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Immigrants Owners of Restaurants in Iowa City

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IMMIGRANTS OWNERS OF RESTAURANTS IN IOWA CITY

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the Journalism and Mass Communication

Kevin Ripka
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Spring 2019

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
Journalism and Mass Communication have been completed.

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Kevin Ripka

School of Journalism and Mass Communication

In my honor project of Journalism major, Immigrant Owners of Restaurants in Iowa City, I experienced many struggles and learned a lot from them. In the beginning, I found this independent study pretty late in January, which usually should be decided at the end of last semester. However, I luckily got into this honor project with Professor Kevin Ripka's approval to be my supervisor.

At first, I know I want to do a photography project, so after discussing with Professor Ripka, I decided to create a photo book. Then I had to determine a topic for my project, which took me a long time to brainstorm. I was curious about foreign restaurants in Iowa City, and I started thinking about taking photos of restaurants in Iowa. But that was not enough, because I have to tell the story behind these restaurants rather than just shallow meanings of unrelated pretty photos. This is what I have learned from Professor Ripka. Later on, we meet the agreements on the theme of the purpose of immigrant owners of restaurants in Iowa City. I originally thought there could be three Chinese restaurants so that it could be easier for me to approach these bosses, but Professor Ripka encouraged me to take some challenges to do one Chinese restaurant and two other exotic restaurants.

On the first day of shooting my first restaurant, China Star, I went there for taking photos simply about the layout, details, and staffs at the restaurant. However, it is not okay because I did not have a story behind photos. Then I went back to the restaurant to wait there from they open to they close it. The wife of the owner seemed unhappy to have me taking photos in their kitchen, which only allowed staffs to enter, and later asked me to leave. Although I explained to her that the project needed a story behind it rather than just randomly shoot for completing the assignment, she kept saying that I should randomly take photos and go. Along the process of that day, I tried to avoid her and talk directly to the boss and other staffs who looked friendly and allow me to take photos there. I understand how the struggle is like when sometimes journalists meet subjects who are not willing to be photographed. Finally, I decided the theme of this restaurant is about family. The second restaurant is a Thai restaurant, Thai Flavor. The owner, Loei, is really nice and allows me to shoot in his restaurants (including the kitchen) and took me to enter his private time of staying with his family. The second story is about family, too. Additionally, I went to the third Mexican restaurant, Casa Azul, and I was surprised that the owner also owns Bardot, a popular bar next to the restaurant. After interviewing the owner, Jackson Zapata, I found that this story could be about his interest in investment and his busy life of running through two restaurants. I went there another time because some of my photos blurred and I needed more photos of him walking

through the entrance connecting his two businesses. I appreciate these owners' kindness for letting me taking photos several times.

Being a photojournalist is not easy, because I had to communicate with people, and tackle problems when owners didn't allow me to do that. I appreciate the chance of doing this honor project and the patient help from Professor Kevin Ripka!