

Interviewee: Donna Chang
Interviewer: Helen Pu
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Transcribed by: Helen Pu
Edited by: Kelly Liao
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Background: Donna Chang was born in Daegu, South Korea and moved to Mississauga, Ontario, Canada at the age of 1. Her family then moved to Bethesda, Maryland where she attended high school, but she returned to Canada to go to college at the University of Toronto. Upon graduation, Donna worked as a Barista at a Starbucks and enrolled in a Masters program at Johns Hopkins at the same time. Afterwards, she received an offer to work for the State of Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development as a part of the team that was responsible for recruiting life science companies. One day, she received a presentation on her desk given by a Korean company that highlighted the potential to isolate a person's stem cells and replicate them. Donna immediately knew she wanted to get involved, and so she joined the company. After a few years with the Korean company, Donna and her two partners decided to start *Hope Biosciences*, a company dedicated to create stem cell solutions for a variety of diseases, where she holds the position of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company.

Donna was declared an Asian-American hero in the *Houston Chronicle* after her company received 3 FDA approvals to conduct clinical trials for a potential therapeutic for the Covid-19 virus. She is happily married with twins and continues to bring hope to the world through the work that she does.

Setting: This interview was conducted on June 2, 2020 over a Zoom call.

Key:

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...: speech trails off; pause
Italics: emphasis
(?): preceding word may not be accurate
[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

Interview transcript:

HP: So today is June 2, 2020. And we're interviewing Ms. Donna Chang. I'm Helen Pu, and we're gonna get started. Okay, so first on—about your life, early life, where and when were you born?

DC: I was born in Daegu, South Korea.

HP: Okay. And when did you move to the US?

DC: My parents decided to immigrate to Toronto, Canada, actually Mississauga, Ontario, when I was a year old, so I'm an only child. So my parents and me, we went to, we immigrated at that time to Mississauga.

HP: And where did—where were your parents born?

DC: My parents were also born in—in Korea, in Daegu. Yep. [**HP:** Okay and—] We're all [**HP:** Oh, sorry. Go ahead.] No, we're all from that area. We're all born in the same area.

HP: Okay, and where, which area? Where is Daegu around?

DC: It's south, it's south of Seoul.

HP: Okay.

DC: So it's not a very big city at all. But yeah, might—that's where my parents met. And yeah.

HP: Okay, and how did your parents meet?

DC: They tell me that they met on a tennis court in college. So they were college sweethearts. Yep. They ended up getting married.

HP: Aw, okay. What prompted your parents to move to America? And how old were they?

DC: Well, they first went to Canada, entered America later, but they—I think they definitely wanted a better life and more opportunity. And my father was in computer software. So he worked for the The Korean Air Force as in the, in the, in the computer data department. And so he had those skill sets that he learned in the military. And so he was able to translate that. And I think a Canadian company found that to be, a bank actually, found that to be helpful. And so his background was a good fit and going to Canada, I think would mean a whole, a whole lot of opportunity.

HP: And did they, did your parents know English before they moved to Canada?

DC: No, of course not. But my—my dad, I think was familiar with English because he had heard it. My grandfather, so his father was a pastor. He was actually a chaplain for the US Army. That was, that was based in Korea at the time. So he learned some of the language. He had heard my grandfather and apparently he spoke very good English. I can't remember, but, you know, I was told that he spoke really good English and so I think my—my dad had sort of a familiarity, I guess he was just familiar with English. So he learned very quickly and when he immigrated and was able to learn really, really quickly. [HP: That's great.] Yeah.

HP: Yeah, um, what did your mom do when she moved?

DC: When she ended up coming, she—she got her real estate license. So she went to school, got—got her licensure there, and was able to help support the family by—by selling houses and my dad had a full time job.

HP: Awesome. Do you know if you know like, did you—did they experience any culture shocks or did they adjust pretty smoothly?

DC: Yeah, I don't know. My, I, my parents and I haven't really talked about that. And I think they, they were surrounded—we were surrounded by a lot of friends just like us, I think for other families who had immigrated. At that time, most of them were immigrants, right? There—there weren't people that were already, you know, the second generation or third generation Koreans at the time. So yeah, because we had a lot in common with those families. We sort of just grew up together and there wasn't—I'm sure that generation had their own set of hardships, but they didn't really—none of that was really filtered to the kids. At least none to me.

HP: Yeah. So I guess you kind of touched on it, but can you like go into more detail about the neighborhood to describe the neighborhood you grew up in? What were like the demographics? Was it a friendly neighborhood?

DC: Yeah. Mississauga is, it was a very small city at the time. I have heard that it's become much bigger. I haven't been back in a really long time. But it's, you know, it said it was a quintessential like, a suburban city a little bit. Like 20-30 minutes away from the City of Toronto. Though, it—it's now exploded into quite a hub for technology and other things. So I think it's grown very much to a city but at that time, it was just a small suburb. Yeah, but it was very safe, very secure. And yeah, great schooling.

HP: Okay, awesome. And where did you move next?

DC: I, in high school and when I had to start my freshman year, I ended up my, my dad got a job in Bethesda, Maryland. And so he transported our entire family to Maryland, and I started my—I finished high school in—in Bethesda at Walt Whitman High School.

HP: And what was it like growing up in Maryland, especially as an only child?

DC: Um...you know, I...It was, it was different leaving Canada. People think it's a very big difference but actually isn't you know, it's it seems very it's just another city it just feels like another city. But Maryland was—where we lived in Bethesda, again, it's like 20 minutes away from DC. It's a very affluent neighborhood. We didn't live in, you know, an affluent like house or anything like that expensive house but—the area will tend to have a lot of, you know, Congress people living there. So people in the government, government affairs. And so it was just a very well to do neighborhood, very good schools, very strong schools and great education. I was in the public school system and yet I feel like I had a really great, really great teaching throughout my high school years. Lots of diversity in school. I'd say it's probably a lot easier to get through high school at that time than it is today. I know a lot of high school students struggle with a lot of different things that we didn't have to do at that time. You know, my—my hobbies were your typical, I think stereotypical Asian activities I was put into. I was not an athlete. So I was at—I played violin for a long time. I played orchestra. I played Allstate orchestra, and I, you know, I just, I studied a lot and I wanted to get into a good college and so I yeah, I was just your typical, yes.

HP: Yeah. Cool. And what about the household you grew up in? Can you describe that I guess, despite moving around?

DC: My household was just, again, just my parents and me. And so, my parents worked a lot and I, yeah, I—I had a very normal, I think I had a very normal upbringing and very much supported by my parents and, yeah.

HP: Do you think your parents were str—like more on the strict side or the chill side?

DC: Yeah, they were a good combination of the both. You know, I think my mom was the typical Tiger Mom. She from teaching me multiplication tables to making sure I would ace my SATs, like she was on top of things. My dad was really sort of the comic relief of my household. [**HP:** Yeah, me too.] People think that my dad and I had a great relationship and we certainly do and, but that we're very close because our personalities, our sort of outgoing personalities are—are very similar. But my mom was definitely strict. But, but loving you know, everything that she did had—had a reason behind it. And I thank her for you know, kicking my butt a lot. [laughs]

HP: So what were some important values and lessons that your parents instilled on you?

DC: Um...you know, my mom, in particular, my mom is a bookworm. Okay, my mom is a total bookworm. And one of the things she says is that when she was pregnant with me, she read so many incredibly long and boring volumes of books that she thinks in the womb, I became sick of books. [laughs] So when I was growing up, she really wanted me to be a natural lover of books. And I think that sort of that sort of—I don't even call it a value, but that is just something I've taken with me and I—it's a, it's a, I think it's a trait that I want to achieve, like I want to find a love for reading. And so that's one thing I really remember. I know that the typical values of working hard, you know, everything—nothing's given to you, you have to earn it. You have to, the harder you work, the—the more you'll achieve at the end, that those—those were, what—what I was taught. I was also taught that—I remember my dad would sort of, you know, tell me like, what is it especially when I was getting into college, like, what is the end goal? Like, what are you really working for? Are you working for stuff like material goods? Because, like, what is that? What is it that you're working for? I remember him challenging me in that way. And I remember at a young age just thinking that "Yeah, like I want to strive for bigger things." I wasn't sure what that was. I couldn't pinpoint like, what—what does that even look like? I knew that tangible things like tangible assets weren't, not weren't attractive, but just what wasn't—wasn't the drive or wasn't a motivating force for me. I think I learned that early on.

HP: Yeah, that's awesome. Do you think you've found your love for books in the end?

DC: No, not yet. [laughs] Not for fun. I mean, I do read a lot. I have to read a lot. I read a lot of science and I have to read a lot of regulations. All kinds of things my whole day is spent reading. A lot of us are doing that emails and articles and things like that. It's really hard to get away and just sit down with a good book. I haven't actually managed to create that habit yet. I really am working on it.

HP: Yeah, it always looks so like peaceful and ideal, like read on the beach, but I just can't read, I always fall asleep. Yeah. Um, so you said your grandpa, grandma, granddad, grandpa, on your dad's side was a pastor. So did his Christian values ever trickle down to your family?

DC: Oh, of course, I grew up in a very solid Christian home. And I actually didn't mention it because for me, it's just a, that was my norm. You know, I—I and I'm incredibly blessed to have been given that sort of foundation. I knew nothing different. So I knew that, yeah, in all my morals and sort of what I believe in comes from the those—those, that foundation of faith in our family.

HP: And then did you guys attend a church when you were young?

DC: We did, yeah, and typically they would be Korean churches, right, Korean churches that where my, my parents would have friends and, you know, I played with the kids.

HP: And so did you guys go to church in both Canada and Maryland? Or...

DC: Uh, yes, both places, Canada and Maryland. Canada were smaller churches and of course in Maryland, by the time we got there, we went to Korean Central Presbyterian Church in Virginia. It's a very big church over there near DC.

HP: And I guess did you face any discrimination when you were a child?

DC: You know, I probably did. I think we all do to some degree. But, I—I've really not been the type to remember and hold on to it or remember it either. I remember being made fun of a lot. You know, I—I went by my Korean name for the longest time, actually, until I got to high school I had a Korean name. And people will make fun of me and, you know, yeah, but anyway, I—I thought kids are just being kids. You know, I've never really thought of being unfairly disadvantaged or anything like that. But I'm sure

that even now in the business world, I'm sure it happens from time to time and sure there's discrimination that happens even as being a woman and being a relatively young woman in this area, I think you're, you might automatically—people might automatically assume that you don't have a lot of experience. You're naive, you know, you're, you know, you don't know what, you know, you don't know what's really going on. Yeah, I get stuff like that. And that's, that sort of discrimination is typical but, yeah, you don't really think much of it.

HP: Yeah. And did that—was it those experiences that prompted you to change your name?

DC: Oh, no, I just really wanted a cool name. [laughs] I named myself, I named myself Donna. And yeah, it just the name just came to me and I actually think is because I was watching a lot of Beverly Hills, 90210 at the time. And I thought, you know, Donna is a cool name. And so I think that's what happened on the first day of high school. The teacher was having a really hard time pronouncing my name and then after like the third or fourth time can you pronounce it again? And I'm just like "Donna, just call me Donna." [laughs] It was never legal. So for a long time people would look up Donna and you know, and she didn't exist, because it wasn't—

HP: Right, and then you ended up legally changing it?

DC: I did. When I got my US citizenship, I was able to add it. So it's officially my middle name.

HP: Okay, awesome. So now moving to your education life. So what university did you go to?

DC: I went to the University of Toronto. So I—when I applied for universities out of, out of high school, I really wanted to go to NYU. I think NYU was my dream school. I wanted to go to New York City. But my—I got accepted. I went through all that my parents were really wanting me to go back to Canada for undergrad. I think, I think me being an only child, like safety is of concern. When you think New York City, it's like a big ci—it's like too much of a change. They felt comfortable that if they were going to just let me go and go off on my own, that if you want to be in a city, you know, Toronto's a good, good place to go. And of course, being in a public Canadian education and being a Canadian citizen, it was actually very, it was really cost effective for me to go. And I had some scholarships and lots of things were paid for. So I was, I was able to—to go, I chose the University of Toronto and had a great education.

HP: So what did you study?

DC: I, uh, struggled trying to figure out what I wanted to do. And because I'm Asian, I thought, well, I'm supposed to be gifted in science and math. Okay, so this is supposed to be my identity. So I should go into this. I guess I'm because you're either supposed to be a doctor or a lawyer. Right? [laughs] And so I thought, well, I love the idea of science and math, but I knew that it was always something I had to work for, like when I told you about my mom having to kick my butt. Math and science did not come naturally to me. So I was not naturally gifted in that. It took a tremendous amount of work for me to like, keep up and understand. So I knew that my brain was probably not like, gifted in that area, and then it—so I thought, "Well, if I'm not in math and science, then maybe I am on the other side." And given that my mom was a, she was a master in philosophy. So she was and she was trying to get her PhD and then she got pregnant, which is why she couldn't pursue that but—so she's like super smart and book smart. And she is—and she can write and she obviously understands philosophy very well. And so I thought, well, I can do philosophy and medicine, which is bioethics. I can learn bioethics and I was really intrigued by the field. I didn't know much about it, but I knew that there was and there are good jobs that can come from that as well. So I studied both, I double majored in both areas. I did human biology, so I was a pre-med student. And I was also a full time philosophy student too. So I did, I did my undergrad I got a BA and a BSC at UT.

HP: Wow. Um, so did you have any career aspirations going into college or did you kind of figure that out during—

DC: Thought again, I thought I was going to be a doctor because I was pre-med, but it changed one night. One—like towards the end of my, towards the end of my college days, I was in an advanced anatomy class. And I had to submit a paper one night and it was very late at night just like a movie. It was late at night and it was stormy. And there was lightning and thunder and I had to go submit this before the next day. So it was like 11:30 at night. And I went, and everything's—yeah, it was a huge campus. So you're walking around there at night. I'm carrying this paper with me to go deliver it to the, in the anatomy department. And I was in this dark basement and there are like, you know, preserved body parts like everywhere in the hallway, and I just, I totally freaked out. I totally freaked out and I thought I don't like blood. I get nervous even looking at it. I can't stand looking at these body parts. Maybe I—I'm not cut out for this. I had this sudden, like, I had this panic attack. And I remember coming back to my dorm room. And immediately I called my parents and I told them that I'm sorry, but I can't, I can't do this. I'm not going to become a doctor. I'm just not, I'm not going to med school. And they—they never forced me, you know, or they didn't. They tried. I think they did a little bit to try and talk me out of it. But they, I think my, for my dad, he explained, you know, “Think about how much work you've already put into this. Do you really want to change trajectories?” But—but, yeah you know, I never wavered. After that day I made that decision. I decided I'm not going to med school and I and at that point, I didn't know what I was going to do with myself. I didn't know what kind of opportunities there were with my education and my background. I really didn't know. So yeah.

HP: And then what did you end up choosing as your career path?

DC: Also, after graduation, I spent a year trying to find a job. And I—I really put in, I applied to a bunch of different kinds of positions and even like, analysts, scientists, you know, consulting to pharmaceutical companies to all kinds of things and just couldn't land a job and so I went to, I worked at Starbucks. Starbucks was actually my first job. I worked as a, as a barista. Yeah, and I was a really good barista. I like to think. And I um, I ended up applying to grad school. I applied to grad school, I applied to Johns Hopkins University. So I was back in Maryland after I graduated UT, I went back to Maryland and I lived with my grandmother. Because at that time, my parents had moved back to Korea. In year 2000, they moved back to Korea. So I was living with my grandmother and my cousins and just working and—and then going to grad school.

HP: Awesome. Um, so did—how was your university experience socially?

DC: University was fun. It was fun. I made really great friends, lifelong friends. And I think I had a much better experience making friends at sort of a more mature age than I did when I was in high school or middle school. You know, there are, there are very lucky people. I don't know if you're one of those that get to have friends from elementary school or middle school, but I didn't and I think because I moved away and I just kind of lost contact. And I really envy the people that have sort of these lifelong friends, yeah it's such a great thing. Yeah, but yeah, in college I had, I made really great friends and I had a great college life. I—you know, it's like the right amount of studying and right amount of partying. [laughs]

HP: Yeah, yeah, I think I have like one middle school friend like she's my best friend now but that's like the only one from my childhood. Yeah. Um, so did you have any struggles during college?

DC: No, no, no real struggles? No, I just, I think like any college student, you feel like what am I supposed to do with myself? And, you know, we all feel like, if I can't figure this out now, I'm never gonna figure it out. So you feel like you're under this tremendous pressure when it really isn't. When—

when even you know 20 years later, you're still trying to figure out what you're gonna do. Yeah, but at that time, I think I was just like, you know how—how am I supposed to find my way?

HP: Mm hmm. Yeah. Um, and do you think so given like the independence from college, do you think any part of that change like how close you are to your Korean identity?

DC: Well, in college I made a lot of Korean friends that were sort of second-generation Koreans like myself, and we, and even some first generation like some, some foreign exchange students that came from Korea, we—we were able to make friends. And so I actually was more in tune with my Korean than ever, because when I was growing up in Canada, there were hardly any Koreans so it was hard to, you know, know anything about the Korean identity other than what you learn from your parents. Yeah. But in college, I was really, I learned, you know, Korean, how to speak Korean, how to read it. I learned all these things.

HP: Wow, that's awesome. If you could change something about your time in college, what would it be?

DC: I could change anything? I guess, you know, everyone says the same thing. Like, if I had worked harder, if I had studied harder, I would become, I would be so much more of a successful person today. You know, I—I bring in a lot of interns here to my company, and I, you know, we—we have an intern here that is, that is doing a lot of job responsibilities that I would hire in right now, even a master's level candidate. And I think that's incredible. And I look at him, I look at, you know, the intern and think, "Wow. If I were that hard working when I was in college, imagine where I would be today." [laughs]

HP: Yeah. So do you think you made the right decision of not pursuing the pre-med track and not going to med school?

DC: Oh, yeah, I have uh—I've done a service for all the patients out there for sure. Look, I—I knew, without a doubt that I wanted to help people. I've always known that—I've known that—I felt very connected. One thing about my family my grandfather who was a pastor at that time, it was after the Korean War, he had set up a—he and my grandmother actually set up an orphanage together and they served and they—I have seen them serve throughout their lives and yes, my parents were career people. But, you know, I—I grew up feeling connected to that, to that story, to that history and knowing that I wanted more, I wanted to be able to help on a, on a bigger scale. But I'm just a person, right. I'm just one person. So what—what is that going to look like? And I think I've—I think that heart has never changed. And I've been able to I've been given these opportunities to serve people in a big way. Indirectly, but so it's an—it's incredible how things have sort of played out.

HP: So you said your first job was at Starbucks, what was your next job?

DC: So after grad school, I went to this uh, I went to this career place, and I remember running up to this person. They were talking about how you know the State of Maryland. So every—every state government has people that are, that're trying to build up the economy in that state. And in Maryland, there was a group of people who are specifically employed by the state to try and grow the biotech industry in that area. And so I—in one of the presentations at one of these forums I was invited to, I—I stepped right up, and I said, "Hire me." And I remember him as—I remember he—I said so clearly, "I have no qualifications, but you should hire me." And he says, he says, "Well, how are you at wrapping gifts?" I said, "I'm great at wrapping gifts! I can wrap gifts, whatever you need me to do, I'll wrap gifts."

But that's how I actually landed my first job. I was a—well my first, you know, serious job that had anything to do with my major. I—I got into the State of Maryland Department of Business and Economic Development. And I was part of the team that was responsible for recruiting life science companies into

the state. So now that through my, through my studies in biotechnology, so in grad school, I learned about all different kinds of biotechnology. So I had a pretty good kind of general knowledge. I wasn't a subject matter expert in anything, but I had a general knowledge of sort of the different kind of technologies out there. And so I was tasked to vet different technologies to figure out which ones I thought were promising. Yeah, through that experience, I learned about stem cells. [HP: Yeah.] Yeah.

HP: Wow. When did you graduate from grad school?

DC: Grad school is I think 2006.

HP: And then How long did you work for the State Department?

DC: I want to say 2009—I have it on my resume somewhere. I can't remember. The dates are all mumbled terribly. I'm sorry for your interview, I should have been prepared here.

HP: It's fine. Did you enjoy that job? Did you like it?

DC: Oh, the state? [HP: Yeah.] Oh, for sure. Yes. It was a—it was a great, a great experience. I wouldn't trade it for the world. I learned so much. Yeah, I worked there from 2005 to 2007. Okay, so I must have graduated in 2005. I must have—yeah, yeah, I'm gonna make myself slightly younger here. But yeah, I graduated then in 2000 and—I worked in, at the Maryland Department of Economic Development until 2007. And I learned a tremendous amount. I learned about, you know, making deals with big pharmaceutical companies and helping little companies, you know, find their way and figure out how to hire people. And so when you're serving in the state capacity, you're offering free help, you're a free consultant, right, for companies to—so that they can grow or they can find their way or they can find resources that they need. So I became, I learned a lot about what a small company needs to grow and what big companies need to sustain their operations. Yeah, I learned a lot.

HP: So it was like a little bit of business in with it.

DC: Yeah.

HP: Oh, wow. Okay. And so what was your next job?

DC: So, while I was at the State of Maryland, I—one day, a presentation came across my desk, and it was a stem cell company that claimed that they could—and it was based out of South Korea. And the only reason why it came to my desk was I think, because it was in Korean. They said, “You try make sense of this.” The only thing I could really make sense of was a picture showing that they were able to isolate stem cells from a person, from an individual. So from an adult, they're able to isolate stem cells, and then they were able to multiply and grow them into large quantities. So essentially, they're making identical copies of the cells. And at that time, my mind just lost it. Because I thought, well, we know that stem cells work, okay, we know that stem cells work for a lot of different things. So there's enough like animal trial data, there's enough data out there for us to know that stem cells are really a possibility, but why it doesn't really translate to an actual medicine for people is because we never have enough of them to make a difference. So just because you have some cells and you can prove that you fix this mouse, okay? does not mean that a human being is going to be able to get back up and go to work it's like totally different in scale. Okay? So when you have suddenly a presentation showing you that you can take a small amount of cells and make it into a gigantic quantity, and you can make it in your mind says, “Well, how far can they go? Can they make this over and over and over again? Can they repeat this?” So many questions, but the idea that someone could actually copy these cells meant that now there might be real hope, you know, for stuff. It's never been tested before.

But for me, it was enough to know that if the technology existed, for stem cells to be sort of created in a lab safely and we knew that, the sky's the limit. So immediately, as soon as I saw that presentation, I literally said, "I'm going to work on this. I want to be a part of this." And I—when that company came and visited, I said, "You should hire me." And they said, "Why?" And I said, "I have no qualification to work here. But I can speak English and you need an English speaking person. So you should hire me." So that's what happened. I ended up working for a Korean stem cell company. But I was in charge of their US operations, just sort of kind of managing US operations and research agreements with different universities and that sort of thing.

HP: And was this also in Maryland?

DC: That was based in Maryland. Yeah, I stayed in Gaithersburg. I stayed in Gaithersburg Rockville area for—for a while until—I'm looking at my resume here as I'm talking to you—until 2010. I was, I was there.

HP: Yeah. And how long did you work for that company?

DC: So it looks like it was five years. 8-9-10 or three, three years? [**HP:** Okay.] 8-8-9-10 three years? Yeah. Three years. I thought it was much longer. I guess it's only three years. Yeah.

HP: And then after that, was that when you opened your?

DC: No I didn't. I—so the Korean, the Korean company ended up licensing out the technology to another company in the United States. There were lots of things going on in the, in the Korean headquarters, things that were beyond our control and so they needed to license out the technology in the United States. And so they ended up licensing it out to a Texas Corporation and that's how I ended up moving to Houston. And when I moved to Houston, we, I—I wanted something different. I just took time off. I stopped working in about 2014. I took a year off. I got married during that year. Yeah. And then tried to figure out, you know, what I'm going to do next.

And my husband and one of my close partners that I have been working with for a long time at the Korean company as well as now, he—his family was also suggesting that perhaps we started company. And it was just, you know, you don't, at least for me, I didn't start a company thinking, "I want to start a company." It's not like that. It's more like, "Okay, we have a great technology." So to fast forward all the development that's occurred, we basically—that original technology that I was talking to you about when I saw it at the State—because we take a small amount of cells make it into a lot of cells, we basically can now make crazy amounts of cells, okay, we make exponential amount of cells in a very short amount of time. So now we have—it is just stem cells on steroids, but they're not there are really healthy and really good stem cells and in giant, giant quantities and so now when we're talking about diseases like Alzheimer's disease that we're studying, everything has potential, a lot of potentials, a lot of excitement over the work we're doing simply because we have optimized making a ton of cells.

But the goal has always been to make this available to as many people as possible and I remember the fundamental sort of mission of helping people—that being the goal, if this technology is to be affordable for everybody, [**HP:** Yeah.] and the only way that's gonna work is for insurance companies to pay for it. Right? Well, if insurance companies are gonna pay for it, then it has to be an FDA-approved product. Okay, so if it has to be an FDA-approved product, then you have to go through all these clinical trials, right? And says, "Okay, then who does all these clinical trials?" So all you have to have a company to do all this right? So it's like, "Okay, so the next step is we have to form a company." So that's what really happened in order to get to—in order to achieve the end goal, creating a company was a necessity. And so that's why we—

went down that road and we said, “Okay, we're going to establish Hope Biosciences and we are going to try and get a therapy off the ground. Never done it before, but we're gonna we're gonna give it a shot.”

HP: Yeah and what's the meaning behind the name "Hope Biosciences"?

DC: Well, my investor had said, "You should name the company after what you're selling." And I thought, “Well, Stem Cells Inc is taken. So what is it that we are delivering?” And I thought, “You know what, we're delivering hope and that's what this technology really represents.” It's, it's the future, and I believe it is hope, so I looked it up and it was available. And there you go. Yeah.

HP: And did you have—so aside from like your husband and your working partner, did you have any mentors in the process of opening the company?

DC: Um, I think my—my investor was a very, was a great resource. I mean, obviously, someone giving you money is going to advise you whether or not you want it, right. I think that's how that works. But definitely spiritual counseling I received from my own pastor.

And just, there's tremendous amount of support in a lot of different ways, right? You have support from patients who are telling you how valuable this is for them. You have doctors who are enthusiastic about it, you know, it's just the medical community in Houston. You know, Houston has, in my opinion, the best Medical Center in the world. And we have best minds here and the best talent and I think they are open to innovation. They can, they can tell, they can discern between what is, what is—what are legitimate technologies and what aren't. And they understand how this can be very promising. And so I think we have a lot of good momentum in our, in our favor right now. And, yeah, it's kind of support from all different kinds of communities. Yeah, even the Asian community, [**HP:** Really?] lots of support.

HP: Awesome. And what is your company's overall mission specifically?

DC: Our mission is to deliver safe, effective and affordable stem cell therapeutics to solve for all, any incurable condition. So that's what we're working on.

HP: And what exactly does your company do?

DC: We make a ton of stem cells, and we do it for each individual.

HP: Okay.

DC: So if it's yourself, we are for—we have clinical trials in progress. We actually started this year, a nonprofit organization, a research organization that would help perform some of the research tasks that are necessary for compassionate use, particularly compassionate use cases and clinical trials that are designed for humanitarian purposes. We are working on a lot of different projects sort of at the same time, some of which are for, like right now the COVID-19 pandemic, we have protocols that are specifically designed for that. And again, that's not for commercial or money-making opportunities that's really to—to help the develop—to help those in need. And then we have other sort of applications that we're working on, like rheumatoid arthritis and Alzheimer's disease, these sorts of disease areas where we're really trying to, um, take it all the way through the commercialization pipeline. Yeah.

HP: And what—what's like the structure of your clients, do you have individual patients coming in or like...

DC: So—so right now we—the only customers we take in are for banking. So you bank your cells with us. That's a commercial operation, but then when you want access to yourself, if you need access to your cells, you have to enroll in a clinical trial. And there are different like—like Memorial Hermann might be having a trial, then you can go there in our cells—our—going to be sent there for you to access in the trial. That's sort of how it works. Yeah.

HP: What do you think is the most important factor that makes a company successful or your specific company successful?

DC: A lot of things but I think the primary one is a good foundation. And by foundation I mean, like whoever you start a company with, your—you have to be unwavering in your mission. Because the whole thing will collapse if you and the other person are not on the same page when it comes to what is your end goal. Right? You can imagine how many times companies fall apart because of money typically or, you know, wanting to—and because most decisions run based on finances, right? So that's why I think you need to always make sure that the people you're working with are—completely agree and resonate with the mission that you have in place. So that you have a, you have a guiding star, like you never waver from that. Right? Every decision you make is based on that. And if you do that, I think you'll—and as long it's a good it's a good motivation, I think, I think you will succeed. I think that's the biggest thing.

HP: Yeah. And how has your experience been as a CEO of a biotech company in a field that's usually dominated by males?

DC: Yeah. You know, it's—I tend not to think about it. And you know, what's a good thing is, after all this COVID stuff, you never see anybody anymore. So you're never reminded by it or you're kind of your own bubble. But it doesn't, it doesn't really affect me. Even in my early days in the State working at the State, it was the same way, you know, sort of all the people that we're dealing with were much older and much more experienced. Yeah, typically males and I think, I think innovation looks like a lot of different things these days. And there's a lot of diversity. And either you can embrace it, or either you can't. And I think for the most part I've been, I've been surrounded by people who are very supportive and are open and so I—I haven't really let it get to me.

But I'm sure that there are opportunities that are lost sometimes here and there that I don't even notice because of that. I think people are sometimes quick to judge that, you know, we—we don't have a lot of experience or I don't have a lot of experience. And they're absolutely right. I don't have a lot of experience. I haven't—I don't have another company. When people ask me about how to make a company or how to do all these things, I say, “You know, I'm totally not qualified because I'm right in the middle of it. I am knee deep in it right now. And I don't know what the end of the story is. I don't know whether this is going to be successful or not.” Yeah, right? It's one thing to be completely successful. And then people asking for your advice, because clearly whatever you did work, right. I think a lot of people face all the accomplishments that we've made up until now, which when I look back, there are very—I don't know how all these things were accomplished in such a short time. But yeah, it's, it is outstanding, but I don't think that this is what defines the success. Ultimately what happens, you know, 10 years from now is what is something I think I can look back and say, “Yeah, I think we did a good, we did a great job.” Yeah.

HP: Yeah. And how long has your company been open?

DC: Four years.

HP: Awesome. Um, I guess on the other hand, have you seen any instances where being a woman in this field is a blessing in a way?

DC: It's a blessing in that they never—well, I don't want to say it's, it's not everyone, right. But generally, I think people don't take you seriously so they don't really see you coming. Yeah. You just gotta, you know, here we are. [laughs] So I think that's—we've been careful and it has nothing to do with the gender role, but it's just all in general. You know, we've been pretty private about what we do. We just think only because we're not big talkers. And we're really, we're really like hit the ground running kind of people like there's—there's too many things to do in a short amount of time. So we're all sort of dividing and conquering so there's not much time for anything else, you know, so we're not really out there spreading the word and, and doing that so much. But and so I think that's why we're not really well known yet. But I think word is getting out.

HP: Yeah. So I guess transitioning from that. So how did you feel when you were informed that you were going to be on the salute Asian American heroes article in the Houston Chronicle?

DC: Oh, man, I—I was, what a humbling experience. I—I felt totally undeserving, I'm, I'm sure that there are so many people out there that are doing amazing things. I'm just honored to be, to be considered. Yeah, so surprised. I just knew nothing I ever expected.

HP: And then who kind of approached you about it? And how did they do it?

DC: It was the writer or the editor for the paper. [**HP:** Okay.] Yeah. Or the, one of the editors—another person who worked with the, the editor on that project. Yeah, they had reached out and asked for information. Yeah.

HP: And so you're saluted for getting FDA approval to conduct stem cell clinical trials as a potential vaccine against COVID?

DC: So it said therapeutic. It's not exactly a vaccine, it works a little bit differently, but it's a, it's a stem cell product. It's a drug, that would—and it's funny I say drug because these are stem cells that come from your body. But they are considered drugs. So it's a drug. And they can either be used in advance to protect you from COVID. [**HP:** Okay.] Or you give it to it after you have COVID, you give it as a treatment so that we can kind of mitigate the symptoms associated with COVID. So there are two approaches. So we're studying—we received three FDA approvals for three different kind of treatment mechanisms, and we're studying all of them right now.

HP: Yeah. And how does this like kind of stem cell process work? Like how does it prevent you from the virus and how does it treat the symptoms?

DC: So for the prevention and the treatment, it all comes down to your immune system. Okay. So if you think at—if you talk in general terms, like, what we know is the—if you're older, and you have pre-existing conditions, you are more at risk for having severe complications, right? And they're saying that younger people who don't have any other comorbidities, those people are fine, and they're relatively symptom free. That's what they say. So you have to look at you take a step back and you say, Why is this? Why is it that the younger population is generally more protected? I know there are anomalies to all of this, but I'm just talking in generalities.

And so the younger generation, it just means that their immune systems are healthier, okay? Their immune systems are—are better equipped to fight this virus. So they still contract the virus, right? Because we know that they have it, but they have totally no symptoms. Yeah, that means that their immune system is working very hard at making sure that this virus doesn't become a problem in the body. It—it spreads on the body, but it doesn't affect it. And that's sort of the ideal situation. I think that's what we're trying to build. We want this sort of herd immunity so that everyone sort of gets it. It's like chickenpox, you want

everyone to get it? Yeah. And then not worry about it again. Right. So that's been—the question we've been trying to answer is, could stem cells play a part in that? So normally, the younger you are, you have a lot more stem cells in your body, okay. And the older you are, the less you have. So, and if you have a pre-existing condition, that means the stem cells that are running around in your body are busy already. They are dealing with all the other diseases that you have going on in your body. So that means that you need extra stem cells to defend you against the virus. So that's the idea really simply, it's—do we give you stem cells beforehand, so to boost your immune system so that it can better fight the virus. So yes, you might get the virus, but it would help you with the disease itself, which is COVID-19. Right?

And it works by the increasing of your immune system basically means that it will help fight the inflammation. And that's the key. In COVID-19, you have this sudden surge of inflammation in the body. Okay, and that inflammation suddenly spikes and what they call the cytokine storm happens and that's when patients like suddenly die. Okay, they're like suddenly put on a vent because, yeah, they—they just go downhill so fast, but that's because a sudden spike in inflammation can do that. So what we're trying to say is, “Okay, well, in patients that do have COVID, we give them stem cells, let's bring that inflammation down.” And if we can do that, and they'll probably be okay in a couple days. So there, those are two approaches that we're taking right now. Obviously, it's a lot easier to—if you think about disease, and you think about the end stage of disease—it's a lot easier to treat early stage of disease, right? Than end stage of disease, right?

HP: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Just, you know, just logically, it just makes a lot of sense, like right now—but right now, in clinical trials, you see a lot of companies and in clinical work is being focused on sort of the end stage like, people on a ventilator like we got to save their lives. And yes, it's very important to save those lives. But you're dealing with a disease where at the end stage, it's very—it's late, right. So we want to try and target this as early as possible. Yes, we're going to help the people in late stages, but we really want to get the people sort of in the middle and the early stages not to that level. If we think keep them off of a ventilator that will probably save their lives. Right? So that's the idea.

HP: I see. And how do you like—where do the stem cells come from? How do you get them out of the person?

DC: We get them from fat.

HP: Okay.

DC: Yeah. And people ask like, Oh, well, that doesn't sound very scientific and what do you do with that? I can get stem cells from any part of your body, but you tell me what you want to give us. Okay, would you like to take a chunk of skin off of you? Would you like, you know, to pull a tooth out? Or what would you like to do? Okay, and so the answer became, well, people would be more than happy to give fat, like, totally happy to give fat, and there's no shortage of it. And so it became like, okay, let's really optimize the process, so that we can do this with fat and do it with a very small amount of fat. So that's the only bad thing about this is we don't take lots of fat we only take a tablespoon of fat.

From there, we take the stem cells that we need and then we culture and we grow them to exponential quantities. And the reason why we take a tablespoon is so that any patient, I don't care how sick you are, has the ability to bank. That's why. [**HP:** Right.] It has to be a process. When you're thinking about like building a process. You always have to think about like feasibility at the end. How are you going to actually do this later on? And you have to think about the masses, can every single person that comes to

your door can you serve them? [HP: Mm hmm.] Yeah, that's that's what we really tried to accomplish here.

HP: And can the stem cells be shared? Or do you have to use the one that you bank?

DC: You can use your—you can use your own. And most of the people who have banked their cells with us have used their own through a clinical trial, but you can also use someone else's and in our COVID-19 studies, we are using donor cells. [HP: okay.] I have been a very strong proponent—proponent, not because I have a business doing this, but I have been a strong proponent that everybody should have their stem stem cells banked and eventually that will happen. That will be normal way of life. Everybody will have their stem cells banked and you will use them when you need them. That's how it will work. But right now, just—we are still in these early stages. And because of that more people don't have their stem cells banked, right? You don't know many people who have but [HP: Yeah.] yeah, you—that before that changes or before we start seeing that change, we really want to—we need to develop ways that people can still receive stem cell therapies, even if it's not their own in a safe way. So these clinical trials that we're doing right now using a donor source out—they call that allogeneic stem cells. We are studying to see the safety event. So far we are seeing a very good safety outcome from that. But I will be the first to report regardless of what the outcome is. I will report on what we find. But surprisingly right now everybody's receiving donor cells are doing great.

HP: Awesome. That's exciting. Yeah. Yeah. So in that article, you said the approval process was like an emotional roller coaster? I think you compared it to you giving birth to your children. So like, what did you mean by that? What was the process like?

DC: That was funny, that interview was funny because it had nothing to do with each other. It was just, you know, you go through highs and lows on any given day, right? Because not only the regulatory process, you have to think about, like, getting approval is one step. After you get the approval. You actually have to execute what you said you're going to do. So now like actually—actually executing is a whole slew of things that we have to do to make that happen. And everyday, there are challenges that come with it, you know, we—we solve a problem. And then there's another problem and every problem that you run in, run into it the time it feels catastrophic, like you can't get past this, right? Oh, this is how we're gonna fail. Like, you're looking at this, like, is this even possible? You start, you start the whole process thinking, is this possible? Can we really solve this problem? And then you start going, and then you realize oh, it's going and you start getting really excited, and then something really doesn't work. And then you think, you know what, this is how this is gonna fail. I think everyone's expecting us to fail. Right? Because really, when you hear about drug trials, even very large pharmaceutical companies fail, even they report they fail. So what chances on earth do we have to actually make this work right? It's a, it's certainly so many challenges along the way. When I talked, when I was talking to the interviewer, at that time, he had just gotten over this issue of like getting PPE like, like there are, they're very strict regulations in place. And if you don't have PPE, you can't you can't go near patients, you can't have patients that so—well, how are we going to get it? Everything's backordered, even lab supplies, sometimes you can't get the equipment or the, or the materials that we need. Well, if we can't make the cells and you can't go forward with the trial. So what are you gonna do about that? [HP: Yeah] There's so many. There's just so many challenges along the way.

HP: Yeah. And how long was the FDA approval process?

DC: For us, it lasted from—first of all, when you're in the middle of it, it feels like an eternity. Okay. It feels like an eternity. And I'd say like, if you have not had kids yet, you'll know like, when you're—when they're first born, it feels like there's no end to the day, okay. It's like it was like that. It's, it was—we applied in—we have, we started applying, we were getting our applications ready. I think we applied in

March, early March. We were preparing all throughout February. And you have to imagine, right? We're sitting here at our desks, and we're looking at, we're looking at the virus in China. Right? And we're thinking, "Oh my gosh, it's coming." Right? Nothing actually hit us yet at that time. We were just totally guessing. And Washington still hadn't reported their first case yet. It was sort of really early on, but we're seeing this virus and we're thinking, "Okay, it's, it's coming. [HP: Yeah.] We should write this up. And we should do this." And we're starting to feel like we have to hurry up and get this done. So it was a combination of that anxiety I think in making this happen and—and—and seeing it through. I think that—yeah, waiting for FDA to get back to us on like every day just seems so long. And you have to also remember that sooner or later on in March, they're telling you, you can't go to work. [HP: Yeah.] And so of course you're grappling with, well, you're only going to become essential until someone makes you essential. If these approvals don't come, then we're non-essential. [HP: Yeah.] So what do you do—you either have everyone working here to get ready to do this? Or you don't? It's a tremendous, it's a tremendous guessing game. Right. And so that was a really you have to imagine just all of the different elements of just uncertainty that we had to deal with. So it was really challenging.

HP: Yeah. And how long, how long do you expect these trials to last?

DC: By the end of the year we should finish them all.

HP: Awesome. So in what ways has the whole pandemic situation impacted your own life? Personally or work life?

DC: Um, I think we have learned a lot. We're working smarter, and more efficiently. But there's a lot of things when you're trying to run a clinical trial, there's a lot of things that you learn along the way that you have to either you have to hire people to do or you have to learn to do it yourself. And I think, because of the situation we've been thrown in, we are learning a tremendous amount on ourselves, by ourselves. So we're making a lot of mistakes, too. We make a lot of mistakes, but we correct them quickly. And we're able to learn from it and grow from it. And so I feel that I find that we are accumulating a lot of assets because we know and we learn, and we're—it's by trial and error, but we're learning, you know. And so it's—I think I've learned a lot about myself. I've learned to be more patient and—and, you know, I—I think I have learned to have more faith, too. Because—because it's—there are so many things that are beyond my control. Like the FDA process is like, really beyond your control. Yeah. And so I think I've learned to sort of let go a little bit.

HP: Um, is there someone or somewhere that you miss most?

DC: Um, yeah, I miss my grandma. So my grandpa who was the pastor, he died when I was really young, when I was like three, three years old. My grandmother died a few years ago and she um, uh, yeah, I think she would really want to see what has happened and what we've been able to accomplish. I think she would fish. I think she would have been a super, a super fan of all of this. [HP: Yeah.] Yeah. And I do miss her a lot.

HP: Yeah. And how—how has your company been affected? Have you guys been busier than before or?

DC: Oh, yeah, it's been crazy. I mean it's been the busiest we've ever been. I mean, we're treating—this week alone we're treating 50 patients. [HP: Oh, wow.] Yeah, in one week. Yeah, that's like 48 patients in one week. It's for us, it's—we've never done anything like this to this magnitude. But by proving that we can actually do it, it shows that we do have something that's scalable. And so it's very important for our industry and the industry as a whole because I think there are so many unknowns when it comes to his cell therapy or at least the field that we're in, and sort of proving out—using these difficult times to prove out what we can do without these challenges, we would not, we wouldn't challenge ourselves to come up

with a solution right? To these problems. So I think of it as a blessing. And we are, we are working hard to—we're using this this time to work hard to prove out what we can do.

HP: And who has inspired you the most during this pandemic, if anyone?

DC: This I would say my staff every day. The team here is, the team here is amazing, because you can't—like what they do here and the work that they put in to make this happen. If they weren't doing it for the sake of our patient, there's no way they could be doing it, right? If you can't do it out of your own initiative and you can't do it because “oh, I have to do this or I do this because I get paid to do this.” I really genuinely feel like the only way they can stay motivated and find purpose in what they do is because they honestly feel that purpose and they—they know that that burden means something to another life. It's like you have a chance to save a life. You're going to do it, right?

HP: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, I'd say they're—they inspire me every day.

HP: Um, so with the future being like extremely uncertain, and predictions are like 18 to 24 months until any preliminary vaccines. Do you think this is like an underestimate or overestimate, especially with the second wave coming?

DC: I think when the weather starts getting colder, I think we're going to see some, some really devastating consequences. I think we're going to start seeing that and we just have to be prepared and whether that is in the form of a vaccine. And I challenge the people, our government and all the people in industry that are working on solutions, you know, solutions come in all different kinds of shapes and sizes, you know, they don't all look the same. And I think we're so hyper focused on vaccines, but like even using these sorts of stem cells as a preventative method. Yes, it's not, it's not, it may not be as cheap as a vaccine at the end of the day. But vaccines are a very narrow focus, you're dealing with a treatment for a specific virus. But what we know is you're dealing with viruses that are constantly evolving and constantly changing and there can be other viruses like you just talked about Ebola and so this—how are we, you know, unless we're coming on by vaccines for every single thing, it will always be a challenge. It's something that we're always going to be faced. So we need a better solution. [**HP:** Mm hmm. Yeah.] And that's, and I think we just all need to work collectively to come up with a better solution for the long run.

HP: Mm hmm. And what's your prediction of how long it'll take until everything returns, returns somewhat normal?

DC: Um, I don't know. I don't know. But probably, I think when the first vaccine comes out, I think people will start getting treatments. And then you'll see as vacc-vaccination started happening, there will be this—this peace of mind I think that. [**HP:** Mm hmm.] And yeah, I think at that time, things will start getting better. Things feel better right now. But I think we're from my bubble and from where I am in Houston. We weren't, we weren't hit as bad as we thought we were going to be, we didn't see the wave as—as—as what we predicted. And so it hasn't felt like too much of a life change, yet. But I do think that—that the second wave is going to be much worse than what we think.

HP: Yeah. Um, and how did you feel hearing about all the physical and verbal discriminatory attacks against Asian the Asian community? In terms of being more prone to the virus?

DC: Yeah, you know, I—I thankfully, me and my family just being in—we are here in the Sugar Land Area. I did not face any kind of discrimination or looks or anything like that. I remember the first time

wore a mask in public. At that time we were working on treatments here. So it's really important that we didn't get virus, which is—I consider myself part of the medical community. So we were wearing masks and when no one else were wearing masks. And I remember getting a couple of looks at that time. Yeah, I've never personally felt attacked in any way. But you know, when I hear, when I hear about, yeah, I think people are saying that this is an Asian thing. I—they're just being ignorant. And I get the origin and all of this, the arguments there but, you know, I think people don't have to be mean about it. But again, thankfully, I haven't been really affected by it much.

HP: Was there someone you know, that kind of experiences?

DC: Not really. Not that I have not that I have heard or been aware. Yeah.

HP: So now going towards your personal life. So how did you meet your husband?

DC: Um, so I had a lot of—my college friends, a few of them were working in New York City. And so I had some business in New York. So I was traveling back and forth from New York a lot. And while I was there, I meet up with my college friends, and I had a lot of guy friends in college. So, you know, I would go over there and meet them. [phone rings] I'm so sorry. And they had made new friends, of course, being in—in New York. And so when I would go, I'd be introduced to all these people. And I remember making friends with—with one of them. So he was one of my college friend's friends, and we just started to hang out and he worked at Madison Square Garden, and that's where Penn Station—that's where that train actually is. And so when I would come from, when I come from Maryland, I would, I would get off, get off at Madison Square Garden and I just call him up because he was right there, he would work there. And so we would eat pizza all the time together and we became really good friends. That's what happened. And then later on, he ended up moving to Houston. And so, yeah, we ended up getting married.

HP: Okay, and when did you guys get married?

DC: In 2015. That date I know. [laughs]

HP: You don't need to check your resume. So did you guys moved to Houston together, or?

DC: No, I was in Houston already working. And I needed some help with some IT related, like some software design issues that we had. And so I knew that he could maybe figure them out for me. So he was close friends. So I called him up. And then he came to visit a couple times just to come to help—help with a project and then and then he ended up moving. Yeah.

HP: So you guys weren't dating at the time, right?

DC: No, we came from—we were friends first and then we, and then I think it just became like, “Yeah, well, we only know each other here in Houston right.” [laughs]

HP: What's his ethnicity?

DC: He's Korean as well. Yeah. But he doesn't look Korean. He's—he's—he's very—he's very much on the darker side. Yeah.

HP: Yeah, I know a few of them. And how did he propose to you?

DC: He proposed he uh—he wrapped. I came up—I came to uh—I came home. And it was a really rough day at work. I remember I had a really rough day at work. It was just a regular day. There was no special

day there involved. It was just a regular day. And he—I looked and there—the whole door. So we had this—I had this closet door where I worked. My—I had a desk inside this closet. So you open the closet door and then there's a desk in there with my computer and all that. But he wrapped, he—with Christmas wrapping paper wrapped the entire door shut. And he told me to open the door. So I took the wrapping paper off of the door, and—and then there was a website and something playing on the website. And so I—he had me read that I was reading that. And then I looked over and there he was. Oh, yeah, it's just the two of us. Yeah.

HP: And did you see it coming?

DC: No, I had no idea. In fact, I don't even—I think even before I said yes or no or maybe I said yes already. But I remember the first thing I asked him was like, "Did you ask my parents?" Like is this, is this okay? [laughs] And I think what surprised me most was that he had, he called. He called them in Korea. I had no idea. I was super surprised. Yeah.

HP: And then you guys have two kids?

DC: Yeah, I have twins, a boy and girl.

HP: Oh, awesome. And so how old are they?

DC: They're two, they'll be two in—in about two weeks.

HP: Okay. Oh, awesome and how is it raising them these past two years?

DC: Yeah, it's gone by so incredibly fast. Right? It's so fast. Yeah, it—it's a total joy. I—I never, I wasn't one of those people who thought like, "I for sure want to be a mom," or like, "I really want to have a baby." I was never one of those people. You know, I—I kept thinking like, I wish I had more time before I had kids like I wish, you know, we didn't have these biological clocks so I could get more things done like I just felt like I had I had so many things I needed to do. I felt like I wasn't, I hadn't accomplished anything yet, so I didn't want, I just didn't know what having children would be like, but luckily I live very close to the office. Just a, just a couple minutes away. And so I can see them often and we—and spend as much time together. I'm at the office, you know, I'm here full time but I am still able to go home and, and spend some time with them every day and just be the best mom.

HP: Yeah. And who's usually taking care of them during the day?

DC: We have a nanny. She is uh, she's Hispanic, and she speaks only Spanish so she—she communicated with them fully in Spanish. [HP: Oh wow.] It's really wonderful because they're fluent in Spanish. [laughs]

HP: Um, do you think you're gonna like try to preserve some of the Korean traditions and tr—like Korean culture within your family as they grow older?

DC: I want to uh...I know with language it's really difficult but I—I try and speak Korean—I try and speak in Korean with them so at least they can understand. I know I did, um, growing up. I understood it—I never spoke but I understood. I didn't speak until later on in life. But uh, at least I understood everything. So I think our—our kids will also have that ability but—I would love to instill some of the customs. Especially when it comes to respect of the elders, um and working hard and all of those, you know, quintessential, you know, Asian, Korean values. Yes, I would love to keep, have those remain for sure.

HP: Yeah and is your husband also second generation like you?

DC: Uh he actually came here when he was eight,

HP: Okay.

DC: So I came when I was one, so yeah I'm pretty much a second generation. But he is like—yeah, he—he's pretty much second generation. [**HP:** Okay.] Yeah.

HP: So how do you personally identify? Whether that be American, Canadian, Korean, Korean-American, or...

DC: I think Korean-American is right.

HP: Yeah, so not Korean-Canadian.

DC: Yeah. [laughs]

HP: So how has this identity of yours changed throughout your life, if it has changed?

DC: What was that?

HP: How has your identity, your ethnic identity, changed throughout your life? Or if it didn't change at all?

DC: Um...

HP: I guess like since you have many identities, or many ethnic identit—err many like backgrounds?

DC: I—I think um, we have uh...I—I think I've never—I don't think I really grew up with an identity to my ethnicity. Like I—I didn't feel like there was a difference between being Canadian and being American. I never felt that, or I didn't feel—and I was never really a Korean, like a pure Korean citizen. So that's why I think I never had that start, transition. I just feel like throughout my whole life I've been pretty much the same person and had the same identity, yeah.

HP: Um, what about how about like what do you center your life around? Like an object, your career, a value?

DC: I think um...I think in everything I do in my life the—the purpose is found in my faith. And I am really...yeah, I can find my purpose in everything I do through that. So it's, um, a driving force to why I do what I do and whether it be my marriage or raising my kids or coming here to work, yeah.

HP: Mm hmm. And do you still go to church now with your husband and children?

DC: Yeah, we are proud members of Second Baptist Church here in Houston.

HP: So what is your proudest achievement in your life? Could be a tough question.

DC: Uh, proudest achievement in life. Proudest achievement in life. I'd say the greatest honor in life is just being a mom, I think. And I'm really blessed with that. And because I can't picture my life any way,

uh, like without it right? And it's not something that I was, uh, again, anticipating or asking for. But now that I've been, um, given an incredible gift, it's like I—I just can't picture my life without it. So being a mom has been a great, a privilege for me.

I'd also say working here, it's also a privilege. I wake up everyday thinking how privileged I am to be able to come to work like this. And, um, being given a position like this to be able to, you know cause you're working, when you're working at a company, or you're one person in a, in a big team, you always think in your own—in the own—in your own position, “Wow if I were making decisions, I would do this, this, and this.” You've always heard that, right? When you're working for someone you're always thinking, “Well if I were in charge, I would do it this way.” Right? And so I—sometimes there's a lot of pressure, but at the same time I have an awesome privilege to make decisions that I've, I've always thought about wanting to make. When it comes to the development of this type of technology in this field, right. Yeah and so I actually executing some of these ideas that I once had, I had all these times. I think it's amazing that—and I'm incredibly lucky to be in this, and to—to be able to do what I'm doing. And to be given a shot, and someone trusting me to do this. It's very, it's uh, humbling and I'm, I'm honored to do it. But I have a lot of help, right. And my husband is a great resource and help to me when it comes to making really important decisions too—there's, there are a lot of things that go into running a company and also creating goals and milestones for the company and it's really important to have a sound advice. Sound people giving you reality checks. And I often need that.

HP: Yeah. And what are your future aspirations, for your children and career wise?

DC: Um, I hope that Hope continues to grow and does everything that it is equipped to do and will make a tremendous impact in patients' lives everywhere. If you could imagine even helping one patient here and making a difference in the condition that currently has no hope, imagine what kind of hope it can deliver on the global scale. Especially in the kind of digital age that we're living in where everyone knows everything and you're sharing all this information. People know. People will find out. So we want to share it, we just, we wanna do the hard work now. Get things proven, get things, uh, get things, uh, you know, into scientific journals. Get everything proven and approved so that we can make a bigger impact and even on a global scale.

HP: Wow. And what advice would you give the younger generation that are currently living in these conditions? Specifically the Asian-American generation.

DC: The Asian-Americans living in this time?

HP: Yeah, that are like—the younger ones that will grow up and be like “Wow, when I was eight-years old, I lived in this pandemic.”

DC: Yeah what an incredibly crazy time to be living in. And I can't even imagine what it must be like for a child because, uh, kids, their lives typically revolve around activities. And activities with friends. And when you take all that away, I really wonder what happens to their mental health. But I would—I would recommend for kids, you know, for young people to use this time to...like if you've ever, if you've ever read the the tale about, you know, the ants that work really hard like you—during the time that everyone sort of “Netflixing and Chilling,” now that it's summer vacation I think more so than ever. It's like during the quarantine time it's already bad. But now that it's summer vacation in combination with it, it's just gonna be like a whole other level of just, you know, everyone's gonna be fixated on KDramas and you know and just—

HP: I'm watching one right now.

DC: And watching TV all day long. So you have a unique opportunity to get ahead of the curve, that's what that means. And so, with the digital age comes many opportunities to take some of the best classes taught by the best people all over the world and I would take advantage of it. I would try and learn as many new skill sets and learn as much as you can, that anyone would teach you. There's a lot of free courses available too that you can take advantage of. But I would try to learn and open your mind and just be um...you know, you—I think mentally you always have to be simulated. The—the, your brain is like an engine, right? You stop working that engine, it's going to start drying up. Like you really need to constantly be using and I think that is, works in your best favor. And right now is the perfect time while everyone is, you know, everyone's zoned out. And now's the time to **[HP: Yeah.]** focus. And I think from—from our experience too, while many companies had to shut down, we had the privilege of continuing to work. And the many strides that we've made during this time I think have been extremely beneficial to our growth, and that's the way I look at it so. Yeah, to the young people out there, learn as much as you can! Read as much as you can!

HP: Yeah, final question. Is there anything else that you would like to add or have anything to say? Could be about anything.

DC: Um...Just uh...you know it sounds so cliché but, find your passion. Find what makes you happy and um, and whatever you do, try and make something of that. **[HP: Right.]** Like um, the more, further you stray from that you'll realize one day you're gonna come right back to that. So I'm trying to just save you a lot of time, so just stick to that. And try to find your job. Yeah finding joy is—is really really important. Because I'll just tell you that—especially for the young people out there. You know, this is what I really want to say. For the young people out there, if you strive to find something simply based on—like if you are judging your self value by what level of job you're gonna get or how much you're gonna get paid, I'll just tell you right now that you'll never be happy. You'll never be happy because it'll never be enough. That's the problem. You need a motivation and a purpose that will get you to go to work and to actually invest your time in something. Okay? And so when you're working those long hours, you're doing something that you're passionate—so it's joy to you that you're working those long hours, but you're also investing in yourself. Okay, you're not expecting someone to pay you to invest in yourself. You're investing in yourself so that you'll grow these skill sets that will make you a valuable person later on. So I just strongly um...wanna share that message to all the young people out there. And these are kind of values that I learned a long time ago as I was growing up, but I feel like nowadays it—it is, you know, we have a different kind of mentality. And so we just need to get back to finding our purpose and a mission for what we do, in life.

HP: Yeah. Okay, well, thank you so much for your time.

[Interview ends.]

