Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

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Interviewer: Zed James I. Santiago
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ZJS: Today is Tuesday, March 4, 2014. This is Zed Santiago with the Vietnamese American Oral History Project and am interviewing…

JYP: Mrs. Jennifer Pham and Mr. David Do

ZJS: And we are at home in Orange, California. Starting off, so what are your names once again?

DDD: My Vietnamese name is Duy Do but call me David so it’s much easy

JYP: My name is Jennifer Yen Pham

ZJS: Okay, so when is your date of birth and where you guys were born?

DDD: May 29, 1959 in Saigon, Vietnam


ZJS: So when you grew up, how would you describe your hometown? How was it growing up in your hometown?

JYP: Me first? Okay, I grew up in the…I was very little when the war started to break. I didn’t really see the war but due to my parent because they was escaping the communist in 1954. When Vietnam divided in half, the north go with the communist and the south go with the republic. My parents originally from the north, the north side of Vietnam but because of communist and we are catholic and we know communist doesn’t allow religion in the society. So my parents escaped and moved to the south in 1954 and they told me stories about the life of the communist. So even though I’ve never been…I was never experienced the war but I still feel, you know, when the 1975, the communist government took over the south, I can feel the pain that my
parents experienced during that time and we tried so hard to escape before the communist took over the city. But unfortunately we didn’t succeed, so we stayed under the regime, the communist regime for four (4) years. My parents tried so many times, you know, we spent so much money, almost all our fortune trying to escape out of the country after the communist took over, we tried to escape, so many time but didn’t succeed until 1975. Somehow my parent, during that time, the government, the Vietnamese and Chinese were at war. So they (Vietnamese) tried to kick out all the Chinese people out the country orderly by boat.

DDD: This was 1979 not 1975.

JYP: 79. Yeah 79. So somehow my parents got me the identification as a Chinese girl and I was able to get out of the country orderly even though we still are boatpeople, they just put us on the boat and we had to go to another country by ourself. And I would be able to escape and I escaped my parents would be able to get my brother and sister out of the country too as boatpeople. And then later on that year in 1979, my parents and my sister, my younger sister would get to escape too. So that means that I would have only 2 more sisters left in Vietnam. They already have a family and married family, so that’s why they couldn’t get out. Yeah but during those time that I lived in the communist regime, I see the lives is so difficult, you turn from white to black, instantly like that. You know, they, how could I say, they harassed us mentally and they tried to make everybody equal by going to seize all your property. If you are rich people, they just come in and seize all your property and they put you in... under the broke man area or they put you in jail, they call it reeducation camp. Technically just a camp, label camp, label jail, and one of my cousin was very rich. She owned a lot of property and a lot of business and that’s how they treat her, you know. They just came to her house and say “okay you have 30 minutes to take whatever you can and get out the house” and they put them into a truck and load them into a farm and she
go berserk. She just have like mentally break down and that’s how the government treat people. And to make the lives more difficult, they try to get all the people in the same class, that’s how the communist believe society is. They, how they do it, they say they came in and announced to the whole country that now we will change the currency and everybody have only allowed to change up to like 500 (American) dollars. That’s all you can change, so regardless of what you have like 100,000 dollars, you can only have 500 per person with the new currency. That created a very chaotic society, you know, I’ve been through four (4) years with them and I did it twice, the currency changed like that. So everybody go crazy, the poor is gettin getting so poor.

DDD: And the extra money, they say you know the government will keep it, you know, so they kept it.

JYP: But they cannot use it anyways

DDD: Exactly, they say maybe you can leave it but you actually cannot

JYP: Yeah, so during those times people don’t keep the currency, the government currency, the Vietnamese currency anymore. If you have money, you can buy gold or you buy U.S. dollar, you know that’s how the lives are very suffer. We cannot buy food, the government control everything like they give you a booklet okay, you are allowed to buy 10 kilograms of rice, maybe 2 or 3 kilogram of meat.

DDD: That’s very rare, we’re talking about very rare meat.

JYP: Even control the medicine. You can only buy medicine through the government.

Everything is government owned. So life is really tough, you know, we’ve been very tough life, that’s why when I talk to my kids they don’t understand. They cannot imagine life as like that, even when I tell them, “you are very fortunate to have a life in this country. Everything you take
for granted.” But they can’t understand because they never experienced this kind of things. So it’s very hard for the younger generation, that were born here, to experience what we experienced in our time.

ZJS: How about you Mr. Do? When you grew up as a kid.

DDD: I was born a little bit earlier than my wife, you know, in the 1975, you’re talking about 75 because that happened, that’s why we’re here, so that’s why you interview us, right? That year, the north side, with the communist, takes over the south side. So, that year, I was about 15 to 16 years old. Maybe I know about the war, I see it. So maybe before that maybe ’74, so many soldier, republic soldier die here because the war escalated. So we’re talking about in Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam, we’re talking about freedom, right? So everyday I see the coffin on the truck, they take to the street, a lot of soldiers died, sacrificed their freedom out there. That’s what I see and when communist come take over, you know that to me at that time, I know that we don’t have freedom. That’s what I know but I don’t know what its really about. So many old workers in the republic regime, they go to reeducation camp. I believe right now that there still some people they still…a lot of families don’t have a father. You see when we try to escape out, maybe families just send the boy or the man out first because it they stay with them in 1978, I almost became a soldier to fight for the wrong reason, because half of the country in war with china at that time too. So you know in my family we only have three (3) people: my dad and my mom. So I know, we plan with the whole group of friends how to get out of Saigon by the boat. So we’re talking about the time of 1975 to ’79. That the boatpeople, until ’80-’81, we boatpeople, we use a small boat, we just go. We just go ocean, we go to Thailand, we go to Malaysia, so in those years. Luckily, because of United Nations adopted us, right, to give use a
chance, you know, to go through the camp in Malaysia and Thailand. So later on we come to the United States.

JYP: And some in Philippines too, some people go there. It’s very nice.

DDD: Yeah you know in Palawan, they have a lot of people in the Philippines, in Palawan, so right now a lot of people still living there.

ZJS: So how many siblings did you have, David?

DDD: To me, just only one

ZJS: Oh just you. And you had how many sisters?

JYP: I had…we have 9 in our family, so right now we have 1 in Germany, escaped to Germany, my sister in Germany and 7 here in U.S. and my oldest sister still in Vietnam.

ZJS: Okay are you the youngest? Second youngers?

JYP: I’m next to the youngest, yeah, I’m the 8th.

ZJS: Oh okay and how about your sister in Germany?

JYP: My sister in Germany is older than me. She’s the 4th one, I think or 5th.

ZJS: How long has she been living in Germany?

JYP: Yeah she live in Germany since 1980.

ZJS: Oh wow, so she must know a lot of German then. (Laughter)

JYP: After 1975, right, when they escaped all over the world, you know, some united nation, they got so many country, they come to the camp. They pick out a lot of people to reside in Canada, Australia, because they are big countries right? They let a lot of people immigrant through the refugee camp to come over right? French leave there, you know in Europe they live there, but now a days, you know all over the world, from Vietnam, all over the world.

ZJS: Do you have a story or favorite story your parents told you as a kid that you remember?
DDD: Ha. I remember my mom and my dad, “Watch out. Whatever the communist say, you have to think twice.” Right? You don’t believe them, right? Because that’s what I learned, in through the years I lived with them, whatever my parent were at, they escaped the North in 1954, right, when our country divide. The north side the communist, the south side freedom right? So when we coming, because they leave the communist on the north side, so they can escape. Whatever they say anything or whatever happened exactly. So they say if the people don’t have anything to eat, they can control your stomach, they control the food right, you have to report. You have to do certain things before they release it and nobody, they divide, nobody believe anybody, right? The communist very smart, they divide. I don’t trust you, I don’t trust my neighbor, that’s the way they do. So they can control, even they don’t have any computer, anything like that, but nobody say you have to go out there and the thing that I remember, after ’75 or maybe I think sometime after they ask you for your report personal information right? And if you’re smart enough, do one and you record, you make copy, so next time they ask you, you say same thing. Or they say something wrong in here right? So that’s what they sought you out and a lot of soldier they try to hide their identity before but that’s the way it is and they go to reeducation camp right? So thanks to the communist, they know it.

JYP: You might want to share with him about your grandfather’s story?

DDD: Oh. You know what they communist, before the doctrine of the communist, they told because we’re a third (world) country, a lot of people, how the communist can rise right because they tell the poor people, “Believe in me, follow me, we make revolution, whatever the rich have, we will have. So that’s what the poor people buy into, to believe in them. So in north side, you know my parents are farmers..

JYP: This was before 1954…
DDD: 1954. We’re talking about ’52, ’50, they got the rice field. So every family they got many 2 rice fields but because my grandparents were rich, right so they got about 4 or 5. That’s what we talking about in Vietnam, that the farmer have right? We raised the rice so we can survive so we can sell.

JYP: We hired some workers to work them.

DDD: Right? So ’54, if you can check it out on history or on Google, right, the got a lot of stories about those things. So the poor people, right, they counted people coming out to identify who survived, my grandparent (????), told use to work, don’t pay, whatever they blame…

JYP: Slander them right now.

DDD: So they can take the rice field to divide, right? So that’s the only thing you can do because you give back to the people, you know, so now in the communist government, “we will take your property and divide for every poor people” so that’s what they do. So my grandparents, you know, my grandpa, so they know it, know what happened at that time you know, so they tell my dad, you have to escape. Don’t believe the communist, so my dad eventually, he escaped out of the north side of the country, mostly in 1955, he escaped from there, but my grandpa, he cannot endure, the way they treat him you know. So he suicide, he hang himself in the prison. Cause they capture you and do many things in there.

JYP: Yeah. One week before the Vietnamese New Year.

DDD: So right now the thing that hit in my dad, in me, you know, so through the years we remember whatever the communist do. You see even right now in north side, in North Korea, do you believe it? Because the people believe everything, they just blind, the people. So everybody be divided, somebody say if you listen, you report, so you get back the life, I give you back the food, but nothing. So everybody, nobody trust anybody, that’s the way it is. And even when you
got something you don’t want to saw the peoples, typical even like in ’54 in the north or even like after 1975. If you got something to eat right, you don’t eat openly.

*Starts to Talk Interchangeably *

JYP: You have to close your door. You don’t want your neighbor to know what you’re eating because they will criticize you “Oh you are rich, you are a higher class, you are not a common class.” You know, and they report it to the local police and the local police will come and check you out to see if you rich or have money or something like that because they don’t want people rich. They don’t like rich people. Yeah, so nobody trust each other and the thing about the government, they control where you live, where you go. You know. In here you just go from one city to another city no problem right? You can spend the night at your friends house, no problem. In Vietnam during that time form 1975 to in think probably from like 1995 or something like that before the government opens the door. You cannot spend the night in another family.

DDD: You close your door to eat. You have nothing to eat you know. I hated it. We always pretend we reported it too. Nobody want to starve. You hide everything, communist try to keep you poor. 1980. 1990. Some people from different area come your area. You have to come to see the local police to report where you come from. So you keep your paper. So when you go they give it to you, right, so you cannot move freely.

JYP: So you want to go from here to somewhere like San Francisco. You have to go to your local government or police. Request a transfer. You know, yeah a travel paper that you can go because when you buy a bus ticket, they will ask for it. You don’t have that paper you cannot buy a bus ticket okay? And when you go to that hotel, in San Francisco, they will ask for that paper. Otherwise the police will put you into jail.
DDD: Right? To go visit. What for? And you go and you report over there. The control you, you cannot make any movement right? They know some people escape from different area. So they know.

JYP: And the local neighborhood. They watch everybody. The police in the neighborhood, watch everybody.

DDD: People police! (laughter)

JYP: So if you are a stranger in that neighborhood, they know right away and they report you right away.

DDD: You know something, you leave to the other side, you don’t believe your neighbor. You don’t believe in other side, certainly you feel, you know. Nobody you can trust, right? (Speaking to Vietnamese to his wife) or whatever in north Korean right now right? That what’s you do. Same thing.

ZJS: Did people try to escape by doing that?

DDD: Oh yeah Silently

ZJS: Through like the request and stuff like that?

JYP: Yeah we do that, that’s how we escaped. Like he got to go to the local police and say “oh I need the paper to do some work” on my boat. We were building a boat so that we can do fishing or something like that. It’s a job so that’s how we got out and escaped. We had to find a way to escape somehow.

DDD: We do it different you know, we hide silently.

ZJS: Changing topic…how did you guys meet?

(Everyone laughs)

DDD: I forgot this one
JYP: It’s very interesting.

DDD: I met my wife in school, Cal State Fullerton. But the thing is...you tell your version.

(laughter)

ZJS: What year was this?

JYP: Same version. In 1983. Yeah, yeah at first I did not want to go study with him because first of all, I’m a catholic, you know, very deep rooted catholic. My uncle is a priest, my sister is a nun, my ancestor is a mother/martyr. So you know we are very strong rooted catholic people and beside that my oldest sister marry a non-Catholic but he’s convert into catholic but somehow the marriage, doesn’t you know have happy ending. So that’s why my family and even myself, learning from my sister experience, I told myself not to get involved in anybody that is non-Catholic. So you know when he start liking me and I told him...i didn’t tell him, but I told his friend, that please don’t go any further than friendship because it will not, I will not allow it to go any further, but he’s very persistent. You know finally, I give in and he promise me its not a problem, religion is just not a problem. He will be able to solve it and you know. So I believe him, so we have very old fashioned. When we started dating, his parents come and meet my parents.

DDD: To ask for permission, you know, I can date her.

JYP: Ask for permission so we can officially dating. That’s very old way. So and my parents say, family say to his parents that “Oh, I know he’s your only child and I know you are Buddhist but I have to tell you so that later on if the kid get in further. More involve, you know what I meant that if they end up getting married. I expect that your son will convert into catholic in order to marry my daughter. And that shocked his parents and his parents go home and maybe have a long talk with him. A couple weeks later he called my dad and his dad called my dad and said
“Oh I don’t think that my son will you know, I will not allow my son to convert into catholic because he’s the only child.” So he have to carry the family name, worship the ancestor and stuff like that. I think we better tell your daughter to stop seeing my son. And I will tell my son the same thing. So we broke up. Mhmm, its very painful but we broke up.

DDD: We just broke up. At that time thinking, it was good idea of the old people because it was too strong. Even that time live in America, so I only believe that time, god on earth, and god not say this; only the people say that and this. So I told my wife, that you should do whatever you do, I should do whatever I do. We’re not rivals right, so a lot of my friends say, “Who cares! Just go to Las Vegas and get married!” and I say “we cannot do like that, you know, we traditional, we have to do the right way, you know. Later on, eventually, when the thing came up, I always believe in somehow god’s miracle decide that we. Both side say, us, you know, we truly love each other, right? So they talked with one of the father’s, the priest to come over. Come to my father-in-law house to talk to them and he come to my side to talk to my mom and dad. We get together, we talk again, and we get married in 1990. Yeah.

JYP: After I graduate. My parents try to introduce me to some other people, but somehow I still not go along with that and they see and that know that I’m still going out with him. Not officially but somehow we come to see each other and they give in. Also that we asked one of the priest that my parents know him very well and very well respected, came to our family and talked to my parents about you know, “don’t ask him to convert to catholic, don’t force him to do that, unless he willing to do it.” And also the priest came over to his parents to talk about it too. So somehow he’d building the bridge.

DDD: That is the miracle too, you know thinking about that when I out to do the community service right. I know that Father Hong. That time, I don’t know Father Mike Ang-Nguyen,
Father Hong right? And we work and I somehow when we talk, get a chance to talk with him about our situation like that and somehow we talk with friend, the priest too and that Father Hong reside on the community

JYP: In my Parish, yeah, in my parish

DDD: Yeah, her parish, so you know, Father Hong, the original priest, I saw him and he say come to see Father Hong to come and help you. I remember 1 o’clock in the morning, right? I keep calling until 1 o’clock. I come to see Father Juan in saint columbine at that time you know in Garden Grove. And we’re talking about almost until 3 o’clock in the morning. He said don’t worry about that. I will help you.

JYP: Yeah we glad that even though, they not too old, not too young, they very open-minded about religion, they not old fashioned, they say you know, “as long as that person have a good heart and he’s a good person, then there’s no problem with that. If he believe in some higher power or some kind of good, then that’s good enough.” So that’s how it is.

DDD: Both our parents understand, we truly care for each other right, so because the father come in and do his religion thing, to smooth it out. If I believe we not love each other, you know, not care for each other but you know the thing is not coming up but because they’re parents you know. Accept me on the way, so then my parents accepted her on the way, so when he father coming in, everything is so smooth. It worked out.

ZJS: Do you have like a family alter for your ancestors?

JYP: *Points to alter in front of me on top of their piano*

ZJS: Virgin Mary...

JYP: That’s my grandfather and my parents.
DDD: Traditional Vietnam right usually everything go for survival ranking, right? Father, we’re talking, father, on the man side right? So usually like if you’re survive, if my parents, if I get me a son right? First one of the sibling, so usually the first one carry on the altar of the family. Right? Usually like that. So yeah.

ZJS: Do you have any special family customs, traditions, or foods?

JYP: Here in the U.S.?

ZJS: Yes.

JYP: Yeah usually we get together every holiday like Christmas, Thanksgiving, the New Year and the memorial day of my parents. We pray for them and share food. We do that every year.

DDD: The big one is Tet. When people pass away we get to remember that day (that they died). The traditional Vietnam one is Tet Festival. Right so at that time we remember our ancestor. Usually we did Sunday morning to invite those coming in to leave with us, that’s Tet Festival right? After that we wishing for the new year, you know, a good year, and healthy for all family member.

ZJS: So that’s how you guys celebrate Tet?

DDD: Yeah the biggest festival.

ZJS: How about like birthdays

JYP: Yeah we do when the kid is still little but now they older, so they don’t want to celebrate anymore. Yeah in Vietnam we don’t it.

DDD: No, the birthday actually, we do when we here but in Vietnam, its only for the rich people, you know. You know but here is fine you know. When it’s a birthday, it’s a chance for everybody in the family, big family relatives to come over. So that’s how we do.

JYP: When my kid was still little we get together the whole family together for their birthday.
DDD: Big family, we’re talking about 50-60 people come over

JYP: But not anymore, after 18 years old they don’t want to do party anymore. They want to go out with friends instead of the family gathering.

DDD: Everybody busy, you know.

ZJS: Is it usually relatives and family friends?

DDD: Yeah, usually because at that time you know, I think that the whole relatives are not big yet right. Every family is still only maybe they don’t have any kids yet you know? So everyone can come over but even my family right, we got five (5) people. So they can control their own.

ZJS: So you say you’re Catholic and you’re Buddhist. Do you belong to any temples or churches?

DDD: It’s freedom. We usually go to the local church, Saint Norbert, right and all the Vietnamese live there and in the Tet festival, on the early, we’re talking about, the date, we go to the temple, the Buddhist temple, you know.

ZJS: You have any special food traditions that you guys cook? Or like pass downs?

DDD: My wife expert about pho, right Vietnamese traditional soup. You go anywhere for pho, we’re talking about Vietnamese one. Pho is number one and the second one maybe Chả giò, or egg rolls right?! Many other things too.

JYP: Yeah egg rolls. My mom loves pho so much he said I can eat this everyday mom.

DDD: Easy to eat!

ZJS: Is that their favorite food?

JYP: Yeah, pho is everybody’s favorite food.

ZJS: It’s also good when you’re sick. (Laughter)

JYP: Yeah actually. (Laughter)
ZJS: You said you have a son, so how many children do you have?

JYP: I have three (3): Jessica is the oldest, she’s 24 years old now, I mean 22. And then Katherine, she is 21, she’s still in UCI and the youngest one is Alex, he is a senior in high school, 18 years old.

ZJS: What does Jessica do now?

JYP: She is working for a law firm. So “legis…” no…no…clerk! She’s a clerk. She’s a litigator.


DDD: She’s assisting lawyers.

JYP: And she is going into law school this fall.

ZJS: Where?

JYP: She hasn’t decided yet, she got accepted into several schools but she hasn’t decided yet and Katherine is a 3rd year in UCI, majoring in Psychology and Alex is in high school.

ZJS: Do you have any family heirlooms or prized possessions? Like pictures, figurines, jewelry. Like pass downs when they get older.

JYP: No.

DDD: Not like traditional like long, long time ago. You know but now you still have something like my mom would get wedding, she bought my wife some cake. (?) And we keep those things, I don’t think my kid will want. But that is the thing maybe wedding that grandma gives to you. It could be like that way.

ZJS: So we talked about the Vietnam War already. So how was life like after the war? Or after you escaped

DDD: Oh coming here?

ZJS: Yeah, what year did you come to the states?
DDD: I come here in 1978.

JYP: ’80, 1980

ZJS: And where did you first relocate to?

DDD: The first one I got to is Las Vegas (Laughter)

JYP: Because his uncle was came here in 1975 so he sponsored his family.

DDD: Through the church in Las Vegas.

JYP: They settle in Las Vegas

DDD: So we go to Las Vegas for 2 years

JYP: He attend UNLV

DDD: Oh yeah UNLV

ZJS: How did you like growing up Las Vegas?

DDD: Only thing about it, was a new country, a lot of thing, I am young and naïve you know. So I try to learn something new and the freedom thing wonderful, right? Everything was new for me. So you know, I go to school, nothing! The good thing to do, I learn some, see so many students from all over the world come to UNLV. I belong to the international group, the student group, you know. We met in a week, we said and taught, we say how different culture, I played table tennis for school, I play soccer. So it for me a new thing and I like it, I love it a lot.

ZJS: So was it hard to adjust to?

DDD: Yes and no. Because sometime you know what you go, whatever you do in the days, in the new country, the new thing right, but your mind always belongs to the old country. I still belong to the… I remember a lot of my friends, poor, every time I eat something good I still remember about them but the time I smoke cigarette right in Vietnam right, that time in ’75 and everybody had the money to buy the cigarette. They just tell the seller, “Hey, I will pay you until
the end of the month,” when they got the money you know. So that what we share, so when coming here they say, “everything I have it, everything I have it!” In our country you know we don’t have it, I remember you know when I got the money from the grant to go to school. I save some money I buy some jean, right? And jean jacket at that time right but at that time I cannot send direct to the Vietnam for my friend, I have to send another friend in Canada over there for them so the guy can just come over very poor too, you know. So lying on his hands, those two. You know what later on when my family in Vietnam, talking about 10, 15 years later, they say those clothes I send to them, they sell those things with a little money, they use that money do something, they sell something to survive over the year because one time here, I bought $20 or $50, something like that, but when they go to Vietnam, that thing from Levi’s from United States, they sell maybe like $500 with the money they can build something.

ZJS: Wow. So that would last them along time. How was life for you when you first moved to the U.S.?

JYP: At first the language barriers is the most difficult thing for me. When I arrived here I settled in Anaheim, California with my sister, 1 sister and 2 brothers, who escaped our country in 1975. So they already settled, have jobs, and they have house already. So I’m very fortunate I have to go through the trouble building the house. So I go to high school, I get into high school. During that time there are, especially in my area in Anaheim, we have some Vietnamese student in high school too, so we were able to get along better and I go to ESL classes (English-Second Language) and we try to fit in, so we try very hard to fit in and go to college and everything. So one thing I feel that I’m very fortunate that I first came here, I see the life here is so, so much better than what we have in Vietnam. I feel so blessed and very fortunate and at the same time I feel very sad for my family that’s still left in Vietnam and friends you know, my high school
friends, still back in Vietnam, I feel very sad. And some of my friends was later on, I found out that one of my friends was dying on the way in his escape from Vietnam. They die at sea, he die at sea, on the way his escape. And I feel very fortunate and I feel very bad for those people that still live these and even now when I came back to visit my family, my sister in Vietnam, every time I come back, I still have that heavy heart you know, even though you know that you’re travelling, except you don’t feel like you travel, because you see, back in your mind you still feel somehow mad at the society, mad at the government cause you see the poor is so poor and the rich is so rich, you know. You see the difference in the society is so clearly.

DDD: The society right now is worse than before.

JYP: Most worst than before 1975. The mortality is going down you know everything is going down in value, family is going down, I mean the morality is going down, and the government don’t care about the people. They just try to rip of the people as much as they can

DDD: Whatever the world say that’s what they face and behind that so many bad thing and…

JYP: You feel very bad coming back. See all those bad things happened in life and nobody really cares.

DDD: In here you know we see, I believe, after 1975 to ’80, ’85. Lets say like that a lot of people when we escape, we work so hard. Even that time we poor, but we try to save the money, we send back to our people in Vietnam. I believe those money, to even help our relative, but most the money the communist take it right they do some other thing. So I believe those money to help them communist to survive until right now and instead of improving the country right? But the help the country in a different way. Whatever we see, right, only making 5 percent of it. But all that other people are so poor, you know, the morality of the society is poor.
JYP: Yeah, if you go to the countryside, I go to the country side and ask people there and they say you know all day long they work and they work and they earn 1 dollar a day. That is so sad. That is very sad, you know you see the contrast of society like that.

DDD: The health of the people very bad, we’re talking about…

JYP: Abortions.

DDD: …Undeniable, terrible.

ZJS: How about the education system then and before.

JYP: Very bad. Very, very bad.

DDD: We’re talking about the you know, big corruption! Right? You got the money you go to school, right, even you got the money, you go to where? So everybody trick each other (?)

JYP: And because of the salary of the teacher is so low, because the teacher was hired by the government, the government control all the school and the salary is not enough to make ends meet. So they have to find a way to make extra money by holding back the material, like if you want to pass the class, you have to go to tutor. The tutoring is performed by the teachers himself at this residence, okay? So if you don’t go to tutoring from that teacher, you cannot pass the class.

DDD: That’s true! Don’t you see that?

JYP: It’s so sickening.

ZJS: So he would hold out lessons for extra money?

JYP: Exactly! Hold out material you know, if you go to the tutoring he give you the cheat sheet so you can study for the test.

DDD: You go to the tutor so you can get help to do the job, you want extra. You have to go out right? That is the way it is but now a days you know the system, I believe, I don’t know in my
time right? They do the education, its very important because you know why? Because if you
don’t pass the class, we’re talking about man and a boy right? You have a chance to become a
soldier and you fight.

JYP: Mhmm, that’s why we say study very hard. Especially for the guys

DDD: So you know ours and yours generation do whatever it do, you have to be good in school
when you study. So you pass, if you don’t pass because every year we’re talking about the 10
and 11 grade, you don’t pass you become Vietnam soldier. 11 grade, you don’t pass you become
a soldier. After grade, if you don’t pass, same thing in the south, it’s the same thing.

ZJS: Did you know relatives or friends that had to fight?

JYP: Yeah, a lot

DDD: Yeah.

JYP: A lot of people especially different race, you know I have a lot of friend in Mexicans,
Spanish, or different race than Asian, different than Vietnamese, ask me the same question, they
say, “Why you guys, your Vietnamese people, so successful in our country?” In the short time
like that.

DDD: School, we’re talking about school

JYP: Yeah in school in business in everything, you guys have…you guys only have how many
years? 30 years? And you are bypassing African Americans, Spanish you know, American,
Hispanic, American like that and that’s make me thinking because you know of what he just
said, you have to study, study, study. So that you don’t have to go to join army or to war and
then also after the ’75 if you come from the old regime like if my parents is a wealthy people,
you were not allowed, you were not accepted into the university or if your parents, if your dad is
to the old army, in the army in the old regime you were not accepted into the university. So that’s
why we are treasured our opportunity that we have here, you know we strive very hard to succeed and all the pain, sacrifice that they can to put the children through college. Make sure that they succeed.

DDD: You’re a soldier Forget it! And though when we the 1st wave, 2nd waves you know, that comes to the United States, the have the same idea right? So you see that reflects what I remember those years. Every time I open a newspaper and you see valedictorian right. So many local high school in there and every year I see so many Vietnamese because those 1 wave people, everybody learn there, they learn from leaving experience from you know in Vietnam, they come and be very successful. Lately I didn’t see much about that one because maybe they have done so well and they say, “okay we don’t care.”

JYP: No they still have in Westminster and Garden Grove, they still have..

DDD: I don’t see that in past lives before.

ZJS: Is it because maybe the generation that came before, the parents, their kids are already older, I think second generation or third generation?

DDD: Yeah we’re talking about my kids right now, totally different generation already you know, I don’t think they think the same like us thinking. Because everybody you see that right now, when you grow up you see you go cellphone, right, you have laptop, whatever its so easy. Before, we have to fight for it, we have to earn it you know.

ZJS: So the values that you taught them did they take the whole thing and applied it to their own lives?

JYP: No, I think they only take like, if I’m like they take half of if, 50% of it. That’s why we as a parent, we try, its not like we to make life hard for them, but like we teach them the value of life. Nothing is just given to you, maybe I care for them, I give them things but I also tell them that
you know you have to work hard for what you have too and I encourage them to find a part-time job and earn extra money, I will not just give them the money.

DDD: We don’t force them to work but we want them to work to know the value of the money, how to manage the money, right?

JYP: Because he’s a car salesman. Sometime he comes home and he told me I cannot believe this family. The parents took the son to look for a car and they told him, “I’m looking for a Honda Civic for my son.” And you know what the son say? “Dad I don’t want a Honda Civic, if you want to buy a Honda Civic, but it for yourself, I want a Lexus or a sports car. If not, don’t bother me buying a new car.” Can you believe it? They are demanding, they keep on demanding and demanding, and that’s the problem of this generation, everything is me, for me and what is it for me. They don’t, maybe they do a little bit of, I don’t know community service and stuff like that but still everything is me to them. Just look at the census now a days, every family have 2 kids or maximum 3 kids, rarely you see a family with 4 kids, right? So both of the parents working, they make money, they make decent money so everything they giving to the kid or maybe in our generation somebody think I grow up wanting so many things and now I don’t have it, so now I’ll be able to afford that for my kid and why not? Why don’t I shower these things for my kid when I can afford it, why I let them suffer? But to us that’s a different thing, that’s the wrong mentality, I don’t raise my kid that way

DDD: Because they don’t understand the value of life, you know but this is you know we’re talking about a freedom country, whatever you want to do we do and nobody can say anything you know but that is a hard, hard thing you know, so I cannot say you’re wrong and you have to do it my way you know. So every family, they get the value, you know but I’m glad sometime in 2009 or 2008 and that time we talk and we say we make the trip to go to Vietnam, very costly
your know and I say if we got the chance you know we should go because at the time Jessica was ready to go to college right? So I say we’d rather you know, we don’t know if we can make the trip together, so I told my wife, whatever we save the money and take the 2nd loan from the house, we take the money out, a little bit of it, and we decide to go to Vietnam. We go from the north side right and go to the south side, make a trip out of it. I’m glad we make that decision because my kids grew up here and they don’t know about Vietnam, they just heard about it but they don’t know right but now they get the chance to go experience what Vietnam is about. So when we go through the north, we go to the south right? So they know where we from in the north, even in the north they still poorer than he south you know, there is more things to buy and more things to enjoy, but I am glad I took Jessica and Katherine and Alex to go see one of the orphanage. Usually we send back some money for those unlucky child in Vietnam that survived without any parents and they run by the nun or the priest you know in the local church to help them out so we contribute the money from here to raise the kid and lucky my kid you know likes to go there and when they come in here, when they come back to the United States right, they see the value of life in Vietnam, how hard the guys work there and they go out there to ride the motor bikes to carry the people to get extra money, so whatever extra money they get, it goes to the university, $150, you know for the whole year, for 2 semester or whatever. That’s the value of it. So when they come back here, we try to save, we try to contribute you know for the orphanage house in Vietnam, so they learn and they know that it’s a blessing to live here and be raised here right? So that is a very good trip to Vietnam in 2008.

ZJS: So by that time you’re able to go back (to Vietnam) without any trouble?

JYP: No.
DDD: No, no, no. Not trouble like before, we’re talking about how many years before, they have to change, if they don’t change, you see the U.S. government, the conflict was the human rights, so the Regime in Vietnam, they have to do something better than that, so because they know it if they do worse right, nobody come back to visit and no money. So you know actually, they treat us. I know, you know, the inhumane thing, um, we talking about the human rights in Vietnam is still violent you know but to us the U.S. have to treat us right, they have to be very nice, yeah.

ZJS: How long ago was your trip to Vietnam again?

JYP: In 2008

ZJS: And your kids enjoyed going to Vietnam?

JYP: Yeah they loved it, they want to go back, maybe one year we’ll take them back again.

ZJS: And you told them stories when you guys were there?

JYP: Oh yeah!

ZJS: Okay, so they know what happened. Okay.

DDD: They see how poor kid, only 10 year old come out to help the parent you know, selling gum to earn the money, when they see those things. That is daily life how they work in Vietnam right, so when you come back to the United States, they don’t take life for granted anymore.

ZJS: When you first came (to the United States) what did you do to make a living?

DDD: You mean coming here?

ZJS: Yes, jobs you’ve had, then and now.

DDD: In 1978, when I come in here and that time right, in the first couple of months right? We tried to living here, we got into the program of the government. They give you a little bit of money but I think that’s not enough money for Americans to live off of but because we stay together, we save, even we can save some money too, you know. In those years, you don’t
spend, you don’t have a car, you don’t spend on the clothes, I still remember I go to Goodwill, right? We buy 10-cent jeans or something like that but still good! You know that’s what we do and I go to school. When I go to school, the government still give us the grant to go to school, yeah, and I think my mom that time, she still go to work but not much you know, she have to go to find a job to work. My dad that time because he cannot do because he have an eye problem and he got a handicap so the government gave him the money after 6-month, we claimed it to give him the money so with that money we rent an apartment.

JYP: And at that time we call it welfare, everybody was under welfare for a while but as soon as we graduate from college and we find a job, we were able to go with the mainstream.

DDD: Yeah see, right now I know right now the welfare program still have a lot of people in different country, you know the guy inside the dark (?) with that whatever, you know from the Facebook? The boy, that company? And that 2 years ago, he still get assistance from welfare, so he got like the buyout from the Facebook, 18 billion dollars on the office of the welfare.

ZJS: Oh Mark, Mark Zuckerberg! Right?

DDD: Yeah. What’s up with that, like the Twitter or something like that?

ZJS: I didn’t ask you but how did you guys come to America? Did you escape by boat? By plane?

JYP: We escaped by boat, yeah

DDD: Our family, we built the boat secretly, and we escaped. (Laughter)

ZJS: Did you guys go from Vietnam to the U.S. or did you go somewhere else first?

JYP: No, we went to, well for myself, like I said before I escaped orderly, so they export the Chinese people out, so after 5 days at sea we landed into Malaysia and then the local police transfer us to the refugee camp in Malaysia and because I was under 18 years old at the time, I
was considered a minor, so I had priority to get out and my sister and my brother was in the U.S. so they sponsored me after 6 months in the refugee camp, I was able to be reunited with my family here.

ZJS: How was it like living in the refugee camp?

JYP: Very hard. Oh my god, you consider, very poor at that time because I escaped out of my country in 1979 and that is like the high peak of the refugees, the Vietnamese refugees. So I was leaving in the most populated camp in the world. It’s called Bulo Bidong Camp and at that time the number of people, refugee at the camp go into the peak, I mean like 50 to 60 thousand people in the camp.

DDD: We’re talking about a small island, the island!

JYP: In the small island! So yeah I was so shocked when I came to the island because I see so many people, so crowded and they just drop you there, they didn’t provide you shelter, they didn’t provide you with anything at all, I was lucky that my parents asked a family that my brother know to take care of me, so I tagged along with that family and I cannot, I can never forget that first night at the refugee camp, I have to sleep on the ground and that area in the morning is the market, you know the flea market and we have no place to live and so I have to sleep on the ground that night and I was bitten by a lot of mosquitos and when I wake up in the morning, I see because we just lay a plastic mat, a plastic sheet, so that I can lay down and sleep and in the morning when I wake up, I see the food is spoiled, there is some type of..

ZJS: Oh maggots?

JYP: Maggots! Oh my god! Huge maggots under that mat, I freaked out, I am a city girl, I’m never a farm girl or country girl. So those things to me are horrible, you know, I’ll never forget that first night, I was bitten all over my body, my face, like hundred times from the mosquitos.
DDD: Just imagine the environment around that one, when you look around, you say how can you live in this one, you know?

JYP: And the island was so filthy and dirty because it was overpopulated and there is no public toilet, there is no water, people would have to dig the well to find water. Oh my goodness, it’s so hard to live that 6 months. Very hard, you go back like in the primitive life or something like that you know, you have to line up to get food. You spend hours to get in line to get food and hours to get in line to get water because everything is hard.

DDD: We’re talking about the girls around 15 years old doing this.

JYP: And have to carry about 2 buckets of water from the ground up to the mountain where I lived. It’s very hard, very, very, hard life during those 6 months.

DDD: So imagine if the people leave, have the will to leave, right? They’re very strong. Later on when we leave to the United States right, so whatever heartache, we will overcome those things.

JYP: And imagine that time only, I was 15 years old and my parents, that was the first time, I was apart from my family.

DDD: Survival, you know.

JYP: Oh my god. I was like crying every night, but it’s well worth it at the end… so well worth it.

DDD: I was better a little bit because in 1978 when I escaped, when it was still early for the refugee camp you know we’re talking refugee camp. In my year that time when they come in you know, we escaped we get in the boat, we get out of the Vietnam and before that a couple months, so many boats do like that and the communist chased them down and they shoot them right. I see so many boat, they parked at the port, I come to visit, and there is blood all over. They kill some people, try to escape out of Vietnam, so it’s still on my mind but luck maybe sided our way, we try 3 times. So the last time, it goes through, so lucky for us, we go to
Malaysia and we go to the oil drill outside of Malaysia and the boat picked us up right there at the oil drill right? They take us up to the boat and in the morning, they take us to the company boat. Lucky for us too, in that day too, we were concerned what country we will go to.

“Whatever country, not communist, we will go!” But in the morning when we find out that one of the older people, he spoke French and English, he talked with the captain and somehow they got the news and that time President Jimmy Carter in here and they approved for 1,000 people to go to the United States this time. So everybody in the boat they know, everybody say, “Okay we decide to go to the United States only!” But the person to select who, you know, what country to go took longer right? So that day we go to the camp, that’s the first night you know and when we go to the camp that night, because we’re new people coming, my boat only 49 people. So we come back late at night, talking about 10 o’clock and the camp, you see that only the torch, they don’t have the lighter for it. Everybody coming out and lucky some people know us already take them to the tent. But my family nobody know, so we stay in the class, they build a church so we stay in that one for a night but it’s very cold and in the morning when we get a chance to talk to some people and our family brought a little gold with us when we escaped. So we were able, I remember we buy the tent because a lot of people come earlier than us right. So they go to build a tent, stuff like that and when the things come, they sell for them. So you know, we were able to buy a tent maybe to rent out, so we got a tent for selling farmers. So later on when we go, we can sell the tent to other people but when we go, we say other people coming in so we gave it free to them because they so poor, yeah.

ZJS: Was it hard to make a boat? I mean did it take a lot of time?
DDD: Yeah to build the boat. I don’t think it was hard to but you how because you build a boat to get out to the ocean right? It has to be different material different structure right if you build a boat inside the river, that’s totally different. So we have to build the boat inside the river.

JYP: Because they have to permit to build the boat in the river

DDD: But when we’re talking about when they have the permit, we modified the boat so we can get out, I think the boat went from there to here (from where we was sitting to their from door, which was about 10 yards), how many yards? Maybe 6-7 yards, right? Maybe 10 yards and contained about 49 people. Right very small boat? And the only thing I believed if the people passed the ocean, get to the camp, maybe you know, may 10% or 20% of the people alive. A lot of people died in the ocean so you know why because the communist so cruel right? So that’s why we have to get out, and so we never forgot those things.

JYP: Don’t forget about the Thailand pirates too. You know a lot of story about the Thai pirate?

ZJS: A little bit but not too much…

JYP: Oh. Oh my god. It’s like 50% of the refugee, Vietnamese refugee was die at sea due to the storm or due to the pirate. They robbed us, lucky for me I didn’t have to experience that, my husband didn’t experience that but when we came to refugee camp and talk to a lot of people, and I hear horrible story about pirate. They rob us several times, some boat get hit by the pirate, 5, 10 times and they don’t have nothing left for them to rob. They rape the girls, they capture the girls, so they can sell the girl to the brothel house.

DDD: They take the girl and take them to the island.

JYP: Yeah to the abandoned island, they drop them there, so they come back and rape them some more later on. They take turns to rape the little girls. Oh my, you have to find something to read about those
DDD: So it escalated from 1980’s…amazing those things…

JYP: Yeah, they are not human. My god. Just unbelievable, very sad story about those.

ZJS: So how do you feel about your decision about coming to the U.S.?

DDD: Very wise decision you know. To us, my mom, my dad you know and we say you know I stay in Vietnam that time you know, the communist you know they bring in the uniform for me to become a soldier already. So you know, I know they know already, they cannot let me die fighting for the wrong idea you know. So we know it you know, die or not, we escaped, even in my young age at that time we’re talking about 17 year old or something like that, we escaped we had a chance to die right from ocean right? But we rather do that choice because you know same like the boat people story right. A lot of people after this you know that pirate, a lot of people die. They still escape because the communist leave and no future.

JYP: Unbearable.

DDD: And everyday you don’t know what is going on. Right? You’re afraid cannot take those pressure right? They don’t know if you do something wrong right? They take you away and you don’t even know where you go right?

JYP: Even now. It still happen now, there is no human rights in Vietnam. There is a lot of young people, like college people speak their minds about patriotism against the Chinese invasion because Chinese now invading Philippine Island, invading Vietnamese island, invading Japanese island, in the South East Asia. You know Chinese now invading a lot of countries and a lot of Vietnamese people raise their voice against the Chinese government, trying to protect our land but what the government do? The Vietnamese government do?

DDD: They want to expand. We try to protest, you know.
JYP: They oppress those people; they put those people in jail. They forbid those people to raise their voice against the Chinese and that’s why it piss us off.

DDD: Because the government support by the Chinese government right? So the Chinese government go do something and that’s why they do it but you know hey we are Vietnamese, “Why you do that for? Why again in our country?” You know we don’t understand it.

ZJS: That’s crazy. That’s really though.

JYP: Really tough.

ZJS: So what were some jobs you had here in the U.S.?

DDD: When I come here I go to school and so many job you know. That time I remember when I go to school with one guy and one friend you know they said, “Okay, I found a job in here, it do something about electronic assembly in Garden Grove.” And suddenly you know he let us know and everyone goes to apply. So one guy knows, and then everybody applies, so we go to work in the assembly or whatever. So they jumped from job to job right when we graduate to the school and you would be able to find another job right and when I visit my girlfriend, my wife, that time in the water company, I find out the owner was a pilot for the U.S. Air Force in Vietnam because when I walk out of his office, I see so model planes and his helmet, his pilot helmet. So we talking and he ask me to come over and see what he can do. So when I come in, I come to work for him, a subcontractor. Why? So later on I get a chance to work for my friend in the computer field and the computer store and you know that life it always change. You go along with it and you work in this country, you get so many chances and opportunities.

JYP: And later on he work for a Taiwanese base company.
DDD: But we strictly worked for compact, we do the compact computer. We do SB computer and later on we do Apple Computers. You know, I think first prototype for the iPod you know and in the year 2000, I work for the Honda dealer here local, as a salesperson until now, yeah. JYP: For me, during college I work for Disneyland as a part-time job, yeah, and then after that I graduate and I got a job for working in the bill processing company in Irvine for 23 years, yeah, 23 years in the accounting department. I have an accounting degree from Cal State Fullerton and I got laid off because the company downsizing and after I was laid off, I was unemployed for like 2 years and then I got a job. Somebody introduced me to work at the Diocese of Orange, the Roman Catholic Church, Diocese of Orange and now I am the assistant to the Bishop, one of the Bishop in Diocese. I am very happy about that job.

ZJS: You guys had some interesting jobs, working for Apple and Disney. Cool. So how would you guys identify yourselves after living here for like 30 years? Vietnamese or Vietnamese American? How would you guys like identify yourself.

DDD: We very proud of our background in Vietnam right, and we very grateful to become a U.S. citizen, we very proud to represent you know cause we American, we live in the U.S. you know but we you know, its good for us we got to think one American and one Vietnamese right? So we mix and you know we proud because whatever we raise up until now we make the country and embrace the new ideas so our children to explore more and more right? But I think that’s the plus side for us too. Become Vietnamese and also American citizen, yeah.

JYP: I consider myself Vietnamese American too. I’m thankful for this country for the opportunity for accepting us into the country and I also thankful for all those immigrant before us because they already paved the way for us to have an easier life in this country, when I learn about you know how hard they are especially in the ‘70s they still have discrimination against
the black people, you know, I feel very thankful that they already paved the way for us.

Especially in this state, we live California which is the melting pot so Asian is not a foreigner in this country were as if you live in like another state like Minnesota or Arkansas or those places maybe you will face more discrimination than California especially in the Southern California where the population of Asian is very high, so and also when I got back to Vietnam, I realized I am no longer a Vietnamese because you know, I consider my lifestyle is totally different from those in Vietnam. Even the culture, the tradition all those things changing in me, so if people ask me if I retire, if I’m willing to go back to my country and retire there, I would tell them no, I will not be happy in my country anymore because the lifestyle is totally different so I’m much happier here, so I consider myself Vietnamese American.

DDD: And I hope that we can contribute you know a lot for this but then rich, freedom country because I live in the United States that children so many race, so many people all over the world and the communist through the years. We got a great country, so I hope our community very strong.

JYP: So that’s why I’m very mad at those people that they came here and they talk bad about this country, you know? They are immigrants, they came here by choice, and you know why talk bad about this country. A lot of like…I’m not naming any ethnic group. I’m mad at…I got to name somebody…like those Middle Eastern people, they came here and they….you know we attacked on 9/11. And a lot of people say, “Oh U.S. people is this and U.S. people that and they live in this country, they talk bad about our government about our country. Why you came here for? Why don’t you go back to your own country where there is war and people killing each other every. Where women can’t open their face, they have to cover their face you know. Where you have no right to vote, where you have no right to have a job, where you have no right to go to
school, and why you came in here and have all those right and all those freedom and you still talk bad about us, about this country? I’m mad at those people, so…

DDD: But see this is freedom right? Whatever you can say, you can say, you know. JYP: That’s what I say to some people, they take life for granted, even some Vietnamese, not a lot but a couple people only, they came here and they praise about the communist in Vietnam…Oh my god, I just want to kick their ass.

DDD: You know it could be that their life will never change.

JYP: Why would you escape from the government, from the communist now and you praising them? They are so naïve.

DDD: Because they don’t face you know really face whatever other people endure you know those from before. So when they come in here, everything good for them so when they go back to Vietnam, they get a good hotel and the people is good to them, and they say, “Oh, the communist is good, their life is good,” but they don’t see it, the don’t see how poor the people.

You don’t see how the government treat the people.

JYP: The other side, yeah.

DDD: They yell at people, can you go over there and say you know, “Down goes the communist?” They will take you to jail, in here you say, “the government sucks?” No problem, right?! In this country, you know, whatever you do as long as you don’t break the law right, then it’s totally different. (Laughter)

ZJS: Did you two face any racism when you first came here or do you still do? Did people criticize you?
JYP: When in high school, a little bit, you know some kid tell, “Oh go back to your country! Why you here?” But they’re just kids, we don’t mind about that but not anymore, not anymore. I don’t see that anymore.

DDD: I don’t face it. You know, but you know when I see the car, I remember one time you know, one of the white people in the morning when I coming out to serve them, you know, “Welcome to Honda company,” or something like that and they look at me and they say you know, “David, thank you for your greet but I want somebody, can you find me somebody?” He wants the white people to go take care for them right? But I say, you know, “Is it cause of my English,” or something like that? And he say, “No, no, I want white.” So I go to tell my manager, but my manager coming down and they ask me you know, “I just want to be sure,” you know, “he’ll take good care of you in anyways.” I don’t quite understand why and he say you know, I want the white people to take care for him. So you know some people still hated that crazy old man, so my manager likes me, very few, very happy, very proud because I do good for that company and that company take care good. They don’t tolerate discrimination and I said, “Thank you for your time but our policy in here does not tolerate for discrimination, sir. The way you say that makes discrimination. But thanks but no thanks. Please leave.” So after that, wonderful!

ZJS: But we know Honda’s better than them. (Everyone laughs) So do you have any funny or memorable like memories from first coming here to the U.S.?

DDD: Many things, many things!

ZJS: Like the funniest one?

DDD: The most funny one?

ZJS: Yeah. Your favorite one
JYP: Let me tell that story. He attend UNLV college, I mean university and there is one girl, his college friend, one Caucasian girl liked him a lot and be friends with him. But he treat her just like a friend.

DDD: Yeah she’s just a friend.

JYP: And at that time he was still new to the country, so he treat her just like a friend, classmate, so she invited him to her house for dinner, in America, when a girl invite guy out to dinner.

DDD: She cooked spaghetti!

JYP: In her apartment? By herself?

DDD: No she stay with another friend!

JYP: Oh okay. You know she open the door for him and then after you have dinner?

DDD: Yeah! (Laughter)

JYP: What did you do?

DDD: She open the book and see the pictures of me, these pictures and that pictures, you know

JYP: The photo album. Uh huh.

DDD: Something like that you know. (Laughs) So funny. It’s simple, I have to kiss her or something like that you know and somehow I don’t do anything you know, she say you know, “Are you gay?” at that time you know. And I don’t understand, what do you mean? How do you spell it? She think I’m gay but I’m joking right? So she went away, she went away you know. So next day I asked my friend cause he lived in the United States 3 more years before me and I say, “Hey, what did it mean when a girl ask you, ‘Are you gay?’” “What you talking about? She’s asking you if you’re a man or not!” So that when I really understand what gay was and I was wondering g-a-y, can you spell it for me? (Laughter) That’s more funny when I learned it later on. I think of that when I go back to the UNLV. Terrible. (Laughter)
ZJS: Do you have one?

JYP: Yeah, I go to college because…I went to Cal State Fullerton, there is a lot of Vietnamese student in there so I don’t associate with the American people. I don’t have any American friend so I don’t know the language very much you know beside the textbook and stuff. I don’t really understand the culture or the slang that they use, so when I go to work, when I start working and one day a girl told me, you know she’s a coworker, so she go to…she told me, “Oh, Jennifer I go to potty,” and at that time I say, “During the work hours? What? You go party?” She said, “No I go potty.” And I didn’t understand what potty is, you know I didn’t understand what does she mean, so I asked her, “What do you mean?” So she say, “Oh, I go potty that means I go to the restroom.” I felt very stupid at that time. So there is a lot of slang that we don’t understand.

DDD: That’s a good thing you know because you learn everyday.

JYP: Even now still learning.

ZJS: How is your community around here? Are the mixed are they white? Or Asian? Vietnamese?

JYP: In my neighborhood?

DDD: We just to have one Japanese behind us but they moved.

JYP: We don’t associate much with our neighborhood. As you can see it’s a very quiet neighborhood. So the only people we associate with is the house next to us. He is white, he is American. Very nice. We don’t have any problems with our neighbors.

DDD: He’s an engineer. Actually when we come in here and the time you remember, Jessica party for her birthday, we open, we invite, we bring the food for them, and have everybody come into our house. You know that day, we have neighbor in front of us but they moved already. We
good relationship with the people and the only people left side you know and we still strong relationship, every time you know they just go over and say yeah come over. Yeah.

ZJS: Are you involved in the Vietnamese community?

JYP: I’m very much involved. During my high school, I was vice president of Vietnamese student association in my school, in my high school. When I move to Cal State Fullerton, I was one of the board member in the Vietnamese student association in Cal State Fullerton. And then after my graduation, I was involved in the church choir, Vietnamese church choir for a couple of years, then after we have a child, I volunteered to be a scout leader until now.

DDD: She go to the scout her high school year.

JYP: I joined the Vietnamese American girl scout troupe during my high school year and now I’m a leader for how many years? Over 10 years. Yeah.

ZJS: Are your children involved in it.

JYP: Yeah all three of them are in boy scout and girl scout.

DDD: And most recently our son, Alex, got Eagle Scout.

ZJS: Wow that’s really good!

DDD: With help of the next door neighbor, he contributed too. They are very close.

JYP: Yeah with a project.

ZJS: Do you like visit Little Saigon a lot?

JYP: Yeah every week. (laughter) At least 1 or 2 times a week!

ZJS: Do you shop there a lot or eat there?

JYP: Yeah we buy there cause it’s very cheap. And we often go to restaurants there, we enjoy Vietnamese food there. I cook Vietnamese food everyday, I enjoy Vietnamese food and so we cook Vietnamese food everyday. Yeah.
DDD: I believe we’re lucky because we living here right? So it gives us a choice, because you can eat any food you want. Japanese food, Korean food, whatever food. But I’m thinking the people back East, sometime before when the Thai leave the United States, you know, in the Las Vegas and that time one of market, Asian market, a Thai market, so when we go and I remember, we go to Thai market that time, I see the rice, we bought 2 bags of rice and some fish sauce, right? I thinking, “Oh man, coming here, I never see it,” thinking okay we got this going the right way, right, because if not, we need a lot of bread and when I came here, I eat a lot of peanut butter and jelly, and we buy the bread, the peanut, and put in the sugar, and later on we find out we have an Asian market. That we have the chance to eat a lot of things you know and yeah.

JYP: My kids love Vietnamese food too, yeah they love Vietnamese food.

ZJS: Do you guys feel at home or sense of belonging when you guys discovered Little Saigon?

JYP: Oh yeah, definitely you know, definitely, you see your people, you see a lot of food that you know in your ethnic group you know so.

DDD: We replace through the frame of different state, you know, they come over, they say, “Man, you in heaven!” Whatever, you want to eat you eat! You don’t have to dream anything right. We’re talking about the food, talking about the entertainment, same thing. All the states they don’t have anything or those things.

JYP: Yeah there are a lot of Vietnamese musical entertainment here.

ZJS: So you mentioned entertainment, what do you guys like to do for fun? Or to entertain yourselves? Hobbies? Sports?

JYP: We like to go to the movies once in a while. My husband and I love Vietnamese music, so we go to nightclub or go to a theatre to see the performance. Yeah.
DDD: A lot of artist, singers, come from Vietnam and people come to buy and see the performance.

JYP: Yeah we just get together with friends and sing karaoke and eat, yeah.

ZJS: What are some things you feel are important for like future generations for know about their Vietnamese heritage like when they grow up? So they don’t forget about where they came from?

JYP: I always share with them the reason why we came here. Why we are in this country so that they know a little about their Vietnamese history. And I told them you know, make your people proud of your identity. Don’t do anything, that they say, “Oh Vietnamese people that, Vietnamese people this,” you know. Make yourself proud; be proud of yourself as a Vietnamese American.

DDD: Do the best that you can contribute for this country.

JYP: You were born here as a U.S. citizen but still always don’t forget you are also Vietnamese. Get the best of each culture and instill that into your life and make it yours, and that’s why I always try to tell them you know. Vietnamese culture got a lot of good thing, keep it, take it and American culture have a lot good thing so take that and combine them, and make into yours. Make it into your culture and raise your children that way. I consider myself, maybe I’m too subjective, you know, each generation is better than the next one, that’s how I think. My parents doesn’t really raise me the way I raise my children, they just, you know they have 9 children, they don’t have time to spend to talk with each children, you know right, we talk to my kids right now you know, they don’t care, as much as I care for my kid now because they have to struggle to make ends meet during that time in Vietnam, you know. They have to work so hard to make ends meet. So somehow the school mold us and the environment mold us into the people that we are now and of course my parents molding us too but you know I spend so much time for my
children, much more than my parents, I talk to my kids much more, I treat them closer than my parents, treat me because different generation you know and especially my parents family are way too old. So there is an age gap, there is no way that they can understand me the way I understand my kid. So I believe my kids when they have children, they will have a better understanding than I have with them because of the generational gap and there is also the culture gap too. They say oh you come from Vietnam, you come from the third country, nothing to eat, you have nothing to you know have, so that’s why you raised me differently than most American people raise there. I accept that but I cannot raise them the way that American people raise their kids you know. Like when I raise my kids, I will not allow them to sleep over night, up until like college, I have no control over them anymore, not completely, I still some how control a little bit you know, but when they were little, I would not allow them to sleep over at their friend’s house, no slumber party, unless it was in house. There are certain things I will not allow because maybe I’m Vietnamese, you know. And they complain about it and I say well too bad you’re stuck with me, that’s my house rule.

DDD: Because whatever you do right, you enter into the new country.

JYP: But maybe when they have their kids they will understand why I treat them that way because now you don’t know what happens you know. The person might look very educated, very normal. My grandparents, I don’t.

DDD: Now a days right, world is very complicated right? You see that the communication is so fast right? Everything you can go to Google, read something when it happened right? Before I think really, really in the life more peaceful right because I talk to my wife in Vietnam a lot people die but I can’t say because nobody knows right? Because technology at the time is not up to date. People think they die because of some other reason but now something right, the more
you know, the more you worry. Right now when you take the medicine, right you find out that the medicine can give you a side effect right, before you get a medicine you get really happy! You get lucky that you have it! So now a day you know good and bad too. If you are paranoid, people and everybody worry, right, whatever. You got take care right, whatever you are happy! It happened!

JYP: So later on we even think we have to deal with maybe my kid marry American people, different race people, we have to deal with that you know, with the language barrier, you see we are not really fluent in English and the culture is different so we have to deal with all that if they marry a different race you know, it’s a difficult thing you know, but we have to deal with it.

DDD: As long as they’re happy!

JYP: Yeah, as long as they’re happy, we’ll be fine.

DDD: How can you define happy? You define happy. (laughter)

ZJS: Sounds good. Lastly, are there any other memories or stories you would like to share or forgot to mention? Or maybe another funny story? Or old memory?

DDD: Are we talking about friend story?

ZJS: Just anything you want to mention before we close it.

DDD: I’m glad we come to this country seriously because we got a change to know a lot of people, go to different countries like France, reason to go visit our relatives in Belgium, very rich country in Holland and I believe things happen for a reason you know. Somehow I told a lot of my friend when they got the chance, we come to be in America and somehow we go back to our country and we see now we’re better. I remind them we’re not better than the people in Vietnam, we just luckier because we escaped and we leave in this country, and that’s what we had today.

We nobody! We’re just hard workers, we earned a living in this freedom country you know. So
I’m glad this country give us a chance, you know to leave and grow in here and many generation after us, you know. My wife said, “whatever we believe, we believe because we’re still Vietnamese and American in here.” We are proud of our country and also proud of our heritage too. You know.

ZJS: Well, thank you very much for allowing me to interview you. It has been a pleasure, I’ve learned a lot.

DDD: Our pleasure too and we know some people out there you know and concerned about our culture, you know.

ZJS: Yeah, but thank you so much!

JYP: Okay. You’re welcome!

DDD: Welcome anytime!

JYP: I hope we didn’t bore you to death. (laughter)

ZJS: Oh no you didn’t! At some points it reminded me of what my parents would say to me too.

(FADE)

----END 1:48:35----