



NYDIA HAN

The Action News reporter takes on race in America

IT WAS A BRIEF ENCOUNTER; probably lasting no more than a minute. Action News reporter Nydia Han was crossing a Philadelphia intersection at 20th and Locust Streets on a Friday afternoon last September, when a driver made a left-hand turn and nearly struck her.

Han and the female driver exchanged words about who had the right of way. (Han did.) As the driver angrily drove away, she yelled out a three-word comment that floored Han: “*This is America!*”

Han – a first-generation Korean-American and the mother of two young children – was stunned.

“It made me feel like they thought a face like mine could not be American,”

she recalls. At various times during her life, the award-winning journalist had been subjected to her share of incidents and comments that made her feel “othered,” to use her own phrase. She’d shrugged them off, but somehow this one felt different.

“As soon as she drove off and I crossed the street, I thought ‘Thank goodness my children aren’t with me,’” Han says. “How could I have explained

what she meant, and why those words were so hurtful?”

Two days later, Han felt compelled to respond to the never-identified driver and to “all the others who had said things like that to me since childhood.”

During a four-minute Facebook live post, Han calmly, yet forcefully, laid out her feelings and the truth of her life experiences: “This is America. I am American, born and raised. I know America. I know America in ways you probably won’t and never will,” she said to the camera. Han also spoke about her knowledge of American history and politics, including

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the fact she can name each state capital and every member of the U.S. Cabinet.

“Are you kidding me?” she continues. “You see this face and you think this face belongs to an outsider or a foreigner? Did you think this face would not stand up against you? Against ignorance? Well, you were wrong.”

The response to Han’s self-described “rant” was immediate and powerful. People of all ages weighed in with their own stories of marginalization. Others, who felt Han’s reaction was unwarranted, gave their side of the story. In all, Han’s original Facebook post has been viewed more than 2.8 million times, garnering 67,300 reactions, 15,800 comments and some 38,000 shares.

“That was an awakening for me,” Han says. “I didn’t really expect anything. I was just responding in a very raw and personal way to this unpleasant encounter.”

Immediately, she was struck by the “solidarity of a diverse group of people.” But what really interested her were “the people who did not like my message and the video...All of a sudden, I saw an opportunity for a real conversation about race in America.”

Hence, the launch of the movement #ThisIsAmerica and a buzz-worthy three-part documentary series of the same name produced and narrated by Han. Its goal is to encourage an honest dialogue about a topic that lies just behind the surface of everyday life: race.

#ThisIsAmerica – the first episode was shown on Action News and the two follow-up episodes online – was Han’s first attempt at series work, and she found the experience “truly rewarding.” The three-part series covered a lot of ground, including an in-depth conversation with area high school students at a racially mixed school, some jarring statistics about minorities in the entertainment industry, as well as interviews with several people who responded to the original Facebook video. Han also talked at length with two recent Princeton High School graduates who’d written a textbook about race that they hope will become integrated into K-12 curriculum throughout the United States.

“I think what surprised me the most was how different people are from how they appear on social media,” Han says.

“Ultimately, we are much more alike than we are different. By really talking to each other, listening to each other’s stories and experiences, we can better understand our own perspectives and biases.”

Her favorite line in the #ThisIsAmerica series came from Dr. John Jackson Jr., dean of the school of social policy and practice at the University of Pennsylvania: “The lie is that there is a ‘them’ – it’s all we have, is us.” Most importantly, Han explains, #ThisIsAmerica is not about *her*, although her unpleasant run-in that September day proved the catalyst for the opportunity to explore perceptions and thoughts about race.

“There’s no question that this topic of race and who we are as Americans is challenging,” Han says. “I’m so grateful that my station trusted me to have this conversation. I still get asked to speak to groups on the topic, and I’m so happy that it’s become an opportunity for myself and others to open that door.”

Han said she and her physician husband have not directly approached the topic of race with their kids, but instead integrate conversations in their everyday lives “about how we embrace diversity and love people of all races and colors and religions...and that those differences are what make the world such a beautiful and interesting place.”

Han, who joined 6ABC more than 15 years ago, found the entire #ThisIsAmerica series different, but just as rewarding, as her regular work as Action News’ consumer reporter/troubleshooter and Sunday morning news co-anchor.

The experience was certainly not planned, much like her decision to put down roots in the Philadelphia region.

When she first moved to Philadelphia in 2002, Han says, she figured her time here would be limited – “just a passing moment in my life.” But then she met the man who would become her husband and knew this was where she wanted to stay.

“I am a Philadelphian by way of California, Illinois, Idaho, Oklahoma and Texas,” Han says, referring to the places she lived and worked prior to joining the Action News team. “I love it here, and I love the people here. They’re honest and real and smart and very authentic.”

While she misses the Southern California climate she grew up in, the warmth of the people in this area make up for



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joined 6ABC
15 years ago

that. “It may sound corny, but I feel like people here will give you a big hug when they meet you. I think that kind of warmth is pretty unique to this area.”

Han, who grew up as an only child, had many career aspirations when she was young – a teacher and lawyer among them. She always loved writing and decided to major in journalism at North-

western University’s acclaimed Medill School, expecting to become a magazine writer. One summer during college, Han undertook a summer internship at a television station in San Francisco, “and that’s when I really caught the TV bug,” she says.

“I loved the power of the medium; the immediacy of it, the energy of the

TV news environment,” she says. It took a few months after graduation to land a job in the highly competitive field of broadcast journalism. When a small station in Pocatello, Idaho, came calling, Han jumped at the opportunity. Two years later, she became an investigative/crime reporter with an Oklahoma City TV station. From there, Han joined the news team at KTRK-TV, an ABC affiliate in Houston, where she launched her consumer reporting career.

In 2002, while at a national conference for Asian-American journalists, Han struck up a conversation with 6ABC’s then-assistant news director, who mentioned the station was in the market for a new consumer reporter. Han joined the Action News team in October of that year.

“I love the fact I can tell stories every day and help make people’s lives better,” Han says of her consumer advocate role. “It’s rewarding to help the little guy get their money back or the service or product they paid for. I feel so blessed and honored to be able to do that.” ■