

AN INTERVIEW WITH SIMON LAMSAL

An Oral History Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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

Oral History Research Center at UNLV
University Libraries
University of Nevada Las Vegas

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Oral History Project

University of Nevada Las Vegas, 2020

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The recorded interview and transcript have been made possible through the generosity of a grant from the City of Las Vegas Commission for the Las Vegas Centennial and funding from private individuals and foundations. The Oral History Research Center enables students and staff to work together with community members to generate this selection of first-person narratives. The participants in this project thank University of Nevada Las Vegas for the support given that allowed an idea the opportunity to flourish.

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
Director, Oral History Research Center
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PREFACE



“Looking back, I feel like there is a lot that has changed—a lot I’ve changed, I should say. I’m very, very glad to be in a position where I have a lot of things happening at the same time in a good way, but still some level of uncertainty to what could happen next, in a way.”

Born in Kathmandu, Nepal, Simon Lamsal recalls his parents frequently being occupied in their work at a travel agency. Simon mentions them jetting off frequently, resulting in Simon spending the majority of his childhood under his grandparents’ care. He recounts his schooling in Nepal and his love for soccer, which, at one point, he hoped he play professionally. He talks about how

he ended up focusing on academics, specifically on business and technology, in hopes of one day taking over his father's business. During this time, he also began debating, an activity that he would continue throughout college.

After graduating, Lamsal applied to colleges in the United States, originally landing in Arkansas to study computer science, but upon his parents' advice, rerouted to Las Vegas, Nevada, where his uncle was already residing. At the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, he became invested within the community, joining CSUN Student Government and the National Millennial and Gen Z Community. Eventually, he changed his major to Management Information Systems, which he continues to pursue in graduate school, and hopes to work in project management once he graduates. Currently, he is an IT audit intern at MGM Resorts International.

Throughout the interview, Lamsal reflects on cultural traditions, family relations, culture shock, discrimination, Nepalese foods, spirituality and identity, finding community, and future plans.

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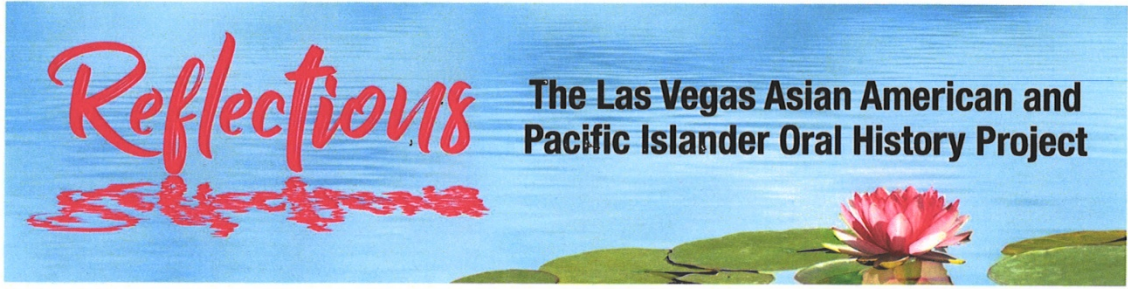
Interview with Simon Lamsal

December 19, 2022

in Las Vegas, Nevada

Conducted by Cecilia Winchell

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Simon Lamsal 12/19/2022
Signature of Narrator Date

Cecilia Winchell 12/19/2022
Signature of Interviewer Date
Jerwin Tiv 12/19/2022

Good afternoon. My name is Cecilia Winchell, and today is December 19th, 2022. I am here today with Jerwin Tiu, Stefani Evans, and Simon Lamsal.

Simon, may you please spell your first and last name for the record?

Of course. My name is Simon Lamsal; S-I-M-O-N, Simon; Lamsal, L-A-M-S-A-L.

Thank you. To get started, could you just tell us about your childhood, where you grew up, your parents, grandparents, what you did for fun, anything like that?

Actually, yes. I grew up in Kathmandu, Nepal. It is in between India and China, so very different cultural experiences for me growing up; kind of being a weird center hub in between rich Indian history but also a lot of Chinese and Tibetan influence where I grew up. Both of my parents are involved in a travel agency, a family business that they operate. Very early on, I was introduced to some of their clients. We were encouraged to speak English to a point where when I was graduating high school, I almost didn't pass my own native language test, which is Nepali. A lot of my friends, even back home, and especially the Nepalese community here, think I'm very whitewashed, which is very funny to me, and is not necessarily the truth. I love my country a lot, and it is a part of me everywhere I go. It's not something that I can take away from.

Growing up, soccer was a big, big, big part of my life. I thought I would end up playing soccer professionally. At one point, I really wanted to go through the National Academy, but a series of injuries led me to not pursue it, but it's still a pretty big part of my life.

Growing up with my parents, I feel like it was always interesting. I remember a lot about super early on in my life, but I've always known that both my parents were always busy. There were a couple of years where both of them were traveling abroad, so I was always living with my grandparents. There wasn't a whole lot of connection early on. I think we got much closer towards the time when I was leaving Nepal, which is 2017. Initially, I moved to Arkansas before

I moved to Vegas. Yes, I think that's how it is. I'm definitely much closer to my grandparents on my mom's side, especially my grandma. It was a very interesting life in Kathmandu, really. It's a pretty big, big hustle and bustle city. When I moved to Arkansas, it felt so small. Moving to Vegas was such a good change for me because I thought I didn't want this chaotic city life when I was in college, but I couldn't have been more wrong.



Simon at left. Family portrait, October 2016

Cool. I'm going to go back and ask you a couple more questions. What kind of a travel agency was it?

My parents primarily operate with expeditions. If you're looking to go into expedition to Mount Everest or any of the top eight peaks that are in Nepal, they'll help you organize that. They'll set you up with climbing Sherpas, plan your trip for you, and make sure everything is ready for you. When you arrive, we pick you up, and then everything is all planned out. They've stopped doing this now, but they used to also take groups from Nepal to travel abroad, to be a bigger group so

that expenses are a lot cheaper, and at the same time, you still get to travel and see the world. That is their primary source of income and their business.

How did they get into that business?

My dad, when he was in college—he’s an auditor by profession. He used to work for a gentleman, and he was doing auditing there, but he needed more cash on the side. He actually started out as a porter. He used to carry luggage and other heavy equipment. At that time, his English wasn’t that good, but slowly he started learning English, and he moved up to become a tour guide, and then eventually, through his years of interesting decisions, like trying to acquire somebody’s company that was in total loss, he ended up acquiring the business and officially renaming it and starting it as his own business the year I was born. He always tells me this story.

Do you know how your parents met?

Yes. It was an arranged marriage. I’m pretty sure I’m right here, My dad knew my mom’s brother, and my mom’s family knew my dad’s family. They were like, “Well, I have a son who is not married. You have a daughter who is single. Let’s make this happen.” I think within about ten days of them meeting each other, the marriage was settled right there. That’s how they met.

You said you were closer to your grandparents. Can you tell us a bit about them and their history?

Of course, yes. Very similar history, too. I feel like arranged marriage is big. Even still, it’s a big, big part of the Nepalese community, maybe most of South Asia, too. They met through that. My granddad used to be a forest officer initially. He then moved onto beekeeping and honey harvesting, and he is still a little bit involved. My grandma took care of all the kids, my mom, my uncle, who also lives in Vegas, my uncle back home, and then my aunt is also back home in Nepal. She is the most genuine person. I’ve never seen her get mad. It’s crazy to me because me,

and I have a younger sibling, we were both nightmare kids. We would not listen to anybody, and so I don't know how she kept up with us, honestly. Looking back, it's just like, oh, my god, I probably put her through so much. I feel bad about it. My granddad, on the other hand, no one messes with him. If you are mad about something to him, you don't say it. You just suck it up, basically. Yes, they're both amazing.

What kind of cultural practices or traditions did they pass down?

That's a tricky one. I feel like in that sense I may not be the best. The way that they are, they are a little bit more religious in the sense that they're still a little bit more strict in their values, some of which I disagree with. More culturally, it's a lot more to do with—even if there is religion associated to an event, I do it more so with the culture in mind. This is something that I do agree with them on is that a lot of our cultural practices are slowly disappearing, or either they're merging with other traditions from neighboring countries and whatnot, which is not a bad thing, but I feel like the true essence of why we do things are being lost. If you asked me why a certain festival in Nepal happened, I don't think, in many cases, I would be able to tell you exactly why they do it. I know what they do. I know how to do it. I would be able to walk you through the general process of it. But the true meaning behind that practice is lost for me. It just seems like that's a reoccurring thing.

I specifically remember this. This was back in middle school, or it might have been early high school, late middle school or early high school, something like eighth or ninth grade. One of our professors walked in and asked what we do during one of the cultural ceremonies, and everybody had an answer. Then he followed up by saying, "Why do we do it?" Nobody had an answer.

I think generally cultural traditions or religious traditions that they passed down to me, I try to follow. I think the biggest one has to be our festival, which is big, called Dashain that we celebrate for seven days in the month of October, and then Tihar, which is our version of Diwali that India celebrates. I think those are the two big traditions I try to follow as much as I can.



Nepalese celebration at Arkansas Tech University, May 2018

Can you spell out both of those?

Yes. Dashain is D-H-A-S-H-A-I-N (sic). There are different versions of the spelling, but I think that's the most common one you'll find. The second one is Tihar, so T-H-I-A-R (sic).

Thank you.

Of course.

What was schooling like in Nepal?

I went to one school all my life from kindergarten all the way—I guess before I get into this, there is a little bit of clarification I want to make. Schooling is a little bit different compared to America. Your standard school is considered kindergarten all the way through tenth grade. Tenth grade is when you separate and branch off into whatever you want to specialize, or kind of your exploring phase of it. A lot of people say eleventh and twelfth grade is college in Nepal, and then you go to university. That's how they distinguish it.

Kindergarten through tenth grade, I went to the same school. It was very funny because it's called public school, but it's really private school. The name is Galaxy Public School, but it's a private school. Either way, very rigid standards and very strict. Oftentimes, I didn't really want to go to school. If I didn't have good friends, I probably would just find a way to skip school, which was insanely tricky anyway because there is a bus dedicated to pick you up, and there is a bus dedicated to drop you off. If you're not there your parents were called. You couldn't miss anything. Attendance, if it didn't happen at the start of the day, they would just take attendance periodically. Very rigid standards even to a point where if you forget to do your assignment, if you miss your homework, you do something that the teachers deem incorrect, you would basically be placed out of the class. There is this guy called the discipline in charge who walks up to you to ask you what you did wrong, and then, yes, some level of punishment. I'm not going to get into—I could if you all want to. Some level of punishment would then be executed on you. That part I didn't like.

I enjoyed the last two years of what would be considered high school here because I went to a different school. I did what is called A levels. The school was very small. Our graduating class was fifty-five compared to when I was done with tenth grade, and my graduating class was four hundred. It was a big change for me, but it was a great change for me because then I was

much closer with the teachers. The teachers had much, much more time to spend with you to try to help you. I met some of the greatest people that I still get in touch with. Honestly, it's probably the only reason, if not one of the few reasons, I ended up in America right after. I did take a year off, but that was a personal choice. Even without that year off, I don't see myself being in America without those two years outside of the college years for me, before actual college here.

What did you choose to specialize in? I don't know what the term is.

Specialize in, yes. I initially chose business and economics, but then very quickly, I talked to the coordinator over there, who was in charge of all our classes. Traditionally, for other schools, they put you into specialized categories. If you want to do med school or some level of medical school, you do something called a bio specialization. If you wanted to do computer science, engineering, you'd be put into a CS or engineering specialization. Anything else would be liberal arts, business. Initially I went to the business, but then I talked to my coordinator, and I was like, "Hey, I'm not sure I really want to do this." But we were a couple months in. "Is there a way for me to switch out?" He was like, "You don't necessarily have to switch out. You can pick and choose what classes you want as long as the schedule works out for you."

I ended up picking physics, economics, computer science, math, and English. Thank God I didn't have to pick my native language because, then again, I'd probably fail. I was one of the few students in my class that had multiple classes in different degrees, so I didn't really fit in anywhere, but I was basically everywhere.

Also, what was it like growing up in Kathmandu? What did you do for fun? Did you get to travel?

Yes, I did get to travel a little bit. I think one of the biggest qualms I have about my parents is I got to travel abroad so much that I never really got to see my country that much because in third grade, we were in Thailand, Malaysia, I traveled to the UK, Turkey, Germany, Denmark. I've seen a decent amount. My parents have traveled way too much for me to make that comparison to say that I've seen so much, but I had my fair share of travels. I didn't really get to see much of Nepal, which is kind of a shame because that's what my parents do. They help other people see Nepal, and I missed out. But I did get to see the most touristy places, which is very hilarious. I think the parts that I would now, looking back, want to see, I guess I missed out.

I think for fun, I was just so invested in soccer. Sometimes people would be like, "You had nothing else going on in your life." I was like, "I'm not going to lie. This is pretty much it." I had one goal in mind, which is after school to play soccer wherever I can, kick the ball whenever I can. I think I grew out of it a little bit towards the end of high school because at that point, I had broken my leg, I had appendix surgery, and now I can't sign up for the academy. I got into video games a little bit, but it was never my thing. When I moved here, I started getting into more different things.

Oh, I guess the other big thing I did was debate. That was actually a big part of the last two years of high school. It's this weird addictive environment. The last two years, one of our seniors was like, "Hey, we're doing this debate camp. It's going to be off site. It's going to be far away." A bunch of my friends were like, "Well, this is the perfect time for us to get away, be goofballs wherever we want to. We'll do the debate, but we'll do other things on the side." We went in, and I got hooked in very fast, and everybody was like, "I thought we were here to have fun." I was like, "Yes, we'll have fun. We'll have fun."

But I just got sucked into this weird debate loophole, and then I started competing at different tournaments and the first official National Debate Championship hosted by the official governing body. Me and my team made it to the finals. We did lose in the finals. That basically got me hooked. I did debate all throughout college, here at UNLV, too, and Arkansas as well. I probably found more success here at UNLV than Arkansas. Not the most interesting things I did for fun, but I feel like things I was very drawn into for...I'm not even sure for what particular reason.

We had a policy debate here, right?

We did, yes. I don't think we have the policy team anymore because Dr. Thompson moved into another position.

One last question about your time in Nepal. What kinds of foods did you eat? What was cooked at home? What did you go out to eat?

My mom has a very extensive history with medical conditions, so the food at home was very bland. It wasn't bad, but no spicey, not a lot of salt, no oil, very simple dishes. If you think about Indian food in particular, you could think about any Indian dish minus the spice. Maybe some flavor at best, but the food at home used to be simple in her words. Obviously, she tried to make things good for us, put her plate first and then add all the spices in for us later.

Growing up, I used to eat out a lot. I think momos, which are basically dumplings for us, was the biggest part. You could ask any person from Nepal what momos are, and they'll tell you all the fascinating stories, how good it is. Growing up, momos has to be the one dish to define my childhood. That's it right there.

But there are other interesting things, too. The year after high school, I was working for my dad because the plan was to take over his company at some point. By that time, I had a lot of

free time outside of work, and my friends were also either applying abroad, or they were just waiting to hear back what happened with their high school results and university decisions and whatnot. We had a lot of time.

There were very interesting things I got into. Goat is a big protein in Nepal, or mutton I guess. Exploring different parts—obviously, I don't want to gross out anybody—exploring different parts that you wouldn't conventionally think, like lungs, kidney, liver, all that jazz. I think the weirdest thing that I've ate, and I don't know the name to this, but I can find out if anyone is interested, it's basically goat belly skin, and then you stuff it with fat and deep fry it. It sounds absolutely insane, but it was so good. I was like, "There is no way I'm liking this right now." One of my friends got me into it, and I was like, "This is absolutely insane, but I like it so much." I hope that does not sound too bad.

No, that's okay.

I just remember that. A very, very interesting way of making sure things don't go to waste. Oftentimes, it was actually pretty good. I was very grateful to have that experience, too.

The thing you mentioned before, momos, what are they usually stuffed with?

Primarily, at least where I'm at, buffalo was another big part of protein. I don't eat buffalo. I try to avoid red meat as much as I can. But buffalo is the main ingredient, minced buffalo meat mixed with spices, a little bit of vegetable. The more popular one is probably chicken. Similar version, minced chicken with a little bit of vegetable, a lot of spices. I think what makes it stand out or different from maybe other similar dumplings is actually the external sauce that's used. Sometimes they do try to make it inside, but I feel like it works better if it's separate from it. It's usually a tomato sauce that's got a lot of turmeric, peppers, chiles, garlic, and peanuts. You have

a plate, and then you just dump the sauce all over, and then you just kind of slobber from there, I guess. It's very messy, but it's really good.

You mentioned that the original plan was to take over your father's business, but clearly you're here. Can you tell us a bit about what happened?

Of course. Before I moved to America, the whole plan was for me to be done with my bachelor's, explore my master's degree if I really wanted to, but at that point I never thought about grad school or even that far, and go back to help my family business. One of the things that my entire family, everyone that's involved in the business knows, is that one thing that we're dependent on, as far as technology goes, is websites. Making sure our booking reservations are on top, we have to respond in an appropriate amount of time. Try to move away from the conventional thing. The other half of that is marketing, advertising. We were kind of lacking and being a company that's basically twenty-four years old, twenty-five, there is a lot of history, but we were falling behind to attract newer clientele. Part of our clientele, like I mentioned before, is people who are more adventure seekers who want to go into mountaineering, climbing, all that jazz. It's very expensive to run that. While there is a good amount of profit to be made, it's a lot more logistically complicated, and it's getting a lot more expensive for various reasons. My whole plan was to go back, help the company out as much as I can, fix errors that need to be fixed.

At that same point, when I was leaving, my dad was getting into other ventures as well. He is still really involved with this hotel business, a three-star hotel he's trying to build up with a couple of his friends. He bought many acres of land where eventually they want to build a luxury resort. He put in money to a yoga retreat. He put his money in way too many areas.

The primary reason I didn't want to go back, and I'm still not convinced that I want to go back, is because it didn't feel like he wanted to listen to any of us. He made decisions by himself, and I didn't feel like I was going to be respected in the decisions I wanted. The whole point was for me to go back to make changes. But if I'm proposing changes and he doesn't agree to them, now I'm just stuck in a position where, "Okay, why am I here?" I could literally not be here, and this would not make any difference.

The other reason I didn't want to go back is because it's a family business. People take things way too personally and in a sense I get it. It's very hard to separate family from business. When you're saying something about someone's work, it's a little bit harder for you to not take it personally, family business or not. It was very hard for me to justify myself going into the family business after that because—I'm thinking of cousins that I grew up with and played soccer with, hang out at family events with, mess around with, all being involved in some capacities, even uncles who are much older than me. If I have to step in and I have to say something to them, I'm going to be the bratty kid who went to America for five years and then came back and started to make everybody do different things or change things. I just thought it was going to be such a toxic environment. Also, I'm not going to sit back and let them just do whatever. I feel that I would be discrediting myself, my family, my dad, who built the business from scratch. It is very hard for me to justify going back in those two primary regards.

The third thing I would say, which did play a little bit more personally, was I just didn't feel myself fitting in no matter what I did when I go back. Even if I were to work IT or start something completely out of scratch, I just don't see myself now being able to go back and being able to support anything, really. I feel like I would have a much trickier time because I'm so used

to the lifestyle here and, to a degree, a level of freedom that's maybe not as much appreciated back home. It just feels so tricky for me to go back in.

The last thing I'll say is it's a lot of family, also. Anything you do gets questioned, which is why I deleted Facebook so fast. Even the smallest thing. I still remember this, and I guess I've heard it through different people. But when I changed my major from computer science to information systems for my undergrad, my dad was upset about it. He apparently vented to one of my family members, and my entire family started questioning why I was even in America. He was like, "Oh, you're wasting money at that point." I just didn't want to do it. This is none of your business. If I didn't want to do it, why is this bothering the whole family, apparently? I was just like, "This is such a bad environment to go back into."

Also, quick context, too. My dad has seven siblings, and he is one of the younger ones. Arguably, he may be the one that saw the most success in his life. Everybody is doing great, but they're in different fields doing different things. A lot of them are public servants. One of my favorite uncles, he's a judge in Kathmandu. They've all had their fair share of success, but because of my dad's success in his own business, there is, what to me at least, feels like a lot of jealousy and talkback that happens, which is very ironic because a lot of my cousins are involved with my dad's business in some capacity.

I just don't see myself being able to put up with all that. Maybe someday, but not right now. At least for the next five or ten years, I don't see myself being able to go through that. I'm praying my sibling will agree to do this, but he is more arrogant and smarter than me, so we'll see.

Sounds good. Really quickly, why did you want to come to America?

Honestly, America wasn't even in the question until the last six, eight months before I graduated. I think my dad and I sat down, and we talked about the likelihood of me, one, getting to a decent university because I wasn't the best student, really. My GPA collectively wasn't too strong to be able to get into a very good school. Then we talked about money to begin with, and he was like, "We'll make it happen as long as you can get into a decent enough university and then come back." He was like, "Don't worry about anything else."



Family trip to San Francisco after four years apart, July 2021

The second reason I knew I wanted to move was because I knew I needed to move for my family to be able to actually focus on myself. I feel like growing up it was always emphasized that I would get into my family business. I think towards the end of high school, towards that six- or eight-month period, I feel like at that point I was just conditioned that I wanted to go into the family business to the point where I was like, "Hang on a second. I wanted to do soccer all my life. What happened? How did this all quickly change?" I was like, "I need to do some level of soul searching." America was the furthest place I could think of. I was like, "This is great."

More so, I think it was a collective decision between me and my dad. He had been in America since 2001. He traveled frequently. He was here on Halloween, too, this year. He knew this was probably going to be the best option, not just because of school but also, the cultural diversity that's here, the learning opportunity that's here, all the external things that come with college. I agreed. All the places that I had traveled to, it almost feels like you get either one or the other. I didn't see myself having both, and maybe I'm wrong in that regard. Having never been to America before that, I just took my dad's word for it.

How did you end up in Arkansas?

Arkansas was actually a pretty interesting story. I was a little late to applications when I was applying to university because it was such a last-minute thought. I was like, "Okay, I'm just going to take that whole year off and then figure it out." I was looking at universities that were a little bit more isolated, kind of like college towns and areas. I applied to Saint Clouds University in Minnesota. I applied to Arkansas Tech where I ended up going. I applied to University of Wisconsin and University of Oregon. Those were my four main schools. My family really wanted me to apply to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, because my uncle lives here. He was like, "You should live with them." I was like, "No, that's not what I want to do."

I ended up applying, and the school I wanted to go to was University of Oregon, but they deferred me, and it was getting very close to the time I had to start applying. If I kept on waiting for them and I don't hear back, if I would pass the acceptance deadline, then I would miss out on the other schools. I picked Saint Cloud University in Minnesota as my first pick. I go on the interview, and they reject me the first time. The second time I go in, I go in with the University of Arkansas, and they're like, "Okay, that's fine." That's honestly the main story behind me ending up in Arkansas.

What was it like there?

It was a very small town, not a lot to do outside of school, which I think helped me initially because at least that first semester was so tricky for me to have been away from a bigger city, from my family for the first time. As much as I thought because of my travel history I'd be okay, the first couple of months were a little tricky to get used to. I lived on campus in dorms, so it was a little bit easier to make friends and good connections. Arkansas is a state that you just feel like it is so bland, at least where I was, because there wasn't a lot to do even for fun. You think a college town...And I'm not even thinking parties or anything...things to generally do, and everything is closed by eight. I'm like, "Okay, I'm going to drive to Fayetteville to just go to a bigger party. This is absolutely ridiculous." I think initially it was honestly the perfect place for me to get started with because there wasn't a lot happening. I was just in my classes. I wasn't working. It was the perfect town to get started.

My first semester, I was like, "I don't know if computer science is still my thing." Heading into winter break and the spring semester, I was like, "Yes, I just don't see myself being here." It just feels like if this is going to happen for three more years, however long it was going to take for my degree there, I just thought I'll be a very good student, but I don't think I'll have anything outside of that. In many cases, I felt a little bit discouraged that, yes, I'll be an all-A student but without a possibility of an internship, which there was none there, without any exposure to a job, which campus jobs are very limited. I was like, "Yes, this is not happening." Then my parents were also very persistent that I move out of Arkansas. That was kind of the general theme of what it was like in Arkansas, very, very steady. The perfect place initially, but then very quickly I grew out of it. I met some of the best people there that I still talk to. Minus that, I just didn't see myself being there.

Why did you choose to study CS?

Honestly, I think it was one of the few things I did in high school that I generally liked. I wasn't good at it, but I feel like I could put up with it to finish a four-year degree, the whole time just ignoring the whole business path that I was on because of my family. Also, generally something I got started being interested in. There wasn't anything in Arkansas, at least, that fit both those categories. Either you go to business school, or you go to CS. There wasn't a middle ground that I could find at that time. I was like, "Okay, I think CS is okay enough. I know enough programs to get by in a couple of classes. We'll see what happens after I go through."

But then, in came physics, and it just smashed my dreams. I was like, "No, not happening. I can put up with math. I'll put up with any coding classes. But I cannot put up with physics." I was like, "This is fine. I don't have to do this."

But also, I think the strain of not being able to graduate within four years got to me. A lot of CS students were also international students that had been there for four and a half years, five years, and they were getting close to graduation, but it didn't seem like they were getting close to graduation. Then I moved to Vegas, still enrolled in the CS program, and there were students here that were like, "Oh, yes, don't worry about graduation. You just take a class at a time." I was like, "That's not going to work for me. I want to be out of school in four years and go back," because that was still the plan, initially. I just was like, "Okay, this is not going to work."

Fortunately, I ended up finding the information systems degree in the business school that allowed me to take both business classes and still be in programming. I guess that's the CS journey-isque that I had.

Sounds good. After you graduated from your undergrad, what did you do?

My initial plan was to find a decent job and just work full time, not even think about graduate school. But I had graduate school in the back of my head. I was like, “Just in case nothing works out, let’s see how grad school goes.” I had talked to my grad coordinator, who was also one of my professors in one of my classes, and she explained what the degree is like, what the differences are between your undergrad classes and your graduate classes. After that, I was like, “I’ll apply at least and see what happens.”



MS in Management Information Systems graduation photos, May 2023

I did apply to other schools, also, not just UNLV, while I was still also applying to four full-time positions. That whole summer between me graduating and then me going to grad

school in the fall, I worked for the Office of Information Technology here. I had that job before, but I just moved on with more hours, but it wasn't a full-time job there. I just stuck it out there. By the time I was ending, I got into grad school. I got into all the schools I wanted to go into. I did the math, and I was like, "Well, UNLV makes the most amount of sense for me to be here." And then I decided to just stay here.

You did the two-factor authentication?

Oh, no, no, no. I knew that was coming, but I wasn't the one there. I was the first student worker to be involved with WebEx.

Very cool.

Anything, you can blame me on that.

What do you study in grad school?

I decided to stick on the same path. I did my bachelor's in information management, as it's called, and then I went into the management information's systems program, so the same program but on a graduate level. I also primarily pick the same degree because of the familiarity but also, obviously because I still don't want to go back, I'm thinking about the actual jobs that I want now in fitting into a project manager or program manager position. I feel like this degree would probably be the best to get me there without having to go through CS. I'm like, "Okay, this is why I want to do this."

Are you currently working?

I am, yes. I am a graduate assistant with the business school, and then I have an internship with MGM Resorts International.

What are you involved with on campus?

This is why I was laughing earlier, because I was like, okay, I thought I was involved with a lot more but apparently, just MIS Society as the President, which is the major organization for MIS, management information systems' students and IS students, or IM students. We try to help facilitate events where we are either bringing in employers to help you network, connect with recruiters, or help plan out events where recruiters can tell about their job openings, recent positions. I think what we are trying to expand into more and heading into next year, because I graduate, is now to try to focus on transition. A new set of executive people will be on the team hopefully starting late February, early March. But what I really want now to do is create a community once we graduate so that the existing students can still contact alumni for our specific major. I feel like there is a big disconnect between those two, and it seems like a little bit of a tricky challenge to try to bridge that right now because oftentimes students graduating obviously move onto different places, maybe outside of Nevada, maybe even outside of the United States, but still trying to find a way to connect existing students so that they can get advice, what they did, even if it's professional or class advice with professors who would, something to help them connect.

That's my last project that I want to achieve before or even during the transition, to try to make that bridge happen, because a lot of students have addressed this need, and it's been ongoing for a little bit. It's just such a tricky challenge to try to make it happen. Be like, "Hey, please join this group." Someone asks. It has to be something people want to do, not they're forced to do it. I understand that maybe some students never want to talk to anybody after they graduate from UNLV. It's weird to me, but apparently, it's a lot more common than I thought it was.

What are your plans for after graduation?

I'm hoping I get a full-time offer from MGM once I get out or maybe closer to graduation. I would like to ideally stick with the team that I'm working on. I absolutely adore everybody on the team. They've all been great mentors to me, helping me with every step of the way and learning. I feel very comfortable with the team in the sense that they care about me. They want to make sure I'm in the right direction to where I want to go in my career. I think the biggest thing that was surprising to me was when I told them I want to be a project manager or product manager in the future, it was okay with them. I had thought about it before the interview because it was an auditor position that I'm going into. Even though it's IT orientated, it's still auditing. Obviously, you still need to know what you're doing with the technology and what everything is about, but you don't really go into managing projects. You may manage audits, but you don't really go into bigger project management goals. Even though I was hesitant, I told them, "Hey, this is eventually what I want to do." During our regular meetings, my manager always would say, "Hey, if you see a position, or if you see someone that you want to shadow, or you want to go talk to, let us know, and we'll set up some time for you to do that."

Yes, I'm honestly hoping I stick around with the team, maybe even the company depending on how it goes, and hopefully grow myself from there. External to work, I feel like I'd still want to be in Vegas for a little bit, obviously because of the job. But even if it wasn't for MGM, I'd probably still want to be in Vegas. I feel like Vegas has given me so much as far as opportunities go. Everything in the last four years has happened only because I moved to Vegas, and it's very hard for me to think about it. If I moved to L.A. or San Francisco, I still don't think I'd be on the same level as I am here now. Everybody I know is here, so it's a great feeling. I'll probably just stay in Vegas and hopefully work for MGM if a full-time offer works out, and then go from there.



With parents at UNLV graduation, MS in Management Information Systems May 2023

And your uncle is here, right?

He is, yes. I lived with him for three years, closer to four years, and then I moved out once I graduated.

What does he do?

He also runs a travel agency, but he is more on the airfare side of the business.

What was your first impression of Vegas when you came here?

Before I went to Arkansas, I was here for about a week. I had seen pictures, I had seen everything, but I didn't think of the scale of everything. I don't know why. The first time I went

to the Strip, it was almost like an overload of...emotions? Sensory overload would be the right term. But once I got settled in, it was like, "This is it. This is great. This is America right here." A very silly way to sum it up. But it just felt like it was such a hustle and bustle city, at least when you're on the Strip. But then you drive ten, fifteen minutes away from the Strip, and it's like every normal suburban neighborhood. I was like, "I think this is perfect." If you really want to go out and have fun, you have the Strip twenty minutes down the road, but if you want to avoid all that you drive thirty-five minutes out, and you're at Mount Charleston and everything else.

My first impression—and a big credit to my uncle, too, because he was very strategic with where he took me to—initially that first week that I spent here was amazing. I came back on winter break, and we went to the Strip for the fireworks on New Year's. I was like, "This is perfect." All the glitz and glamor, I feel like, got to me, and I guess I still haven't gotten over it. Yes, honestly, I feel like my first impression of Vegas was amazing.

Only—and this is true of most American cities—is the walkability isn't there, but it still didn't affect me as much as maybe it would if I were in a different city. I'm thinking of San Francisco or L.A. I hate it there because usually you can't get it anywhere. But in Vegas, I'm only thirty minutes away from most things, so it's fine.

Just in general when you came to America, did you experience any form of culture shock?

I've thought about this question a lot. A lot of my friends have asked this in the past. I honestly can't recall anything being such a big culture shock. I feel like I grew up with so many different people traveling to Nepal and just hearing and sharing their experiences and them telling me what the differences are, coming here it didn't really...I guess I was already prepared for all the

culture shocks to where when I did come here, everything just felt like, okay, this is what America is like. Nothing in particular was a big culture shock.

I will say again, though, I think the walkability was the biggest culture shock I had. Kathmandu is not a very small city, but it's not a very big city, either. If you really wanted to, you could walk thirty, thirty-five minutes, and you'd end up in a totally different part of town, and most things are within five, ten minutes of walking distance. The nearest shop is five minutes down the road. There are usually smaller stores, convenience stores, two or three minutes away from every home. That's something that did...I was like, "Oh, my god, I have to drive everywhere, and I don't even have a car." But I think I quickly was like, okay, well, this is just how the cities are. Everything is spread out. Everything has its own area. I guess I got used to it.

I feel like I never really experienced culture shock, maybe as much as other people who have moved to America did. If I did, I guess I didn't think about it so much as to remember it being such a big culture shock, which has always bugged me a little bit because a lot of people ask me something. I wish there was. I just cannot recall a time where it probably was.

That's okay. Was there anything that was difficult to leave behind in Nepal?

I don't think I've ever thought about this. I'm going to say no because my whole mindset was to eventually go back home, and so I don't think it was very hard for me to feel like I was leaving something behind, or part of me behind. I think later on, as I decided to not go back, I think the things I did miss were my friends and my family, of course, because I haven't been back since I left, not even to visit. I do get to see my parents here, but the rest of my family, they're not able to travel, and so it's a little hard for me. I think the biggest thing I do miss is being in certain

areas that I felt the most comfortable around the city. They were quiet hubs and spots that either me, my friends, we used to all go out and hang out.

The biggest thing was food without a doubt. I feel even when you're making the dishes here, there always feels like there is something missing. You nail it down to the recipe, but it still feels like something is missing, which I think was the most heartbreaking experience for me. This happened to me last summer. I was putting together this chicken dish, and I got my mom's recipe to put it together. I was so proud of it. I sat down and had a couple of bites. I was like, "I'm missing something, didn't I?" I go through the ingredients, and nothing, I didn't miss a thing. It still felt different. I was talking to my mom about it, and she was like, "Well, it's because I didn't make it." I was like, "Yes, it could be that."

Also, I've been getting more into cooking and trying to make more traditional dishes that I ate growing up. It still feels like something is missing. I just don't know. All my closest friends have had some version of something I've made, and they're like, "This is amazing. What are you talking about?" I still sit there, and I'm like, "I don't know. Something feels like it's missing." There is some element of not being home, I guess, or maybe it's just the environment I grew up in, the environment I ate in, the people around me. Maybe that's what I feel like I left behind a little bit.

This doesn't bother me as much anymore, but my brother and I are eleven years apart. When I was leaving, obviously he was very young. He is thirteen now. But I always feel like part of me was leaving him behind because, one, I knew my parents—my mom calmed down on the travel a lot because she was sicker and couldn't travel as often. But my dad still is traveling a lot. I was on the phone with him yesterday, and he's like, "I'm going to Spain in January. In March, I have to be in Malaysia." He said this, "I'll try to make it for your graduation. If it doesn't work

out, mom and your brother will be there.” I was like, “You are coming for my graduation. That’s not a question.” And he was like, “Okay, I’ll make it happen.” Then he is listing out all his travel history. I knew growing up that was going to be a problem for my brother. We drifted apart because of the distance but also, he grew up without me being in the core years that I believe you make a bonding relationship with your sibling, and we do miss each other. We do talk as much as we can. But part of me feels like I left him behind with my parents. My grandparents are much older compared to when I was growing up, so there is so very little they could do. Obviously, when you have a little toddler running around, you don’t have energy, and the last thing you want to do is try to put up with them. Part of me felt like I left him behind a little bit, but not so much now. I understand that’s something I did because of myself and the decisions I made, but it’s still hard for me to ignore that.



Simon, his mother, and his brother in Lumbini Province, Nepal, May 2012

Yes. What dishes have you tried cooking?

The one dish that I absolutely love, and I haven't nailed it down as much because I need an actual grill and I don't have it where I'm at right now, is called Choila, which is a grilled chicken dish with a lot of spices. You eat it cold. We don't make that at my home, which is why it's so hard for me to nail it down. My best friend from middle school, I used to go over to his place a lot, and they used to make it. An absolutely phenomenal dish. I'm trying to think what the closest resemblance would be. It would be maybe like a skewered chicken, but with a lot of spices and a little bit too much cooked. It's absolutely phenomenal. That's something I haven't been able to nail down as much.

The one I am proud of is...I want to say I've nailed down making momos, the dumplings.

Really?

Yes, yes. The pleating part, I am still working on, but I've at least nailed down the stuffing to where the flavors are there, and the seasoning is balanced now to where I can make fifty or a hundred, even, in one batch and just give it out to everybody.

But the proudest one for me was making the typical Nepalese curry. It's not a hard dish to put together, but you forget one thing, and then the dish is way off. It still tastes good. But the essence of the flavor kind of disappears. I think those are probably my top three right there.

Awesome. Do you consider yourself religious at all?

I think the easiest answer for me to say is no. I would probably be more leaning in that line of more agnostic. I don't think I would consider myself an atheist either. Maybe more on the side of agnostic. I feel like because of the fact that I grew up with my grandparents a lot more than my parents, especially my dad who is definitely an atheist as much as he doesn't want us to put that label on him, I feel like I'm more agnostic. I feel like I do a lot of things more so for the cultural

relevance aspect of things, more so than anything maybe religious. There are a lot of religious things that happen in Nepal that I absolutely condone. I really don't see the point of us doing it anymore. Even in the past, it doesn't make sense in some of the practices that occurred. But yes, I don't know if I would consider myself religious. I feel like spirituality is something I definitely believe in. Maybe there is a higher power somewhere. Maybe there is some level of sophistication with that, but not so much from a religious standpoint.

What religion did your grandparents practice?

My entire family is Hindu. They're all Hindus. On my mom's side—I guess they're both Hindus, really, but there is a little bit of Buddhist practice mixed in. If I'll be honest, I have no clue how that got incorporated in our family. It seems like it's just my family that does that. All my dad's brother, his side of the family, they never seem to do any of that. At some point, Buddhism got



Simon's father, Mohan Lamsal, giving him a blessing on his birthday; July 2018

into the mix of our family, which honestly, probably was the best thing that happened to me. I feel like a lot of Buddhist teachings I still follow and still make sense to me. I guess it makes sense that a person achieves nirvana, instead of God coming down from the sky and doing things.

Since you've moved to the U.S., how has your understanding of your identity changed, and how connected do you feel to your Nepalese identity?

That's a tricky one. I feel like I feel more connected in my own way. Part of that is because I never fit any Nepalese community, even when I was in Arkansas or here, in the way that maybe was more common, I guess. I'll explain a little bit more on this. When I moved to Arkansas, there were a couple of Nepalese students there already, seniors or had been there for a couple of years, and then there were a couple of freshmen that joined along with me. Right off the bat, I was very good friends with my roommate, he started introducing me to other people. I started getting involved with debate on campus. I had my little friend group outside of the Nepali community. But the other Nepali students used to primarily hang out with either the Nepali students or other students that are also international students. It almost felt like it was, in many cases, was indirectly said to me that I was the outlier. I've always assimilated with people that in their view I shouldn't have assimilated with. I was like, "Why does that make a difference who my friends are? I'll do everything we need to do together because we're all Nepali, but that shouldn't take away from who I am friends with." It was very hard for me to get used to that dynamic initially.

Then when I moved to Vegas, it got even worse because I joined the debate team even before I had started my classes. That summer I was already at debate camp. I was already doing debate. By the time the semester rolled around, a couple of the graduate Nepali students reached

out to me. “Hey, we’re doing XYZ. Are you free this weekend?” I was like, “No, I’m traveling for debate.” Then after a while, they just stopped reaching out to me. This was fine by me. I didn’t want to not be excluded but also, they need to understand that I’m just not available on the weekends. The times that I was available and tried to make it, it almost felt like I was the outlier. No one really wanted to talk to me. I was just trying to force myself into conversations. It just didn’t feel like it was natural at all. I just cut ties, really.

The only Nepali community that I’m really involved with is because of my uncle, his friends, all the people that he knows. They’re great in many capacities, but I’m still the kid that moved from Nepal to America. In many cases, they moved here and have been here for twenty-plus years, or they just grew up here and were born and raised here. In that regard, I feel like identity wise, it was such a tricky challenge for me to try to know who I am because it almost felt like I was always an outsider, always an outlier, not here, not there. It was just so tricky.

Then I started thinking about it a lot more, and I was like, it really shouldn’t matter what other people have to say about me. It’s my identity and how I feel about it. I started getting more connected once I got a lot closer to my mom. We talk a lot now, not compared to when I was in Arkansas. Being able to do things like cooking, I try to connect in that regard, and that probably helped me a little bit. I still feel like that part of me is probably a little bit more missing compared to other people. I guess at this point I’m just happy that it’s fine; I’m there; I’m connected as much as I can and as much as I want to at the moment. I would like to be more connected maybe in the future, but at this point having that level of identity crisis is fine for me.

Sounds good. I’ll pass it on to Jerwin and Stefani now.

JT: You talked about your friends being a big motivator for you in school. I just wanted to know if you have any favorite memories of yours or memorable memories with your friends in Nepal.

Yes, a couple of ones. I think that debate camp that I shared initially was the defining moment our friend group became a friend group. Obviously, we were doing different exercises and whatnot, and someone accidentally hurt themselves. I don't remember exactly what happened, but I know they hurt their ankle. Then everybody immediately jumped on trying to help, try to figure out what was happening. Then after that whole thing happened, someone external to us helping that one friend was like, "Damn, y'all really are like brothers." We all just looked at each other and started laughing very loudly. After we settled down, we were like, "Damn, we didn't realize how close we had gotten." Being in a setting where we all came from a very big public school or private school with hundreds and hundreds of students and still having friends to the point where we were, like, fifty-five in a class, everybody knew everybody, and still being able to connect on a personal level despite our very stark differences in what we liked to do outside of school was just phenomenal.

The story has to be the defining moment that our friendship solidified, which is a very cliché story to begin with but also, it's very crazy to think about one random debate camp we picked to do because we didn't want to be in school for one week, and then we ended up being very good friends. One of our friends, he lives in Texas, actually. We don't talk as often, but when we do, it's three hours, four hours in one stretch. He'll be working and I'll be doing something, but we're periodically talking the whole time. I absolutely love all my friends from back home. I did disconnect with a couple of them, not from that friend group, but I have other

friends I had from middle school up until tenth grade. I wish I was still connected with them, but stuff happens. Life happens.

JT: Second, you talked about the things you did in graduate school, but I just wanted to know more about things you did in undergrad, like extracurriculars, things you were involved with, anything like that.

Absolutely. Undergrad, I think debate was definitely the biggest time investment for me. I did policy debate for three years that I was here. It definitely took a lot more time than I would have ideally wanted, but I don't regret one bit of that. I was involved with CSUN for, I want to say, two or three years. I started out as an election committee member, getting a sense of what was happening, and then became assistant director of elections, and then went on to be director of elections before I graduated. I was still involved with MIS Society, but at that point I was director of operations, or VP of operations, something like that. I forgot the exact title.

I did try to start something. This is like a national committee—I guess now it's international. It's called the National Millennial Community. It was founded by Bill Imada, who is a phenomenal person. He runs an American PR agency, absolutely brilliant person. One of my friends from debate team was like, "Hey, there is this organization. Do you want to be part of it? I'm graduating, and I'm looking for someone to take over." But it was just her. I was like, "Sure, I'll be part of it." The whole thing with this organization was that he helps you—he obviously has a team. He's not doing this all alone. But he helps connect different students with each other and then picks a city or maybe cities, and you visit the cities and companies there, and you're able to sit down and talk to the people from those companies. Two trips I was part of, and these trips are very well planned. The companies on a different range of scales. I went to San Francisco, and so we went to eBay. We went to the Google headquarters. There were other

companies there, too. Then we went on a separate trip to Chicago and Milwaukee. We went to the new McDonald's headquarters, this insurance company that I'm forgetting, and then a couple of other organizations, too. I want to say Liberty Mutual, but I know it's not Liberty Mutual, but it's based out of Milwaukee.

One thing I'm a little bit sad about is I never found a way to get more people involved with that. It was just such a hard buy-in. At the surface, you don't pay for much at all. Your first trip is completely covered. All you have to really cover is your hotel fee and airfare. Everything else is covered. But it is such a hard buy-in. Everybody is like, "What's the catch?" I'm like, "You don't believe it, but there is no catch to it. You quite literally just sit on a plane, and all the trip thing happens, and you get to connect with all the wonderful people."

I guess those are the top three things I was involved with: CSUN, debate, and the National Millennial Community.

JT: Thank you so much. I'll pass it off to Stefani.

SE: The way that you talked about your schooling in Nepal, it resembles the British education system, and so why would that be?

It definitely is. Without a doubt, it is a lot more on the British end of things. Because it borders India and India being colonized by the British, there is a lot of influence there. But Nepal in itself was never colonized. There is a lot about that. We signed a treaty that says that we will basically give up everything for Britain's success in the name of sovereignty. But a lot of British influence into Nepal came about when one of our prime ministers went on a trip abroad and saw how underdeveloped Nepal was because at that time, anyone outside of royalty had no access to education. This wasn't too long ago, either, maybe less than...at most, maybe a century, which put the Nepalese society backwards. Initially, only royalties had access to education, and it was

because of the British. They brought a lot of foreign British teachers and professors in to start teaching the royalties, and slowly they opened a little bit more of a private school for royalties and people who would be considered upper class, rich people, people who had ties to the royalty. Then once everything started opening up, we had a big revolution that—I don't want to say modernized, but opened up access to education, things that you would think normal citizens should have access to much more. A lot of British education system influence trickled in because obviously the influence from India trickled in, but also, direct education institutions were established by some of the British people that came into Nepal. Obviously, it was a business venture for them, but setting up an education system following that regard was definitely the case. If I'm not wrong, the person who started our school probably also has some level of British education, a history with them, and that's kind of how the schools operate. But in general, too, it seems like that is just the general theme in the education system in Nepal, even higher education.

SE: Do you play soccer here?

No, not as much, unfortunately, which is a little sad. I try to do as much as I can. I feel like it's progressed from playing in person to playing online. I still try to watch as much as I can and play as much as I can. Now with grad school, I feel like there is a lot more time commitment, and I'm not free as much as I'd like to be, but I still try to kick around as much as I can with my friends.

SE: With your internship at MGM Resorts, do you find yourself drawing on your experience with your parents' company at all?

I feel like not directly with the work I do, but I feel like with the way I interact with different people. If I'm at a department level meeting or if I'm interacting with people outside of our department, which happens very frequently because we do audits and we have to interact with different people from different departments, I feel like that experience definitely helped me out a

lot, and it made me, in a way, feel comfortable about being able to interact with new people because I feel like since such a young age, I was basically, in a way, forced to interact with people that I didn't know. Growing up, being what we call picking up clients from the airport, sometimes it was just literally me, the person driving the car, and that was it. I was fifteen, sixteen picking up a group of ten, fifteen people, and then I have to tell them exactly what is happening. There is a certain level of experience that I got thankfully because of that. I think in that regard, definitely it helped me a lot in being able to know how to talk, how to interact, when to say things, when to pause, body language. All the things that my dad polished into me, it definitely, helped out a lot. Maybe I'm not the best at it. There are things I could obviously learn but, without a doubt, I feel like maybe not for my job function, but anything external to that, outside of that, definitely, it's really helped me a lot, yes.

SE: Why did your uncle come to Las Vegas, and when?

If I'm not wrong, he came to Vegas about twelve, maybe fourteen years ago. He was initially in Colorado. He had a very successful restaurant up there, but he just could not tolerate the snow. At that time, if I'm again correct, it appeared that my niece was about to come into the picture, and so they were like, "Well, this is not going to be the best place." They were talking to a couple of friends who were further this way into the West Coast. At that time, Vegas seemed like the most appealing place for them to be able to move into. Yes, they left the snow behind in Colorado and then moved to Vegas.

SE: Did he open a restaurant here?

He is now looking at it, but initially, no. I think the primary reason why his restaurant in Colorado was so successful is because he had a chef from Thailand. It was a Thai restaurant. That's why he found so much success. But the chef didn't want to relocate from Colorado, and

my uncle didn't have the confidence to start a restaurant without an executive chef who knows what he's doing. He just didn't feel like it would be as successful and probably more problematic. He decided to go into the travel agency, ticketing aspect, and move away from the restaurant industry. I know he still wants to, so we'll see what he opens up.

SE: In your family—I'm thinking since it's you and your brother, I'm looking at your cousins as well—does your generation practice arranged marriages?

Yes, I would say so. I think it's very circumstantial now, and they're most accepting of you finding your own partner, but it is very much prominent. Two of my cousins who got married within the last five years, both of them were arranged marriages, and their siblings, too. My cousin who is the older of the two—I guess the backstory to this is unfortunately their mom had cancer, and one of her last wishes was to see her son get married. He's like, "Well, I don't have anybody at the moment. I'm single. I'll marry whoever you want me to marry." She picked out his wife, and that's how they got married. My other cousin, she was like, "Well, I'm getting older. I need to get married. I don't like anybody that I know." That's how they looked into it, and she got married.

Arranged marriage is still a big part of it. A lot of people still try to avoid it or make fun of it, but a lot of people still think it's okay, maybe not as much heading into my generation and younger, but it's still prominent. I'm thinking of at least four or five more cousins in the range where you are expected to marry, and I'm thinking every one of them will probably get an arranged marriage, or at least proposals. If they don't have potential partners, then yes. In many cases, it's even frowned upon because of the generational differences; if you don't get an arranged marriage, it's a problem. Yes, it's a little bit trickier. But yes, arranged marriage is still a big thing.

SE: Is there an age when it becomes pressure?

Yes, absolutely. I think it's a little bit different depending on—I guess on two levels. If you're a girl or guy, your age difference there. Also, it depends on where you are amongst your siblings. If you're the oldest sibling and you're a guy, if you're turning thirty, it's time. What is happening? We've got to do something. Two years and no one is going to marry you. You can't be older than thirty-two; otherwise, something is wrong, which is such funny rhetoric. Let's say, for example, if you are thirty and you are the older sibling, you're the older brother and you have a sister who is around twenty-two, twenty-three, she is under much more pressure than you are to get married because twenty-three, twenty-four is the conventional age to get married in Nepalese society, at least from what I've seen. Let's say, if you're the older sister in that instance and you are twenty-four, twenty-five and your brother is twenty, it's still the same. You are actually in a lot more pressure in that instance to get married off because your younger siblings are younger, and it's just like, "Well, we've got to get you married off first before we can start to think about his marriage; otherwise, for whatever reason, it's not going to look good." It's such a bad way to think about everything, but I feel like a lot of families still subscribe to some of those thinkings, which is honestly a shame, but that's kind of how it is, yes.

SE: What are your plans going forward?

I feel like I'm on a path where I am now more content with the things I do and I've done in the last year than I've ever been. I feel like a lot of things I did, maybe, in the past have been more so in some level influenced by family or the needed pressure to be doing things. But now I feel like I'm on a path of where I know what I want to do, at least for the next five years, and I'm going to keep on trying to build up on that. I think going forward, just to really live a little bit of a boring life, try to stay as calm as I can for the next five, six years, spend as much time as I can

with my friends, with my family, being able to have a job that can sustain my lifestyle, slowly progressing to where I want to be in my career, and just let the gas on the pedal go a little bit. I feel like I've put myself under a lot of pressure in this last four years. I've realized a lot of it is more external, like family pressure or the general position of you have to do things. I feel like I'm getting a little bit over that, and I want to slow down a little bit once I graduate and see how that goes. I know exactly the things I want to achieve, and I feel like even if I slow down, I'm able to get where I want in the next five years and graduate by May.



Simon's BSBA in Information Management, May 2021

SE: Just one last question for me. How have you seen, even in the time you've been here, how have you seen Las Vegas change?

This is a great question, actually. Compared to maybe some of you, I've been in Vegas for a very short amount of time, four years. I have personally never seen such a fast expansion of Vegas because I remember...I lived in North Las Vegas, and that area used to basically be a big desert. I considered it desert, and 2017 was when I first came to Vegas. Now when I drive up there, it just feels like there are houses everywhere. In the expansion sense, I feel like that's how fast Vegas has grown. But also, it just feels like, and this is not necessarily a bad thing, but it just feels like there are a lot of people in Vegas now maybe compared to even four years ago to where usual places that I go out to eat, that I go hang out with other people used to be much more quieter versus now it just feels like there is a lot more people. Honestly, I don't mind it as much. But outside of being stuck in traffic for an extra ten minutes, I think it's great. I think there are obviously problematic things that could happen with water resources. But generally, the cultural impact that's probably happening, we may not be able to see it right now, but I feel like the expansion that's happening now would probably be, on balance on a cultural level a better thing for Vegas. Yes, I feel like Vegas has expanded quite a bit, and it's exciting to see where it goes from here.

SE: I'm going back on my word, and I have one more question.

No worries.

SE: You arrived in August of 2017, and on October first, we experienced the shooting. How did that affect you as a resident?

It was scary because that first year I was in Arkansas. I was on my phone. I was talking to one of my friends back home, and then I see this news pop up about the October first shooting. I didn't even say anything to my friend. I immediately hung up. I called my uncle. He didn't answer, and I was like, oh, my god. I was absolutely scared. It was one of the scariest things that happened to

me. I called my aunt, and she didn't answer either. Then I called my mom back home, and she answered. She's like, "What's happening? Why are you calling me?" I'm like, "Hey, this happened. I have no other way to get a hold of them. What do I do?" She was like, "Oh, my god, this is terrible."

All I read was there was a shooting happening. I didn't see where. I didn't even look where it happened. It was just that innate instinct to call my uncle as fast as I could. In the time of me figuring out who else to contact, they contacted me. They're like, "Hey, we're okay. We weren't anywhere close to there."

It's very unfortunate what happened. Then I started reading more and more into it. It was a big tragedy for Las Vegas, of course, but it was such an interesting situation to be in having seen Vegas only a couple months before, knowing all the sights in general, and to think about something as tragic as what happened, it was mind baffling. I thought I would be better prepared for any kind of events of like. There was this big earthquake in Nepal, and that was a crazy story in itself. But I thought because I had experience with a big tragedy like that, I would be okay. But nothing prepares you for anything like that. It was absolutely heart shattering, and it was so hard to grasp my head around for a couple of days because all the people that lost their lives, everybody that was impacted because of that. It was very hard to grasp.

I still remember this. I was sitting in my dorm talking to my friends, and then I see that little pop-up, and then me just absolutely losing my mind for twenty minutes until I finally heard back from my uncle and my aunt. Nothing really prepares you for a tragedy like that. It's super scary.

SE: Thank you.

JT: I actually have one question. I just wanted to know, have you, yourself, ever experienced any racial discrimination either here or in Arkansas?

I think maybe not so much directly. I feel maybe more indirect instances where that probably happened. I don't know if I would consider it discrimination, really, but in a lot of instances, knowing that you didn't grow up here, when people know that, that kind of changes their perspective on you, which is very unfortunate. Up until then, nothing was different. Now I add my back story, and everything changes. Often in cases, they'll be mentioning a story or some version of reference, and before they're even done asking, they'll go, "You probably won't get it." I'm like, "I've watched 'The Office.' It's not that crazy to have access to the internet in Nepal. I didn't go to school on an elephant. Come on." I think maybe not direct instances of discrimination, really, but in many cases, it did feel like I have to be thought of specially because, oh, maybe he wouldn't like this because he's not from here. In many instances, even my closest friends were like, "You probably don't get it." Maybe in that regard. Definitely a lot of instances where I've probably seen that.

Also, I feel like people don't think before asking sometimes. I don't mind sharing my stories and my experiences and the differences in what it's like, but in many cases, it feels like it's more targeted to try to get you to say something different than what's happening in the conversation. I'm trying to think of an instance where it would make more sense. Yes, fortunately, I feel like I got away with it. But in many instances, I've seen that.

I think the worst incident that happened to me when I was in Arkansas...At least where I was at, Arkansas Tech had a big Saudi population, a lot of students from Saudi Arabia coming in. Someone's car got smashed in, and they spray painted "go back home" and different slurs painted. That's a targeted instance where someone basically wanted someone not there. I don't

know how else to express it, but it was such an interesting time to be there and see that in person.

I guess in one way, I feel like I'm fortunate to never be in a position where I have directly been discriminated against, but there is still smaller things that happen on the daily that is just constantly there. I feel like oftentimes it doesn't happen because I tell them that I'm not from here or I didn't go to high school here, and that just changes something, just subtle things. I guess another thing that happens more often is because a lot of people can't tell where I'm from, and then they just assume I'm from India, which isn't necessarily the worst thing, I guess, but it's just odd that that's the default. In many instances, even people who have talked to me for a while start speaking to me in Spanish. I'm like, "I'm so sorry. I wish I could speak Spanish." And they're like, "I thought you were Hispanic or Latino." I'm like, "No, I'm not. I'm from Asia." They're like, "Oh, you must be Indian." I'm like, oh, well, here we go. Maybe not direct instances, but I feel like there are subtle instances where that's probably happened.

JT: Thank you.

CW: Is there anything else we haven't asked you that you would like to talk about?

I'm not sure. I feel like we've covered a lot. I can't think of things. I think having moved to America, I feel like I'm very grateful of the opportunities that I've gotten thanks to my parents, thanks to my uncle, everybody that has supported me all throughout, up until today, really. I'm very grateful for this opportunity. Looking back, I feel like there is a lot that has changed, a lot I've changed, I should say. I'm very, very glad to be in a position where I have a lot of things happening at the same time in a good way, but still some level of uncertainty to what could happen next, in a way. Yes, I think that's pretty much...Being able to sit here and being able to share my story, a couple of years ago, I don't think I would have ever been in a position like that,

but I'm very, very fortunate to be in Vegas at a university that cares about students as much as it does and just being around people that are all amazing. That's the best way to close out.

ALL: Thank you so much.

Thank you.

[End of recorded interview]