take any student loans. Number one, I was not



qualified to get student loans. No student loans. I had no debt, but I earned every penny. That's how I spent my summers.

But then also I made friends with—this is an interesting story—I made friends with a family in Boise, Idaho, the same family that came with me on the plane when I was going to Pocatello. I'm still in contact with them. That family wanted us to go to Thanksgiving. I didn't know what Thanksgiving was. Okay, we go there. It's my first time seeing snow on Thanksgiving. An interesting thing happened. This family of my college roommate—he became my roommate; his name is [Cy/Si?]. [His] grandmother, Mrs. [Howes/House/Howze?], she passed a few years back, but we were the first brown people that she saw in her life, and she was terrified of us. This is a white lady in Idaho. She is terrified, this little lady. But we made conversation and after the next few days, she really loved us. We are not as curious. She must have been in her eighties, nineties. That really bonded us because the grandma [Howes?] likes us. We would go every Thanksgiving and those small holidays, like Veterans Day. We would fly out to Boise and spend some time in the house. We ended up taking her out in a wheelchair. That's an interesting thing because that changed her perception of Brown people, like, wow, they're not scary. That changed the whole family's attitude.

***CW: What did you end up majoring in in college, and why?***

I ended up majoring in computer information systems, which I really sucked at because I had no choice. When I was in Sri Lanka, there is no choice. You take that class, computer information systems, and there is another one, but I hadn't even seen a computer before, so I took that class. Honestly, I didn't even have a computer at home, and I took that class. All right, I went through with the program, and I graduated. My GPA was pretty good, 3.5, but I was really bad, really

bad, and I hated it. Why? Because I had no choice. After I graduated, I got a degree in computer information systems and management.

Back then—I think they probably do the same thing—the employers would come right before you graduate and try to recruit you out. It is a big thing. You dress up and all that. You have your resume. You think you're the big one. Okay, go through the whole process. Kmart came for a management training program. Back then they were offering almost twenty-nine thousand dollars. That's a lot of money even right now. I got selected under their management training program. That's how I got my first job other than my dishwasher career, and I moved to Montana. My first assignment was in Bozeman, Montana, a really cold place. I went from Sri Lanka [to] Idaho, then Montana. That's how I ended up in Bozeman, through Kmart.

**KP: Now I'd like to move on to how you actually ended up in Las Vegas, so could you tell us that story?**

Kmart. Kmart took me to Bozeman. I was a management trainee. I went through the program there. It was a three-month management training program. After that, they said, "Your first assignment is in Las Vegas." Then they transferred me to Las Vegas. I came here from the coldest place to the hottest place. My car didn't even have A/C because nobody needs A/C in Montana, right? I drove from there. I worked in the East Sahara Kmart. There was a Kmart, the oldest Kmart in Las Vegas. That was my real job.

Right before I got the job, I was still on a student visa; it's called the Practical Training Program. I had to either stay here with a purpose or go back. Back then there were two options. I was thinking maybe my employer Kmart will sponsor me, which they started doing, but at the same time there was this green card lottery, so I applied for it. I applied for it while I was a student, and they said I got selected. There was a pattern. [All laughing] I can tell you the

numbers: grade five, grade ten, and this one. I thought, "I'm really lucky." Here was the catch to it. They said, "You are selected," and then they're going through the process. Then they said, "The INS made a mistake," and they always selected a certain number of people. I'm in the "always selected" category. I said, "Okay, so what do we do?" [They said,] "If you get your sponsorship paperwork together, we may be able to process your file and see how it goes." The family, the grandma [in Boise] that I was great friends with, ended up sponsoring my green card application, so now my employer didn't have to sponsor the green card or the naturalization process. I was pretty lucky and thankful that they did that. I ended up getting a green card. They said, "Okay, you're fine now. The mistake is taken care of. You're good to go." That's what happened.

I came to Las Vegas in March of '96. I came to Kmart. I realized that I was not a retail boss. One thing, I didn't like somebody telling me I needed to get up at eight o'clock to go to work. I suppose you don't have a choice, right? But you were on your feet. It's a good money thing at that time, but it was not me. I was just thinking I need to do something on my own. I worked there for a year. Then I applied for another company called HomePlace. That company went out of business. Kmart went out of business. There's a pattern there, too. I became an operations manager for the other company. Still retail.

By that time, I was married. I was making about fifty thousand dollars in '97. I was twenty-seven years old. That company said, "You need to go to New Mexico to open a new store." I said, "No, I'm not going." I already bought a house at that time. One thing I did, the moment I came to Vegas, I bought a house, a small house. I still have that house. I got married. My wife was pregnant. I said, "I am not going to go," so they fired me. I'm thinking, okay, I've

got a college degree, a couple of years of experience, I should not have a problem finding another job. I was wrong. I didn't find it in the retail sector.

Then I took my resume—my wife is about to deliver twins—I took my resume and went to some strip malls and passed it out. I was thinking that maybe I needed to change to a different thing. There is a company called Household Finance. That company also went out of business. I got a job with them as a mortgage loan officer. I was selling interest rates upwards of 24 percent, starting point closer to 10 or 12 percent on mortgages. They call it D paper. But I was really good at it. I was really good at selling those high-interest loans. I made a lot of money in the first two or three months.

By that time there was another company that I forwarded my application to. They called me up and said, “Hey, what are you doing?” I said, “I’m here.” [It] was called Green Tree Financial. That company went out of business as well. No, I’m not kidding. These companies have all gone out of business. Green Tree Financial. There’s a pattern, I’m telling you. Green Tree Financial, I went there. That was my calling to be on the real estate side. In 1997, I joined the real estate industry and I’ve been in it since then.

***CW: What were your first memories when you came to Las Vegas? How did you feel?***

I had come a few years before I came that official time. When I was in Idaho in college, one Thanksgiving we decided, you know what, I had a car. I bought a car from a professor. It was only a thousand dollars. It’s called Chevy Citation, 1980. No A/C, no nothing. It’s like a fishing car. He goes fishing in it with his dog. He gave me the car and, okay, I got it. We decided, “Let’s go to Las Vegas!” And I was not a good driver. This is in November of 1992. I came [to the U.S.] in August ’92. There is no GPS. There were no cell phones. We had a map. We came to Las Vegas in that car going through a snowstorm. My first night was in Excalibur. I paid ten

dollars. Then the second night was in Circus Circus, eighteen dollars. So, I had come to Las Vegas.

Then I was in my computer club and there's a convention called COMDEX. We would come together in a truck type of a thing. Every year we would come also to the Las Vegas COMDEX. We would have our fake companies made. I was in a suit. I even got interviewed by IBM when I was in COMDEX. Okay, I played the part right. I got a bunch of free software. Las Vegas, wow, this is the place, but I never thought I would end up in Las Vegas. It was just like, what the hell, I'm here; make the best of it. But I had come to Las Vegas before and I moved to Las Vegas because I had no other choice at that point.

**KP: When you came here what was it like watching the city grow and expand?**

It's exciting. Las Vegas is the most exciting place for me. I wouldn't live anywhere else. I always think about what would be the best other places to be, but this is my home. I feel home-y. I love the people here. Culture. We work in harmony now, I think. When I came I remember the Excalibur—no, the other one, the pyramid.

**SE: *The Luxor.***

The Luxor is barely coming up. It was in the construction phase. MGM was there. None of the 215. Summerlin was about to be built. It was actually getting built, the north Summerlin side. Well, it was nice. Good to be in a clean, nice city. It was a small city even though the tourism factor was a huge process. But I loved the whole environment. I made some friends here and started playing cricket again. I'm still young and we are going to the clubs. Where could you eat? We would go.

Then I enrolled in the UNLV MBA program, so I embraced student life again. We could go and eat a one-dollar steak at the Horseshoe after ten o'clock. There is a place down on Las

Vegas Boulevard [where] you get free chicken after ten o'clock. There was a bunch of free food. When you're a student, free is golden. We would gravitate to the free stuff. This is the best city to be with everything.

***CW: Did any of your family back in Sri Lanka ever end up coming to America or Vegas?***

Yes. My parents lived with me here for about—they moved a few years back, but they ended up moving back. My parents came here after they retired in Sri Lanka, and they both got into the insurance field for a while. My mother had a kidney issue. My brother lived in Australia at that time. We evaluated both options, where would be best to be to take care of the health issue? The health system in Australia is a thousand times better than here for the seniors especially and senior care is paramount. They end up moving to Australia about eight, nine years ago. [But] they lived with me here for a while, about seven years.

**KP: Now I'm actually going to touch on a really random subject, which is food. We love food at UNLV. Growing up what kind of foods did you eat, and when you moved here, if those foods—did you have to adjust your diet and just accept whatever, or how did you tie that culture into when you came here?**

I lived in a very modest household. When I say modest, we were not rich. Eventually, my father made an empire of insurance. But growing up when you're born into a poor family, you don't know what rich is. You only know that that is normal. Am I right? Every morning my mother would feed my brother and me before we go to school. I would have to get up at five-thirty in the morning. She would feed us rice with eggs and some coconut things. That is our standard meal every morning, every morning. There is no variation. I hated it, but you ate it and you were happy with it. You end up eating that. There wasn't much chicken there, not many other proteins, no beef and stuff like that. There was fish, but very modest, not so expensive.

I go to Idaho. I'm a dishwasher here, right? Do you know the dishwasher line? It's a line. I see these plates full of food coming through. They haven't really eaten. I mean sandwiches. Honest to God, I ate the first time. I see it coming through, it's not touched, I was hungry, boom I ate it. I did it because I said, "Why waste this food?" I'm more adaptable because I had gone to Australia now. Australia was a big issue for me because Australian family, I'm sixteen, I'm used to certain eating stuff, and I was talking to my host family recently and my host mom got mad at me because she had this whole lamb roast done for me and I put a bunch of pepper [laughter]. But at the age of sixteen, I didn't have any Sri Lanka food in that whole year. But then in Idaho, I was able to get some Sri Lanka food, not much because my cooking was not that great. But I learned how to cook. I cook now. Food was not a big deal. But in Australia, just living with a Caucasian family—that was hard.

***CW: What about holidays? You mentioned that Sri Lanka has the most holidays anywhere in the world. What are some of your favorites, and what do you still celebrate?***

Sri Lanka... We just had the New Year. The Asian countries celebrate the Lunar New Year in the same time frame, April, so that's the biggest celebration. Offices are closed for about a week and a half. That's the biggest celebration we would have. Every month there are at least two to three holidays. The Full Moon Day is a holiday. It's a multi-religion country. When you have a Hindu holiday, they do it. Christians, celebrate Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas. Muslims, their star, and all that. My biggest interest was to do with the Hindu celebrations. We had the firecrackers going, homemade firebombs, all kinds of stuff. Yes, I was a rebel, so I knew how to.

***CW: Do you still celebrate some of those holidays now?***

No. The country of Sri Lanka is a third-world country. Everything that they do is based on auspicious time, auspicious in that the planetary alignment has to be there for them to start work,

eat, or start a new job. Everything is based on a horoscope and a planetary alignment. I was just talking to my friend. “What are you doing? This country is so doomed. It’s a third-world country. These planets are not aligning properly. I think the horoscopes are wrong.” I feel like all those things feel like cattle; you’re just following the hope. Something has to change. When we were young we had no choice, but [now] we can be outspoken and say, “I don’t know why people follow those things.”

***CW: Could you tell us more about what you do now and how you got here?***

What do I do now? I do a few things. I own a real estate company. We are a property management company as well as we do other transactions. In 1997, I transitioned into real estate finance. I built it up to a point where I owned a mortgage company. In the 2009 crash—I don’t know whether you remember the recession time—my company couldn’t survive because we held almost 15 million dollars of loans that we couldn’t sell on Wall Street. They wouldn’t buy the stuff. The company filed for bankruptcy, so that’s the end of my financial mortgage side of it. I still hold my mortgage license. Then I transitioned entirely into the real estate side and started building the portfolio. We’re a midsize company. Then in 2013 my wife and I started Integrative Medicine, which is just fascinating. We were out in Summerlin Hospital before. Then about five years ago we opened this practice here. My goal is to set up a business, one with a different subject. Right now we just launched a software development company. Basically getting the software developers from Sri Lanka and finding the end-users here and we become the brokering company. That’s what we do.

**KP: When you opened Integrative Medicine, was there anything that inspired you to specifically target the medical side?**



My wife is a physician. She is the brain. I am the operations person. She's a naturopathic physician. There are only five naturopathic physicians in the whole state of Nevada. She's also an internal medicine doctor. She does acupuncture and pain management. More and more people are looking for alternative medicine to go after. People don't want to be hooked on pills anymore. They want to be out of medicine. They want to see a less harmful way of treating the body, be kind to the body type of thing. She's an amazing physician. Not only because she is my wife, but she's also an amazing physician. Also, at the same time, I didn't want her to go and work for somebody else because maybe I'm looking in a more drastic way, I think. When you work for somebody, you're like a slave, it's modern-day slavery; they tell you what to do. I don't like being told to—unless I want to get up at seven o'clock in the morning, I don't want to wake up. Because I didn't want her to be a slave for somebody else. She had never been in a business world. I set it up, but you will get to know it. We have our moments of disagreement when you're business partners—husband and wife naturally have disagreements—but when you are compounding that with business, you are at odds sometimes. But I'm sure she likes the environment now because you are more driven to push the business more than anything.

***CW: How did you meet your wife?***

eharmony.com. That's an honest answer. I had been married before. I have two kids from that. They are twenty-five years old. There was a time that I didn't have time to date much. The algorithms that eharmony had...[have] got to find a compatible person. I truly believe that those algorithms are amazing that eharmony put out. So, I said, "Okay, I'll sign up and see what happens." She contacted me. She was in California. We ended up going back and forth and got married.

***KP: Do your two kids still live in Las Vegas?***

I have a daughter living in Utah. She's going to Dixie College. My son is here. He's trying to get into the fashion industry and also into the real estate side. They're twins.

**KP: Now I guess we can touch on the model minority myth and when you went to college. You were probably the minority at your school, right? What was it like going to school in that environment?**

Here's the thing. When I was going to high school in Australia or going to college in Idaho where predominantly it's all White, I never felt I was discriminated against—nobody called me any funky names or anything like that. Maybe I didn't hear it. I had no mindset to think that somebody would be discriminating. It's also your mindset, "Oh, somebody's discriminating [against] me," so you're like a sponge; you are absorbing the wavelengths based on that. But what I realized—this is to answer that question—but right after the recession when I'm transitioning to my other career path also, I got more and more politically involved, so that's when I realized there's more to life than just selling real estate and owning businesses. I lost my business in 2007. I was going through a divorce. I was in law school. I dropped out. My life was a little bit on shaky ground in 2007. I was in Boyd Law School. I was good enough to get in there.

In 2007 something happened. I was a little depressed while all those other things are going on. I met then-Senator, Barack Obama. He was a senator. I was completely inspired by his presence. I was in a very vulnerable position in my time. He really inspired me to do something completely different. Up until then, I was a registered Republican. I worked on some Republican candidates' campaigns in the past. But I decided I'm going to do something different and I'm going to become a Democrat. I completely embraced him and I started something that was never done before in Nevada, a Nevada political situation. I started the Asian American Democratic

Caucus. I was the chair of that. I was the formal chair. My goal was to engage the Asian American community, become like a bridge-builder between the communities. Especially I saw the Asian American communities do not engage much in the political process. We built that with so many different coalition partners and it became a very good success and now it's one of the powerhouses here.

In doing so, I also decided, okay, I'm going to run for office. I ran in 2008 for Nevada State Assembly, but I dropped out. I had some other issues, so I dropped out of that. But I got interested in so many other civic activities, including a fundraising partner for Obama. They were going through a lot of turmoil at that time, so I did that.

Speaking about that, your questions were about how Asians are perceived. I realized—it's not my experience, but the community as a whole has experienced a lot of discrimination from their own because of how we express ourselves and also how we are perceived. My take on it is a lot of first-generation Asians in this community are from oppressive regimes, oppressive countries that don't speak up; don't make waves; just shut up and do your job. Naturally, there's a tendency to not complain. There's a natural tendency not to make waves. Second-generation Asians are a little different, but second-generation Asians are highly influenced by first-generation Asians. They'll tell you, "You go study; don't do anything else; that's it." That has to change, so that's why getting involved in the political process is a step closer to becoming that independent voice. That's why I say I'm a little bit of a rebel because I don't fall into that model of typical first-generation Asian.

**CW: *What are some of the most important political issues to you?***

I have a son and a daughter. Women's issues are paramount to me when it comes to issues whether they have equal rights. I see there is a huge disparity in how men and the women are

treated in a constant employment situation. I don't want my daughter to go through that situation. Then also my son is gay. I knew he was gay when he was three years old. He hasn't told me that he's gay, but I know. He just told his mom. But I realized that you see things that you could do for your children, so I joined the Stonewall Democratic Club, and I walked in the Pride Parade. I could hear their sentiments on why those rights are valuable. Being on the healthcare side, I know how disproportionately certain communities are affected by the health industry, especially people of color. Political representation, how disproportionately the political representation [is]. Just look at Nevada. Ten percent of the population is Asian community. Eleven percent are African American. The fastest-growing community in Nevada is Asian Americans. How many elected officials are in the state legislature? There's one, Rochelle Nguyen; she's the only person. It's a process, but beyond that... even that she had to be appointed.

I ran in 2014 again. I lost by 167 votes. I was the first Sri Lankan-American to run for any political office in the United States. It's not that I'm going to get elected. I want to say it's not hard. You run and people will support you. That's what I want to make sure of.

**KP: Thank you so much for that. Now I wanted to touch on more recent activities, such as COVID-19. How did you feel when the recent president of the United States and other high-ranking officials termed COVID-19 as the “Wuhan virus” or the “China virus?” How did you feel?**

Well, obviously it's an ignorant statement, number one, right? My wife is Korean. When you put a Chinese and a Korean, they don't know the difference. They say, “You all look the same.” It is true. I think it is extremely offensive, but at the same time, he's talking to his base. He's a politician. His intention is to get reelected by showing more of a nationalistic approach: “This virus is caused by this particular group of individuals.” The ultra-White group will acknowledge

it: “Wow, this is a person for us and let’s vote for him.” He is the most divisive, he has been the most divisive person in our lifetime in my opinion. Of course, the people in this country have spoken. That’s why he’s no longer the president, thank God. But it also shows he also got 70 million votes. That’s also a factor to think about because the divisiveness in this country has a straight line because that line was not so clear and now it shows; you are with us or with them.

***CW: You mentioned that Sri Lanka was very Buddhist. Does Buddhism or any other religion still figure into your life at all?***

I’m sorry?

***Buddhism. You mentioned that Sri Lanka was very Buddhist. Does religion or Buddhism figure into your life at all?***

Of course. Yes. I grew up in a Buddhist household. I went to the highest level of education I can get at the Buddhist school. I know all the scripture, but knowing scripture is not everything.

What I get out of Buddhism is how I live my life, especially when you are in a bad situation, how would you balance it out? Don’t get too excited when you have all the victories and don’t get too down when you have the losses. It’s the equanimity... the balance of life. That’s what Buddha told you, “Hey, when you are sick it’s just around the corner you are going to get well. When you’re poor it’s around the corner you’re going to get rich.” And when you’re rich, you’re going to get poor (laughter). It’s a cycle of life. Buddha said it was a cycle of life, so I’m mindful of that. I’m not going to go preach about it. It’s in my mind. Buddha is like Isaac Newton, cause and effect theory. If you do good, good will come to you; if you do bad, bad will follow. I know when I grew up I did bad stuff, but I’m trying to minimize my bad. Sometimes you do bad stuff. You have to be true to yourself and say, you know what? I did something bad, but at least I minimized the bad; the bad that’s going to come to me is going to be less. Just be mindful.

**KP: Why is it valuable for the university to collect interviews such as yours?**

I don't know. I'm nobody. You just came to me. But I don't know. If my story is going to help somebody to...I don't know why you would choose me, but I appreciate you coming down here to talk to me. Why is it important? I think everybody has a story. Their story is very similar. Everybody has a similar storyline, and when you are doing this, I'm sure that you will see that. But there are little actors coming in and out of the story. When you read that story or hear that story, you could say, "Oh wow, I can relate to that part; I can relate to that part of the story, type of situation." That's why it's important, so relatability and maybe to inspire somebody; that's probably why.

**KP: Thank you for that. Now I'd like to open up to Stefani and Ayrton if they had any follow-up questions.**

**AY: *Why do you think politics recently has become so polarizing?***

Why? I think they elected an awful person. The decency of a person matters. I'm a moderate Democrat. I'm a fiscally conservative, very socially liberal person. When you look at the fact that there are two groups here: One is ultra-conservative and one is ultra-progressive, we cannot work in that kind of environment. We've got to find the middle ground. But the leadership that represents both sides wants to be elected, in my opinion. Whether it's Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders, they are polar opposites of this whole political spectrum. They both want to be elected. They both want to become the president of this country. Now, if you go to India, Prime Minister Modi is another example of an extreme person. He has a Hindu majority following. He's more of a nationalistic-type person. They want to remain in power. They want to show that's the majority and that's the type of person that we are going to caretake. Do I think it's right? I don't think so. You've got to be a moderate. There is something valid from both sides whether you're a

conservative or a progressive. That's why people like John McCain and people even like Barack Obama, even Ronald Reagan, they were really the statesmen. They saw both sides and they worked around it. But unfortunately, we're in a very toxic political environment. Hopefully, President Biden will make some changes in his term and we can all come together.

***AY: Recently, I would say in the past twenty years, we've seen obviously Barack Obama, the first African American president, and then in this one, Kamala Harris, becoming the first Asian American and first Black vice president. What barrier do you want to see broken next in the U.S.?***

I would like to see, of course—I was one of the early endorsers of Vice President Kamala Harris when she ran for president. I worked on her campaign as a consultant. I was also one of the early endorsers, so I happen to know her very close. I would like to see her being the president, not only her, a woman president in my lifetime. I think it will happen.

But more than anything I think these barriers are... arbitrary divides. I think it completely divides us when you say Asian American or African American or Caucasian. Why do we not see people beyond those labels? It's important to have representation, but I don't want you to define that as Asian American woman. You're a woman of substance, you are bringing something to the table, and you should be part of the discussion. But when you put these nametags, it's hard for us to move as a country. But I understand where you're coming from, but they should all have a fair seating arrangement when you're discussing them. It's a little complicated, isn't it? Because, yes, you would like to have representation from the Asian American community, but, at the same time, do you have the qualifications? It should not be that just because you're an Asian American, you should be here. No. Your merits, your qualities, abilities should be a big part of the conversation.

**AY: Can you discuss more—you touched on it—how did you meet Barack Obama and where did that happen?**

It was in 2006 or '07, I believe. He came to one of our friend's houses when he was campaigning. It was around the corner, not too far from here. He went to William's house two streets over. We were very happy. The first time an American—more than anything, the first presidential candidate I was cheering to see. He came and I looked at his pants. Guys actually look at how other guys look. His pants are a little torn at the edge of his...because he's been wearing them for a long time, it's torn. I looked at his shoes; the soles were gone. He was just like a regular, normal guy. He's working hard on the campaign. I looked at him and thought, "This guy is one of us." That really sparked a huge thing in me. I dropped everything. I didn't work for the next two years, and I worked on his campaign; that's it.

**AY: Wow. Can you touch on the government in Sri Lanka and how it differs from the U.S.?**

My family is very politically involved in Sri Lanka. My uncle is the secretary of education, and so many other people are involved. How would I define government in Sri Lanka? Corrupt, hyper corrupt, more or less what's happening in the United States. Sri Lanka is predominantly a Buddhist country, but the leadership in the country is pandering to the Buddhist single majority. I'm a Buddhist single majority, but the minorities are completely sidelined for the sake of getting the work. As long as you pander to the majority saying, "I'm going to safeguard your interest," and forget about the minorities, they're going to win because that's how people gravitate to. It's corrupt, highly corrupt. In my lifetime, I [could] see Sri Lanka become a colony of China because the Chinese influence is so much. They just did a currency swap with China for 1.5 billion. They just gave away the port of Sri Lanka to China. They gave away their military base similar to the Pentagon to China. That influence is tremendous. I play a lot of politics from this



side of the aisle, from this country, to have some U.S. presence there. I work very closely with our congresswoman in Nevada, Dina Titus. She is also the co-chair of the Sri Lanka America Congressional Caucus. I meet with her office at least two to three times a year to address the situation in Sri Lanka. It's a situation that needs to be highly monitored and have pressure groups from the United States come to the enclosing of the Chinese government.

**AY: *What were your living conditions like in Sri Lanka?***

Happy. Like I said, uncorrupt. We didn't have a TV in the house. We didn't have running water. My living quarters were half of this room. My brother and I both slept in that room. Actually, my father built half of the house, and then it had one bedroom, a little kitchen, and another unfinished bathroom. My brother and I lived in the unfinished bathroom for a long time until he finished the house. Materialistic [things] didn't [matter]... I had one pair of jeans. That's it; a couple of shirts, one pair of shoes, no TV. I had to give cookies to my friends to get a bike. There are bicycles around, so I would give them cookies and say, "Hey, can I ride your bike?" You wanted to ride a bike, but we didn't have a bike. No telephone. The radio was my thing and reading. When you read you imagine everything; when you listen to the radio, the stories, it was very nice. I could say, "Now, we have everything."

**AY: *What do you think separates third-world countries from first-world countries?***

Financially?

***Financially and politically. What is stopping third-world countries from being successful because obviously population growth is there, but not necessarily politically or financially can they support that?***

I have a different take on that. We have third-world type of situations in this city. It's a very simple thing. People have aspirations to be millionaires, but they have a minimum-wage work

ethic. You have a mindset of becoming a millionaire, but you have a minimum-wage work ethic. In this country, you have to try really hard to fail. Really, you have to really try hard to become a screw-up. But after living in Australia and Sri Lanka, I realized, even in this country, people say, “Oh, you don’t have to have an education; you don’t have to go to college to become successful.” It’s not the case when you’re in a third-world country. Education is everything for you to become successful. That is the ticket to launch into the next level. I have friends who don’t have college degrees, but I know what their living conditions [are]. Fortunes don’t come easily for a third-world kid if you don’t have the right education. But here, you don’t have to go to a trade school or to college to become that successful. That’s the biggest takeaway: access to education. Not everybody has the access to education in a third-world country. Access to education. Either you have to have really good grades or a lot of money so you can go out of the country and get your studies done.

***AY: You were in Vegas when 9/11 happened. What was that like experiencing it? Do you even remember where you were when it happened?***

I do remember. I have a very good memory of it for numerous reasons. I was actually in bed the morning, and I saw the second plane hit. The next day the newspaper comes that pretty much identified all the bombers. Were you guys born then? Okay.

***AY: I wasn’t.***

None of you, right?

***AY: I was born right after 9/11.***

***CW: Yes.***

The next day the newspaper comes. They have identified all the bombers and the potential bombers with their pictures. They’re all Brown people. They were like twenty people. The

newspaper comes. My son comes up and says, “Oh wow.” *Thaath-tha* means father. “Look at dad’s, all his cricket friends are here.” I still played cricket. Wow. That is my first reaction. “Okay, son, you’re good.” But the next day we had kind of a rally in the Buddhist temple to show that—actually, my father gave a really great speech that day. My father is from a union background, so he is a great orator. His sentiment was that we should all rally behind the country that we live in. This is a time to unite, show that we care about this country, and go forward. I remember that moment.

I never experienced any hate towards me, or nobody called me any kinds of names. I used to make fun before that. I’d tell a friend, “If you don’t like me,” we’ll joke around, “I’m going to bomb you,” or something like that. I stopped doing that joke after that because it became inappropriate. I became more mindful of my surroundings. That’s pretty much it.

***AY: What were your typical meals like in Sri Lanka? You touched on breakfast, but what was your typical lunch? Did you eat lunch at school? Did you pack a lunch? And what did you eat for dinner?***

Mostly a rice-based diet. Rice, fish, coconut; are the three ingredients. Spicy. Subsidized food was there; all the schools would get savory buns and milk from the government given to all the students. It’s fun because people will throw buns at you in school. They throw the milk packet and the whole place would smell. Milk in a hot climate wouldn’t do well. It’s just a mess and you had to hose the classrooms down. You know how kids are. We were typical kids throwing the buns. Typically, it’s mostly rice and fish and vegetables, things like that.

***AY: Was it hard for you to find ingredients that were familiar to you once you came to Idaho, Montana, or even Vegas?***

What changes from a vegetable to vegetable curry is the spices that go along. You find any ingredient, but you've got to put the spices. The hardest part was finding the spices. We used to go bring it from Sri Lanka and make the powder. But nowadays everything is there. That was the hardest part, not having the spices to cook with. The ingredients were there, yes.

***AY: You mentioned earlier that you kind of had a single-track mindset. Do you think that attention to detail and that focus really helped you become so successful?***

I don't know about being successful, but I think it helps you to accomplish the mission. My mission was simply to finish school and get over it. It was a financial decision. I don't have time to fool around, my budget. I was only working to make the money so I could pay my tuition, simply that, no other frills. We had free movies in the school. Go watch those on Friday. Go back to work Saturday morning. Study, get good grades, apply for scholarships. I got scholarships when I was there. I got four scholarships, small ones, like a thousand dollars, five hundred, seven hundred, but they all added up. In order for you to keep this certain GPA, I had to do that. Mindset helped just being focused, yes.

***AY: Did you feel any pressure from your parents or grandparents to be successful, coming to the United States?***

No. Absolutely not. My parents are wonderful in that regard because they are the most accepting. That's why I said I had to realize it on my own. My mother was a schoolteacher, school principal, and she was okay with me being the twentieth out of the twenty-six in the class. I put pressure on myself because I had to live up to that expectation of some accident that happened in grade five, making me the best student. I'm really going, "I'm not that student." I really had to meet that expectation. About four years ago I went back and saw my fifth-grade teacher, that teacher that made that happen. I went to her house. This is almost thirty-five years later. I went

and saw her and thanked her because she had some influence. Maybe I listened to her and somehow got good grades. We've been in touch since. Yes, I put the pressure on me later on because to say that it was no accident.

***AY: How did your parents grow up?***

My father had a very difficult childhood. He had ten brothers and sisters. My grandmother was married when she was fifteen and my father was born when she was sixteen. She is from a wealthy family. My grandfather was a village headsman appointed by the queen. He had a British education. He was a pretty successful person. But education, as I said, the access to education is a challenge. They had to sell off all the properties for the kids to be educated. They ended up coming to the city, but those sacrifices paid off.

The same goes for my mother's side. She came from a wealthy family. My grandfather bought the first car into the whole area. That was in the 1920s or something like that. But he was also a playboy, that's what I heard. He squandered off all his wealth. He got married when he was in his fifties, late fifties. He was that type of man. He had a lot of lands, but he was living a different life.

***AY: You mentioned when you were sixteen that you were quite rebellious. What was the reason for your unrest? What were you fighting for?***

Mostly the Marxism, the communism had infiltrated into Sri Lanka. The school I went to is a Buddhist school. The students were very sharp. They were the best of the best because of how they got selected to be. At the same time, they came from more or less poor families. You often hear the kids from poor families do well in school, which is true because they see a way to get themselves better. They get good grades. The same [happened] there. In the same situation, unemployment was high, access to education was limited. There would be graduates coming out

of the university, but they couldn't find jobs. There's no jobs. The unemployment was then close to thirty, forty percent. The rebellion part, the culture in that era was towards that. Naturally when you see your friends organizing and you become an organizer and you are kind of leading the way; that's what happened.

***AY: Where do you think Sri Lanka gets its most influence from? You said that in your lifetime you see it being colonized by China. Where do you think Sri Lanka got the influence from in your lifetime?***

Sri Lanka has a rich history going back to documented history of two thousand five hundred years plus, documented in Sri Lanka. This is all written, not oral, written history. But Sri Lanka was also colonized by the Dutch, Portuguese, British, certainly some influence from India, from different eras. It's a melting pot from different eras. But recently the political situation is such that China could come in and give a lot of loans. What happened is they were giving an amount of loans to these countries, but the paying back factor is not really considered. Then what happens? They will take an equity position of the country, and this is happening in Africa, all over. You lose the country eventually because you cannot pay back these loans, so you lose the country. The influence right now more or less from China is from that part.

***AY: Since there is so much influence from different areas like you said, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, what's the native language in Sri Lanka?***

It's called Sinhalese. My native language is Sinhalese, but that's only one of them. There is Tamil. Sri Lanka went through a bloody civil war. It has gone to a civil war. There's the minority Tamils and majority Sinhalese. The minority Tamils, they want to have more or less equal footings with the Sinhalese. Just to give you a little bit of the background, Sri Lanka was colonized by the British. In 1948, Sri Lanka got freed from the British, or I say the British got

freed from Sri Lanka. That's what I think now because if the British were there we would have been better off. In 1954, this is where the extremism started, 1954. A predominantly Sinhalese Buddhist, a leader came in and said, "I'm going to make Sinhalese the national language." Up until then, people spoke English all over the country, and that was okay. Sinhalese and Tamil were spoken. When you make one language the national language, obviously that minority feels they're discriminated against. It's completely taking something out of the equation. I think that's when the brewing started happening. It escalated to a point there's a terrorist group borne out of the whole struggle called Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, LTTE. They were considered the most dangerous terrorist organization by the FBI because of how many atrocities they committed... this minority Tamil guerrilla group. They killed a lot of prominent Sri Lanka politicians. They killed the prime minister of India. They invented the suicide bombing. The whole suicide bombing came from that. In 2009 the Sri Lanka government took a very [heavy]-handed approach and they ended the war; meaning they killed everybody in that whole area. Upward of a hundred thousand people died within a span of two weeks or so. They killed a lot of people. Since then, Sri Lanka is under huge pressure from the United Nations Human Rights Council to have a proper investigation to show how these killings were carried out, whether there are lessons or reconciliation programs available for the minorities to reconcile. Even last month the United Nations Human Rights Council passed a resolution against Sri Lanka. These things are happening just like World War II ended in the 1940s, there are still lingering effects. They're still there. The German influence, what happened there, Japan, all those things still happen. Sri Lanka will have that effect for several decades to go.

**AY:** *Thank you. I will pass it off to Stefani.*

**SE:** *I have no follow-ups. You guys did a great job.*

**KP: Thank you.**

**SE: *And your story is incredible.***

Thank you.

**SE: *Thank you so much for your time.***

You're welcome. Anything else? Any questions?

**KP: That's all we have for the actual interview. Thank you very much.**

You're welcome. You're welcome. Well, that was easy.

**[End of recorded interview]**



## **APPENDIX**

## ***Sanje Sedera***

### ***WORK HISTORY***

#### **President / CEO - Zenith Realty Group**

7465 W. Lake Mead Blvd #100, Las Vegas, NV 89128 ( March 2009- Present)

[www.Greaterlasvegashomefinder.com](http://www.Greaterlasvegashomefinder.com)

#### **President CEO – Las Vegas Integrative Medicine**

3030 S. Jones Blvd #107, Las Vegas, NV 89128 ( August 2013- Present)

[www.lvimed.com](http://www.lvimed.com)

#### **Farmers Insurance Group – Sanje Sedera Agency - President**

4825 S. Rainbow Blvd #207, Las Vegas, NV 89103 ( June 2014- October 2018)

#### **Partner - Cornerstone Mortgage Company**

7942 West Sahara Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89117 (March 2001 – October 2009)

#### **Senior Loan Officer - Northern Pacific Mortgage Company**

6625 West Sahara Ave, Suite #3, Las Vegas, NV 89146 ( March 1999- March 2001)

#### **Senior Loan Officer – Green Tree Mortgage**

8683 West Sahara Ave, Suite #3, Las Vegas, NV 89146 ( February 1998-March 1999)

#### **Loan Officer- HouseHold Finance**

1228 South Nellis Blvd, Las Vegas, NV 89104 ( September 1997- February 1998)

### ***EDUCATION AND TRAINING***

MBA – Idaho State University 1995

Bachelor of Science in Computer Information Systems and Management -Idaho State University 1994

Mortgage Loan officer license - Nevada - Since 2007

Credentialed Mediator- Clark County Neighborhood Justice Center - Since 2010

Graduate of Citizen Police Academy, Las Vegas- August 2009

***AWARDS AND AFFILIATIONS***

Commissioner- Southern Nevada Regional Housing Authority - September 2011- September 2019

Board Member/ Vice Chair – One AAPI Nevada (2018-Present)

Trustee-Sri Lanka America Association of Las Vegas -(2017- Present)

Board member- Citizen Review Board- Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department -Jan 2008-2015

Board Member- Use of Force Board – Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department - Aug 2013- 2016

Founding Chair – Asian American Pacific Islander Democratic Caucus (2006-2010)

Vice Chair – Clark County Democratic Party (2009-2012)

Executive Board Member – Nevada State Democratic Party (2010-2012)

President - Nevada Cricket Association (2013-Present)

Vice President – Summerlin Home Owners Association (2015-Present)

Treasurer- Rotary Club of Red Rock – June 2016- June 2017

Founding Member of Las Vegas Buddhist Temple

***CURRENT MEMBER OF***

Member - Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce

Member- Las Vegas Asian Chamber of Commerce

Member - Las Vegas Latin Chamber of Commerce

Member – Asian Real Estate Association of America