Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: MARIA NGA CHAU
Interviewer: Thuy Vo Dang
Date: March 5, 2013
Location: Orange, California
Sub-Collection: Thuy Vo Dang Oral Histories
Length of interview: 2:00:28

FIELD NOTES

My contact at OCAPICA introduced me to Ms. Maria Nga Chau, forewarning me that her story would make me cry. I set up the interview in Horizon Cross Cultural Center’s conference room and the OCAPICA contact also joined us. She drove Ms. Maria to the interview and stayed the entire time.

Ms. Maria’s interview was very touching, as she recounted some very personal and wrenching experiences of loss and suffering. As we began the interview, I was very pleased with how expressive and descriptive she could be about her family and her observations. She described her parents, her marriage, and her relationship with her in-laws in a way that I felt might be very relatable for other Vietnamese women in her generation.

When we began discussing the post-war period, I could see that this would become quite an emotional experience. I had a box of tissue I carried with me in the Oral History kit and we put it to good use. Even the OCAPICA contact cried along with the narrator as she recounted her experiences teaching in a school after 1975 and not having enough to eat. Her husband was in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam and was sent to reeducation camp after the war. She was able to visit him on two occasions and he told her he would be escaping. In 1977 she lost all contact with him and later received news from friends that he had supposedly escaped. However, she never heard from him again and could not properly bury or mourn his death. The depth of her grief was beyond what I could understand. This was a hard interview in that respect.

Ms. Maria’s strength and her resilience was clear from how she fiercely protected her children and sought avenues to provide better lives for them. When her family came to the U.S. in 1992, she worked in the garment industry and then went into the nails industry, putting her kids through college.