

Jackson: Okay. Well, I really appreciate your time for this. I know you're a busy person, especially running your own company, so I really appreciate that. To start off, when I conduct this interview, I want to hear mostly about you and your story. I want your voice, so I won't be saying "yes" or "I hear you"—I'll just be nodding so I can hear your voice through the recording. Otherwise, I'd love to jump right into this interview if you don't mind.

Samuel: This is fine with me.

Jackson: Perfect. If you don't mind, can you introduce yourself by stating when you were born and where you live now?

Samuel: My name is Samuel Jun. I was born in South Korea, 1960. Currently, I'm living in Locust Valley, New York.

Jackson: Thank you, Sam. Can you tell me about your life growing up in Korea—your family, schooling, and community?

Samuel: I have one younger brother who is three years younger than me. I lived in Korea until 1978. In the summer of 1978, my father and mother brought me and my younger brother to America for a better future for the family.

Jackson: Was that decision mainly for a better future, or were there other reasons or family challenges?

Samuel: My father used to own his own company back in South Korea, but it didn't go well he decided to go to America so we could have our dreams come true. With that dream, we came to America in 1978.

Jackson: That's fascinating to hear that your dad had his own company. Looking at your company now, was that something you started, or did your father start it and pass it down to you?

Samuel: Currently, I own Klein Cleaners in Locust Valley. My family started it together—myself, my father, and my mother. I've been there for 36 years.

Jackson: That's amazing. Of course, you see my dad coming in all the time. What's it like to have recurring customers and build all these relationships?

Samuel: Most of the customers are happy with our service, and I'm happy with them as well. Your father, Mr. Brielmann, is one of my favorites.

Jackson: That's great to hear. I'll definitely let him know. Did owning this company help you find your place in a new community or connect with other Koreans in the area?

Samuel: We came to Locust Valley 36 years ago. At first, we didn't have any Korean friends around. We bought the store through a business broker, and over time I started seeing more Koreans opening small businesses like us—shoe repair, nail salons, tailors. Fifteen years ago, there were no Koreans in Locust Valley, just our family. Later, a few more families came for better education opportunities at Locust Valley schools.

Jackson: Since your family was among the first, what was it like meeting other Koreans trying to achieve the same goals?

Samuel: We didn't have time to meet often because we worked six days a week and long hours, but we knew who the other Korean families were. On Korean holidays like New Year's or Thanksgiving, we would briefly see each other, say hello, and wish each other luck. That was about it.

Jackson: Do you think these long hours and hard work created a sense of isolation?

Samuel: Yes, it did. My brother lives in California, so we have a three-hour time difference. It's difficult to communicate sometimes. For me, I get up at three in the morning, go to the store, and return home around six or seven. If something goes wrong, I stay longer. Working long hours makes me feel isolated.

Jackson: That makes sense. When you came to America, were there any language barriers you had to overcome to run your business and communicate with customers?

Samuel: Yes, there were. I went to community college to join the English as a Second Language program. After three or four months, I started regular courses and learned English. I was lucky to learn fast and communicate with customers. My brother and I both went to school here. We worked part-time, saved money, and bought a small family business. It wasn't easy, but we worked hard.

Jackson: That's amazing. You mentioned your brother—when did he move to California?

Samuel: I studied business, and my brother studied computer science and electrical engineering. Silicon Valley had better opportunities, so he went there and earned his master's at Stanford University. After graduation, he got a job in Silicon Valley, and we've been apart since.

Jackson: Do you have a goal to reconnect with him once you retire?

Samuel: Yes, I'd love to. My mother passed away, but my father, who is 91, lives near my brother in California now. He used to live with me here in New York, but the winters are harsh, so he moved there last year. I feel lonely during the holidays, but we talk on the phone often, which helps a bit.

Jackson: I'm sorry to hear about your mother, but I'm glad technology helps you stay connected. Do you spend holidays with any other family?

Samuel: My wife's sister and mother live in Queens, and we visit them every weekend. Her mother is 97 years old. My brother-in-law lives in Atlanta, and we all meet occasionally at Korean restaurants.

Jackson: Do you still celebrate Korean traditions?

Samuel: Yes, we celebrate New Year's in the Korean way and also Korean Thanksgiving. We go to Korean supermarkets or restaurants, eat traditional food, and talk about the past.

Jackson: When you do those activities, does it remind you of home?

Samuel: Yes, very much. There's a Korean church community around here—some in Queens, some in New York City. We go every Sunday and share stories and food. It helps us feel connected and supported.

Jackson: That's wonderful. Can you tell me your first memory when you arrived in the U.S.?

Samuel: When we arrived in 1978, we were very happy. Americans were friendly and always tried to help us. But now, I feel things have changed. Before, people would say hello and help each other. Now, it's different.

Jackson: I understand. Have you noticed that same change in your business with customers?

Samuel: Yes, very much. When I started 36 years ago, customers appreciated everything we did. They'd thank us for our service. Now, people don't do that as much. Your father is one of the few who still does. Some customers even complain early in the morning, which can affect my whole day. People aren't as respectful as before.

Jackson: That's really eye-opening. How do you handle that negativity?

Samuel: After 36 years, I've learned to handle any situation. I try not to let it bother me. But yes, I miss when people were more kind.

Jackson: I know you often go out of your way for people—like when my dad needed help after hours. Could you share that story?

Samuel: Of course. When a customer shows respect, like your father, I'm always happy to help. I live just ten minutes away, so I came to the store even after hours to help him.

Jackson: That's so kind of you. Have you ever experienced discrimination as a business owner?

Samuel: Yes, I did when I first took over the store. At first, maybe 30–40% of customers wouldn't respond when I greeted them. But over time, as I remembered their names and built relationships, that changed. Now, most of them are friendly.

Jackson: That's great. Did that discrimination ever make you question your belonging?

Samuel: Not really. I always tried to think positively and be thankful for the opportunity to start a family business in this country. That mindset helped me stay strong.

Jackson: That's admirable. What strategies have helped you deal with challenges?

Samuel: In the dry-cleaning business, good service is everything. If I do my best, people come back. That's been my focus for 36 years.

Jackson: That's an excellent philosophy. Do you think being a business owner shaped your role in the community?

Samuel: Yes, definitely. I try to participate in community events, school fundraisers, fire department events, and library meetings. I also donate when I can. I want to be part of the community, not just a business owner.

Jackson: That's inspiring. What does being a business owner mean to you and other Koreans who moved here after you?

Samuel: It means working hard to give my family a comfortable life and future. Most Korean small business owners think the same way. Family is everything. I tell my son that no matter what he does, family should come first.

Jackson: That's a beautiful lesson. Do you think your son values your experience and the lessons you've shared?

Samuel: Yes, I believe he does. He sees how hard we work and understands our sacrifices. Even if we don't talk much, we have that understanding between us.

Jackson: That's touching. What are your thoughts on retirement?

Samuel: I don't think I can fully retire. I might take a few months off, but I'll probably work again if there's an opportunity. I enjoy working.

Jackson: Have you ever taken a long break or vacation?

Samuel: No, not really. It's difficult for small business owners to take time off. Even if you rest physically, you feel pressure mentally because the bills keep coming. It's hard to step away.

Jackson: That's very true. Do you have a vision for your business after retirement?

Samuel: I don't want my son to take over. I know how hard it is to run a small business. I want him to do better in school and find his own path. My wife and I worked hard, but I thank God that we've never faced serious financial struggles.

Jackson: That's wonderful. Would you change anything if you could do it all over again?

Samuel: No, I'm happy. Some of my friends also run small businesses, and we all work hard. I feel lucky—I came to the right town at the right time. My wife and I worked hard, and I thank God for everything.

Jackson: That's amazing. What advice would you give to future business owners?

Samuel: It's simple: if you want to achieve your goals, you have to work hard and make sacrifices. Every business has good times and bad times—you have to overcome every situation.

Jackson: I think you can take that idea in a broader sense and apply it to life as well—whether as a student or as an individual—realizing there will never be a perfect time. To end off, do you have anything else you'd like to share, any advice or experience you think would be valuable to hear?

Samuel: Not much. I just really want to thank you for giving me the chance to talk about this with you.

Jackson: Well, I'd like to say this has been very enjoyable. Thank you so much, I really appreciate you taking the time out of your day.

Samuel: You're welcome. Thank you, Jackson.