



Chanda Sar

Naomi Slipp:

This is Naomi Slipp. I'm recording a story for a common ground. Will you introduce yourself first?

Chanda Sar:

My name is Chanda Sar and I'm happy to be here.

Naomi Slipp:

Thank you. So, the project is seeking stories that relate or people's relationships to the region. So are there particular things in your community or things that you feel connected with in new Bedford or the region? Where are you from? How did you come here? What's your kind of connection?

Chanda Sar:

Well, I would never be here without the work of my grandparents. So mainly when I saw this, I thought, oh, this is a great way for me to just talk about essentially everything they've done to get to America. So, I am Cambodian American and they were actually very unfortunately enough in the genocide in Khmer Rouge. So they spent those three years, pretty much losing all of our families. So when my grandma speaks up before it ranges from seeing pregnant woman literally massacred and them betting on, oh, is it a boy or a girl and seeing her family hanged and then right before they were killed, buried alive these types of terrible things. So knowing that she, of course my grandpa, he ran away from her two times to be able to seek safety.

Chanda Sar:

And he was able to do so and because they were able to be in a refugee camp, they were able to give birth to my mom. So that was wonderful, but my mom evidently suffered from being born in that area. So I think of all the struggles that they went through with at the time nine children, it went down to six and they brought all six at the same time to here in America, in Fall River. So they're very connected there specifically because there is a really big Cambodian community as you know. So, I just think about everything that they've done to do. So my grandma is quite the resourceful person to the point where, when my uncle who was a baby at the time was sick, they were heading on a bus from Thailand to go to the airport. And my uncle was sick. He was probably a couple of months old.

Chanda Sar:

So in the hospital, they told him, hey, listen, you can't leave with him. He needs to stay here. But my grandma was not going to let my uncle be left there. So she took the IV with her, took my uncle and ran out the door. She took the medicine on the counter and she gave him the medicine because she knew it would make him sleep. So he was able to sleep through the bus and had he coughed even one bit, they would've all been kicked off. So she knew what she needed to do to get to America. And then once they did get here, they worked so hard to study and to reach their citizenship, once they were able to. And my grandma took her two times the first time, there was not an interpreter present and they made her pay for it first. And then they told her there was no interpreter. So she was not able to take the exam.

Chanda Sar:

But the second time she came ready and she had me with her just in case for backup. And she passed with flying colors, albeit it was the average 20 question version, but she did it and they're very happy to be citizens. And I can't help, but think about everything that happened in the midst to be able to have me here. So



Naomi Slipp:

Do you know what, what was it that drew them to Fall River in particular of all the places to come? Was it the community already there?

Chanda Sar:

There actually, there was a huge amount of people that were coming in general around here. So they wanted to be around people that were of Cambodian descent. Also, they were fearful in moving here that they would lose a lot of what essentially the Camaro Rouge tried to kill, which was their sense of belonging and their sense of community. I remember my grandma telling me that when she knew all of this was going to happen, she said, "do not read, make sure that you do not show any signs of being different". She wanted her whole family anything that distinguishes us, we need to mute and keep down because she was in survival mode. And I think everyone around her didn't necessarily realize the extent of what was going on. So a lot of people pushed back, especially her being a female, telling them what to do.

Chanda Sar:

And unfortunately those were the people that aren't with us today. So there is a huge community here that they still reach out to, but more so than anything, they just find comfort in what we have. I look at the daily luxuries that we have. My grandpa is floored that we have Facebook and he's able to connect to people. And he's floored by me working at the museum and all of these wonderful things that it just seems so out of touch for them. And it's funny enough, they're actually a lot more current and up to date with news than I think my uncles and aunts and even parents are because they love YouTube and not to create resource. So when something sounds a little funny, they're like, "well, this YouTube video said something different and there's more YouTube videos that support this". So, that's how they go about their scholar leaders student. So, that's pretty funny.

Naomi Slipp:

Are there, you said part of coming here and one of the big things that they worked for was a cultural continuation of cultural traditions. Are there big traditions that have been a part of your upbringing and that continue through those kind of community connections?

Chanda Sar:

Well, I have to say, I think my grandparents do a great job in terms of keeping that urban and flow of staying true to their roots. So we grew up being very accustomed to Buddhist traditions to go into the temple. And there is a really great one within the Fall River community. And they also, whenever they say Cambodian person, they just have to say hi or greet them and it's just this big sense of love. But additionally, they've changed so much with their ideologies. I mentioned previously that my mom at the age of 15 was put in an arranged marriage and it was a horrible, horrible thing for her because she just wanted to go to high school and be like all of her other girlfriends. My grandparents begged on their hands and knees pretty much for this to happen because they wanted to bring honor to the family.

And they didn't think that there was any other way, except for through marriage for the female of the family. So when that ended after three years of marriage and after one, well, I am the grandchild because they eventually decided that wasn't the route that they wanted to go with. And they decided if my granddaughter or if my son wants to marry someone that isn't Cambodian, then wow, that's wonderful because we live in this place. That's so diverse and so great. You meet people and they might be one of us and they could be a bad person. My grandma says that all the time, you just really don't know the jacket betray that you're going to get. So to see them put aside their prejudices and to really learn and to be proud of where they're from, they're so happy to just live in a home and to be residents of this country.



Chanda Sar:

It's phenomenal because we take it all for granted. And I find myself complaining all the time, but to really think about everything that they suffered through, my grandma was tortured very much so throughout the genocide, because she has fair skin, majority of Cambodians have like olive tone, tan complexions. So they thought that she wasn't Cambodian. So to the point where they were lighting her hair on fire, they were injecting her with all sorts of different things. And that's why she says her memory isn't there. I think she's wild because she remembers everything, but she just loves being in this area. She thinks that it's the best because you know, there's always something going on, but she can be secluded at the same time. So they've definitely changed with what they accept in culture. And they've, I think more than anyone in my family, they've really just embraced that times are changing and so should they.

Naomi Slipp:

That's really amazing. That's an incredible shift in mindset and not just cultural perspective, but like outlook on the world. And that's pretty incredible.

Chanda Sar:

I remember they were very fearful of people with tan skin, dark skin because the soldiers in the genocide were always of darker complexion because they were out and patrolling and whatnot. And fast forward to the first person that I considered dating when I was in high school, he was a man who was black and my grandma was, "well if he treats you right then that's fine". And just to see that switch to, because they've been in an area that is, I mean, New Bedford, Fall River, all of our surrounding communities, there's so many different people and they've really enjoyed that and seen how much it helps. It helps them be able to thrive and survive.

Naomi Slipp:

So those are your family connections, what brought you here through generations, what are the things that keep you here? What are the ways in which you feel tied and connected to community?

Chanda Sar:

Well, I'm a city girl. I love New York city and New Bedford is like a branch off of that. I definitely feel a huge sense of community here. I think it's a lot there for instance, I lost my wallet outside of the liquor store. I was having a girl's night and I was getting liquor and I dropped it and I was freaking out because of course it was the week that I had to go to the DMV. So I had my social security card in there, all my medical cards. So it wasn't just, so I lost my wallet, which I have had a many times in New York city lost my wallet from nights out, all of those things. So I was so distraught because this was the first time it was affecting my son because all of his medical cards were in there. And I'm the only person who provides for him.

Chanda Sar:

So I was, well, let's shoot. How do I do this? How do I prove my identity to the bank and all this stuff? So I went back to little liquor store and asked for the security footage, took a photo of it, of myself or a video of it and then posted it on all of the groups around the surrounding areas. Sure enough, 15,000 views later, over a thousand chairs later, my wallet turns up at my grandparents' house.

Naomi Slipp:

Amazing.

Chanda Sar:

And they dropped it off, yes, at the old ID which is my grandparents' house. If that happened in New York city, the police would've laughed at me. Nothing would've ever come from it. That would've been well you're out of luck. The sense of community here is so immense and specifically New Bedford. It's so distinct with its downtown area.



Chanda Sar:

There's so much that has come around with it. I would love to be a huge part of this community if the stars align with the rental community. But I think it's so great. And so Fall River and New Bedford were kind of neck and neck with regard to crime and with regard to dropout rates and all that stuff. To see everything kind of flourish, specifically our New Bedford, but even Fall Over, they just revamped over their whole high school. I hope that good things will come from that area because one of the best things is to be able to give back to where you came from. So I feel a huge sense of that and working here.

Naomi Slipp:

I think one of the things that the project, the Common Ground project is thinking about is, it's not just New Bedford, but it is that whole kind of South Coast region. So you mentioned a little bit the relationship, but also maybe little sense of competition between New Bedford and Fall river. What of that, have you felt growing up maybe being in Fall river, how has New Bedford been, maybe when you were younger? What were your thoughts of New Bedford? Was there a sense that like the two cities were similar or there were differences?

Chanda Sar:

Well, definitely a sense that they were similar, but also new Bedford is one of those places where it just was, "oh, you don't want to go there". There was a huge sense of it being dangerous. And it's so funny because, of course wherever you go, it's dangerous. I think about when I was in New York city, how I got mugged in Soho of all places and that's so ritzy, it's so nice. And they wanted my \$20 purse, take it. But I definitely feel like the turnover and even in Fall River, the amount of restaurants and the amount of the fun things to do that you wouldn't necessarily expect so many people come to us for certain things. And even back when we had the mills, this in Fall River, it was the best place to shop apparently, is what I keep hearing.

Chanda Sar:

So just to see the cities kind of do a revamp of their personalities and it's so exciting to be back. This was nothing like growing up here where it was, you can't go there, you can't, there's nothing to do there except drugs and all of this craziness. I mean, I think Chris Herren wrote that in his autobiography, the NBA player for the Celtics he said "oh, there's nothing to do in Fall River except drugs". Yeah. And it's so funny because it's like, no, you can act throw there's a couple of breweries. We've got an ice skating ring. There's lots to do. And I think about that now because my son is two and well going to be two and now I'm seeing him play at the playgrounds that I did. And I couldn't even imagine having the playground that he has now, it's so neat and so cool. So it's very nice that there's so much change that's happening for the better.

Naomi Slipp:

So what was it that brought you home? You've mentioned being in New York, your son, your family, obviously here, what affected those decisions to come back?

Chanda Sar:

I think COVID took a number on everyone and I found myself isolated in a one and a half bedroom that I was paying 2,500 for, with a newborn because two weeks after he was born, we were in lockdown. And I was so thankful for technology, but I needed the ample space to be able to feel like I could raise a child. And I knew that home offered that, so I look at the areas around us. And even though we're in a city of some sorts, it's still gives you room to be able to drive around. And I think that's a luxury that I didn't realize that I took for granted until it was gone for me. I love that these areas specifically, you can have that city nightlife downtown bar hopping kind of vibe, but then also you can just take your car and go to market basket or stroll around.



Chanda Sar:

And there's so much to do. That's outside of the scope of just hanging out and drinking and so much that you don't have to pay for. I think about when me and my son go out, we have picnics all over the place and it's just so something for free and for leisure. And there's so much beauty specifically here in New Bedford and even Fall River, we have that battleship quote, but the Harbor is so underrated. So underrated. I know we have a lot of restaurants over there, but to see the view, especially from the museum, it sells itself.

Naomi Slipp:

So what are some of those other things that you have done with him or that you're looking forward to doing with him or introducing him to raising him here?

Chanda Sar:

Well, we've done so much of them already, but I think just exploring more specifically New Bedford, I took him here around the Halloween and we were walking around and he just got such a heat out of everyone that was around, it's not so crowded to the point where it's suffocating and you feel that way in New York city where there's just this overwhelming sense of buildings all around you and here you feel like everything's a little bit more spread out. There's so much more greenery and there's so much more to explore. I found him walking and peeping through like little alleys and kind of gauging whether or not he wanted to go down that way. And he was jumping on the cobblestone streets. He thought they were the coolest things, listening to the cars, drive on them. He had to stop by every single car that passed us just to view it.

Chanda Sar:

And I'm thinking about it from his eyes, never seeing these cobblestone streets and all this stuff. It must have been so much over stimulation for him, but it was so amazing because it really made me pause to look at all the beauty around us from the workout buildings that they have here to the lofts, to all of this fun beauty that we're so much into docking, like to it in our device when I'm walking out of here on my phone, all of this stuff, that to pause and to take a breath and to look around. It's so wonderful. And even though, even the people who are unfortunately a part of the homeless population here, they're so nice and friendly. I've never had a bad encounter with someone being rambunctious in a manner that wasn't a good time.

Chanda Sar:

So this has been so refreshing because in New York city, that's not the story. Right. But everyone is... so it's nice to be able to have that sense of community. It always comes back to me with, to be able to say hi to people that you see walking down the street, you don't find that in New York city or quite honestly, I feel like it's very selective, those kind of areas. So.

Naomi Slipp:

Great. Well, is there anything else that you want to share about the region or your connection or coming home that has...?

Chanda Sar:

It's just, it's so cool. I think every day you discover something new and interesting about this area. The Whaling Museum as a whole is such a hidden gem. And I can't wait to see it really encapsulated upon it really brought to the light because it deserves it. It deserves the recognition and I can't wait to see what's forthcoming. Yeah. We'll share that photograph with you too.

Naomi Slipp:

Oh, good. Yeah. We'll scan that and add it to the story.

Chanda Sar:

Awesome.



Naomi Slipp:

Cool. Well, thank you so much. This has been great.

Chanda Sar:

Yeah. Thank you. Yeah.

Naomi Slipp:

Cool.