Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

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JL: My name is Jennifer Le, and today is May 15, 2014. I am going to interview Nam Quan Nguyen at the University of California, Irvine in Irvine, CA, and this is an interview for the Vietnamese American Oral History Project. First off, I would like to ask if you could state your name, age, and where you live currently.

NQN: My name is Nam Quan Nguyen and I am 40 years old, I live in Midway City, CA. Do I have to say the address too?

JL: No you don’t. First off, let’s start off with your parents’ names. And can you describe them?

NQN: Yes, my father’s name is Khanh Nguyen and my mother’s name is Bich Man Tran. And uh, my father he is an artist and my mom is…she is you can consider her, she’s a registered nurse. Let’s see-what else? Basically my father he just draw and paintings and most of the time my mom is working at the hospital and my dad he just stay home and do the drawings. And sometime he selling and yeah sometime he sells the paintings and the-but the most of the time our family lives on the salary that my mom makes. And, and yeah. The money that my dad is making is like-because it’s not…how do we say this? It’s like a sometime he sell the painting, but not all the time. The money that he sell the painting-the price of the painting is we can say that it’s a lot of money. So, whenever my dad he sell the painting, our family have a lot of money and then we can buy something that is expensive like T.V. and motorcycle like that. OK. And - oh yeah more about my dad. Before 1975, he’s a soldier in the South Vietnam army. When Saigon collapsed, and he was put in the concentration camp and for 5 years. And after he was
released from the prison, we live a few more years, actually he get out around 1980. He get out around 1980 and we live in Saigon for 14 years until 1994 and then we got a visa from the U.S. to go to the U.S.

JL: Where did you grow up? Can you describe your hometown?

NQN: I was born in Quinhon. I live there for 2 years. That’s a very short time and I was too little to remember about Quinhon. My - one of my aunt, one of my aunt take me to Saigon and I live in Saigon for another 2 years. I live there for 2 years and yes, still the same person, the same aunt took me to Buon Ma Thuot which is a province one of the province of Vietnam. And my mom is working there and yeah I live I live 2 years in Saigon with my grandparents and then my aunt took me to Buon Ma Thuot to meet my mom there and we I think we live I Bu Ma Thuot for until I don’t know how many years but until 1982. And then we move back to South Saigon again. So and then I live in Saigon for until that moment until the day I went to the U.S. And then ok so I think the I can say that my hometown is Saigon, not Quinhon so back then Saigon is not to crowded like nowadays. Most of people we don’t just a very little of the population have motorcycles and I don’t see I don’t see the automobile very often. Most of the time the people that you know using the automobile is the one that work for the government. Yeah, talking about the transportation at the time, most of the time we use bicycle ‘cus I can say that some of I can see that some of my friends’ parents, they have motorcycle at home but they don’t have money to buy gas because gasoline at that time is just reserved for the government to use. You have to…if you want to buy the gas you have to buy in the black market to use the motorcycle. Most of the time people use bicycle to move around.

JL: What were the main industries in your hometown?
NQN: At that time, it’s I was too little at that time to know. But when I get a little older, I can say that in Saigon, people do a lot of things, everything. They make clothes, make toys, and yeah - it’s not I can say that Saigon does not have a special industry. They have all kinds of things.

JL: Did you have any jobs in Vietnam?

NQN: Yeah, before I go 3 or 4 years before I went to the U.S. When I went to school, I don’t work. But the day I graduate from high school, I do photography - wedding photography. I do exterior design for houses for about 3-4 years. And yeah - I do fix watches in 6 months.

JL: Can you describe your schooling?

NQN: School - I went to first grade in Buon Ma Thuot and when I move to Saigon, I went to first grade, no second grade in Saigon and I finished 12th grade in Saigon also. From...I think I don’t even recall how can I pass first grade because at that time, I was too little. We just go to school and just play and we don’t know exactly what school is for. And it’s...I have the same feeling when from 2nd grade actually 8th grade, I just think go to school and just like to get the job done. I go to school do homework. Just do it for my parents to make them happy but all the time go to school is to meet my friends and to play with them. It’s not until I...it’s not until I went to the high school which is the 10th grade then I start to realize that ok, school is something, school is the future and then I started to focus on school stuff. I - uh yeah. I study harder and harder. But before, I just think school is a place to play. And school is go to school is just my memories about school is just a lot of fun memories. Even though we just the students in school, you know we have a slogan we think. The first, we say “Nhuc quy nhi ma thu ba hoc tro” It’s like “the devil is the first place in the - the ghosts in the second place and then after that, after that, third place is the students. We do all kind of bad stuff in school but it’s just very fun memories.

JL: What do you remember most about your parents and grandparents when you were a child?
NQN: My grandparents in both sides passed away when I was little. I don’t have much memories about my grandparents but one thing that I remember about my grandfather in my dad side, which is “ong noi”, I think that was the time that I went to 2nd grade. I was very sick. I was very sick at that time. It’s like - I don’t know what they call it in English but the disease I got is “sot xuat huyet” [dengue fever] it means that I think it’s like you get sick and then the blood is coming out under your skin. You got it from the mosquito bite. And I was very sick and my grandpa he just carry me on his back and he just rushing to the hospital and one - even though I got very sick, I still remember how hurt it is when the doctor gave me two shots of penicillin. It too hurt and I don’t know if not because of my grandpa that I can live ‘til now. The doctors - I heard my parents tell me this story - if just a few hours you know later - if you know if I didn’t get to the hospital on time like that then I not going to make it. I can see - yeah just like a few days later I saw a lot of a lot of kids around me they came and go and I asked my mom “Where did they go?” and my mom said they going home but later on I find out when I get older I found out the kids they all died. It’s lucky for me that I still survived my sickness.

JL: Were sicknesses really common where you lived?

NQN: Yeah, it’s I think it’s very common in Vietnam back then…until now too. A lot of people I mean a lot of kids - children die because of that disease. As long as I know.

JL: How many siblings do you have and what is the birth order?

NQN: I have 1 - 2 siblings. One is my older brother and one is my younger brother so I am in the middle. Yeah, they all here.

JL: What languages do you speak?

NQN: You know my mother’s language is Vietnamese and now I can speak English too.
JL: Do you speak a different language in a different setting, such as home, school, or work?

NQN: Yeah, most of the time I speak English in the - at work. At home sometimes I speak English but most of the time I speak Vietnamese ‘cus I want to keep the tradition in my family going on so I want my kids I mean my daughter to speak Vietnamese before she can speak English.

JL: What memorable stories have your family members told you in the past?


JL: Memorable stories. Like any stories you remember.

NQN: Stories…there’s a lot of stories but our family at the time - I heard from my parents about my grandparents. I don’t…I think as I know, it’s very common the Vietnam society back then before in the 40s-it’s like man can have more than 2 more than 1 wife. It’s very common. My grandparents in the…both sides, “ong noi” [paternal grandfather] and “ong ngoai” [maternal grandfather] they both have 2 wives. Yeah, they have a lot of children-one in ong noi we have let’s see-one two three - 6 or 7 aunts and uncles in my “ong noi” and about 10 in the other side…my mother’s side. Yeah about 10. Back then we have big families, very big families. But right now, as in the modern society right now, people don’t people just limit themselves with 2-3, 2-3 most most is for kids per family. I spoke to my friends and most of them have 1 to 2 kids. They don’t want to have more like their grandpa or grandparents or their parents.

JL: Which occupations have your family members held in the past?

NQN: Yeah I told you before, my dad is an artist. He do the drawings. And my mom, she is a nurse. We call it in Vietnam, we do have one level between nurse and doctor…and we call that “y si”. [nurse] We have “y ta” [nurse], “y si”, and then “bac si” [doctor] so but I don’t see it here. So I just say my mom is a registered nurse. You can say that. And my older brother he’s doing
the exterior design in Vietnam and he went to the U.S. and he studied in the fine art and he graduated with a Master’s degree in Fine Arts and he’s working for he’s working for his professor for 2 or 3 years and then just 2 years ago, he decided to work for his own. And he went back to Vietnam to work for him in Vietnam and he’s still in Vietnam now. My younger sister, she let’s see…she’s a manicurist. She’s still working like in the nail shop. She gets the she get married to a African-American man and they have a little daughter.

JL: In Vietnam, or America, does your family hold any family reunions or gatherings? And what activities take place?

NQN: We do the reunion in the U.S., not in Vietnam. And what else?

JL: What do you usually do at your reunions?

NQN: Oh we just gathering-making the traditional food and chatting. You know, having fun.

JL: Is it at a relative’s house?

NQN: No, because we don’t have much relatives in the U.S. and my parents…we can see that my parents is the oldest, you know in the relatives right now so if we have any events and then we gather at my parents’ house to celebrate

JL: Do you have a spouse? And if you do, how did you meet and marry?

NQN: Yeah, I do. I met my wife through my friends and I…we went out for I think more than a year and we decide to get married. That’s it.

JL: Do you have children? How many?

NQN: I have 1 daughter.

JL: Do you ever talk to her about your history?

NQN: Nope. She’s just barely older than 1 year. I didn’t tell her any stories at all. I don’t think she understands them yet.
JL: Do you plan on telling her?

NQN: Yeah I will.

JL: Does your family have any special family traditions that you do every year?

NQN: No, we don’t.

JL: Does your family keep an altar for your ancestors?

NQN: Yeah, we do – at my house right now and at my mom’s house right now.

JL: Do you have any traditions or celebrations that you maintain for the ancestors?

NQN: Our Vietnamese people, we have a little get together, we call it “gio” “ngay gio” “gio ong ba” [day of remembrance of dead grandparents] - we remember the day that our grandparents pass away and at that time we gathering and we pay respect to our parents and we remember them and we talk about we remind our young in the family about how good the grandparents is…you know. We keep the memories going.

JL: Were your “ngay gio” in Vietnam and America any different?

NQN: Let’s see… I don’t think there’s much difference. Just the “ngay gio” in Vietnam we have more relatives, more people.

JL: What religions do you and your family practice?

NQN: My parents…my parents they…we “tho ong ba” [pay respect to dead parents/grandparents] - but…my wife - she’s a Buddhist, but not me. I just - I don’t have any religion. I go to church and I go to the temple just to experience it.

JL: So growing up, your parents didn’t have any religion?

NQN: Yeah - my grandparents - my grandparents do. My grandparents are Buddhist. And I think the grandparents in my father’s side they are - they are “Cao Dai” followers. “Cao Dai” [religion
in Vietnam] is one of the religions of the South of Vietnam. It’s very popular. They have so many many disciples, right? Disciples…

JL: Does your family have any special food traditions? Like any recipes that have been passed down.

NQN: That I don’t know. I don’t think so.

JL: Do you have any family heirlooms? Like any pictures, or jewelry that are handed down.

NQN: Yeah we do. Pictures.

JL: How did the war in Vietnam affect your family and community?

NQN: Yeah, it affect our family a lot. It’s like this. Our family back then is very wealthy. Our family - we live in Ha Noi. When my mom is very little, I just heard a story from my parents and our grandparents are just so wealthy and the war at that time, I think at that time, it’s not about the war between the South Vietnam…between the South Vietnam and North Vietnam but between the Vietnamese and the French. Because my - uh no my great grandpa - my grandparents they working with the French and you know, the Viet Minh. The Viet Minh…is you know…the Vietnamese army at that time. They - one night, they came to my grandparents’ house and they took away my grandfather. And he never come back. That’s one of my grandpa. I mean my grand - my grandfather’s brother but we still call him - you know grandpa. And then - you know - as the war escalated, when -I think the Geneva Agreements signed between the French the Vietnamese and I think involve the U.S. too and they divided Vietnam into 2 parts. One is North and one is South. My grandpa - my grandparents they decided to move from the North to the South and that time we lose everything. We lost everything and my grandparents have to raise their children from the beginning. They start working, make money you know - start off again from bare hands. I - and yeah that time the war between the 2 parts of Vietnam
started and I think and my dad he grew up and he joined the South Vietnamese army and you know the people of the I think at around 1972 or 73…yeah as the war getting to an end the South the North Vietnamese army they pushing south and the people that living in living near the border “Song Dan” they just the 17th - what we call it

JL: Parallel?

NQN: Yeah they scare of the North Vietnamese army so they moving south and my parents you know…once again my parents have to left everything behind and we have to migrate south to avoid the Vietnamese - the North Vietnamese army. Yeah, and we lost we lost our uncle in the war too. We lost like 2 – 3 of them in both sides.

JL: Did you lose them from - were they in the army? Or were they killed?

NQN: They are in the army. They were killed during action…in action.

JL: Where did you live during the war?

NQN: We live in - our parents - we live in Hue, we live in Con Thum, we liv live in Saigon.

JL: Were you still able to work during the war?

NQN: No, I was like 2 or 3 years old at that time.

JL: How were you or your family members involved in the war?

NQN: My father…he’s the soldier in the South Vietnamese army. That’s how we involved in the war.

JL: Do you know what position your father held in the army?

NQN: He’s - I think he’s a Lieutenant. Yeah - of the - yeah he’s just the Lieutenant.

JL: Do you know anyone that was in a reeducation camp?

NQN: Yes, I do. I do know a lot. My father’s friends in the concentration camp because most of my father’s friends are South Vietnamese soldiers and when the war when the war was over,
they all get put into the concentration camp for...from 2 to 15 years. It depends on...you know - how the new government decided how dangerous they are. If you know... they think one individual are dangerous enough, and then they keep them there for longer... One of the famous person in that I know I mean like I know, I mean he’s very popular in the Vietnamese community in Little Saigon, I mean in Hai Ngoai, is the writer Phan Nhat Nam, his name is Phan Nhat Nam and he is the very very popular novelist in Vietnam during the war. And he is very active person in you know against the Vietnamese community party right now.

JL: Did any of your family members suffer a disability or injury from the war?

NQN: I don't recall any except my 2 uncles died during the war.

JL: Where were you during the last days of the war?

NQN: Where was I - I don’t even know. I would have to ask my mom you know - because I - at that time - just like 2 years and I don’t remember at all. I wish I remember but I don’t.

JL: How do you feel about leaving your home and country?

NQN: Uh...yeah. My feeling is I’m very saddened, you know. The day that I left Vietnam for the U.S....I always think of U.S. as the paradise to live in and because I’m young at that time and you know...I just have so many imaginations about the U.S. I just want to go to the U.S. to find out you know a lot of things that other people that went to the U.S. before me and they come back and tell me their stories, I say hey I have to experience the U.S. myself ad yeah - that’s my feeling. I don’t have any feeling against the government at that time the Communist government in Vietnam at that time because I don’t pay attention at politic much at that time. If we don’t pay attention to the politics, we don’t feel anything. We don’t feel any restricted you know - anything. If we have money and we can buy things that we want. I feel I’m ok if I leave Vietnam...but I feel excited to get here.
JL: What do you think of U.S. policy during and after the war?

NQN: U.S. policy toward the Vietnamese community? Vietnamese….towards the Vietnamese government back then? Okay.

JL: Do you think it was right of them to withdraw from Vietnam? Do you think it was a bad decision?

NQN: Oh yeah. I think…okay this is what I think. I think the U.S. they just use the South Vietnam for their purpose. And once you know they once they don’t need the South Vietnam then they just drop. They just drop that. I think that the U.S. government that they just do things that they think benefit them. They don’t care about the people in the South Vietnam. That’s what I think. That’s the U.S. policy. That’s what I think.

JL: Why did you come to the United States? And how did you leave?

NQN: We come to the U.S. - we came to the U.S. by the H.O. [Humanitarian Operation] program. We just get to work and then we leave…making money and then we leave. I think that’s it.

JL: Did you come with your family?

NQN: Yeah, I came with my family.

JL: Do you have any special possessions that you brought with you from Vietnam to here?

NQN: No, I don’t.

JL: Which family members came with you and which stayed behind?

NQN: My direct family, which is my father, my mother, my older brother, including myself, my younger sister. We all came at the same time. We came to the U.S. at the same time. Nobody get left behind besides the relatives.

JL: Who sponsored you?
NQN: One of my father’s friends.

JL: Were you or your family ever in a refugee camp?

NQN: No, we don’t.

JL: What were some of your first impressions and early experiences in this country?

NQN: In the U.S.?

JL: Yes.

NQN: I still remember that I have a stunning I saw a stunning view when I was on the way from the airport to my to my apartment. The first day I came to the U.S. and the landscape, the tree along the - that is the - that was in the Fall. The sight seeing was beautiful. I am just stun me. I say, “Wow, the U.S. is so beautiful.” That’s one of the thing I you know that I remember the first time I went to the U.S. It’s one of the thing is like about one month after that, I saw snow. Which is - I never saw before in real life. I mean I can see snow through the movies but the real snow and our whole family was so so happy to touch the snow, to roll all over from the snow and we took a lot of pictures of snow too. Yeah, that’s my….

JL: Where did you first settle when you came here?

NQN: Portland, Oregon

JL: Did your family settle in the same place or move around?

NQN: We live in Portland, Oregon for 2 years from 1994-1996. Then in summer 1996, we our whole family decided to move to California. The reason behind that is Portland is up North and it’s getting so cold in the winter and my mom and my dad they trip and fall several times on ice. We don’t want it to happen again and then we decided to move to California where the weather is warmer.
JL: When you first arrived, did you receive financial support from any organizations, church, or family?

NQN: Yes, I think we did. It is the money from the - I think the money from the government. I don’t remember exactly how much we got but I think they give us around $600 for each person a month and they…the money was redistributed by U.S.C.C. I don’t remember how U.S.C.C. stand for…what does it stand for right now but I can see U.S.C.C. is the name. That organization they I think they sign a contract with the government and they their task, their job is to pushing the people to get a job you know as soon as they came so the government don’t have to pay for that kind of money anymore. So I remember that we work with a few workers and they trying so hard to push our family members to go to work. And of course, we don’t want to depend on the government’s money for a few hundred dollars a month and then we decided to get a job and my whole family got to work and we…yeah and then we-and then less than a year we stop getting money from the government and we making our own money and we support ourselves.

JL: How did you make a living after resettlement?

NQN: I work for N.E.C. [company that produces displays, such as screens] company for I think 6 months. And then I switch to - what company? I don’t remember now, but I work for I talking about the time I living in Portland and then we got a job - you know… a cleaning job to clean all the - dealer shop. Auto dealer and yeah I work at night. We work at night and my mom she work for a hotel and my dad and my brother and I work at night cleaning the dealer shop. My brother and I went to school in the morning. That’s how we make a living during that time we live in Oregon. When we move here, my brother and I first got a job at Davidson company, the company that making computer games. Yeah, we work in the night and then we go to school in the morning. I work there for almost 2 years and then I got a job at my college and then I stop
working for Davidson. And then I work for my school, El Camino College for until I went to
UCI. Then I graduate as - I mean like what - I mean - when I went to UCI, I stopped working for
my college. I work like - like a student for UCI, making just enough money to support you know
- day by day and yeah I finish school at UCI and then go to work full-time until now.

JL: How do you feel about your decision to come to the U.S.?

NQN: I think…I think it’s the best decision ever that I ever made. But I don’t think that’s up to
me though because at that time the whole family decided. I’m just a part of that family and the
whole family decided to go. And you know…and then I go with my family.

JL: Did you support their decision?

NQN: Yeah, yeah I do. I did support this decision so I think I am one of the decision makers too.
That’s the best decision I have ever made.

JL: What were some of the challenges you experienced when you were starting a new life here?

NQN: I think one of the most challenging is is the language barrier. Until now, I think the
language is still…I still have challenge too. Let’s see, I can say that - I can say this. If - I think if
I have a chance to move to the U.S. a few years earlier you know-I think my English gonna be
much better and it will help me much more in my career. Yeah, that’s what I think.

JL: Who helped you find a home in the U.S.? Was it your father’s...

NQN: My sponsor.

JL: Your sponsor, right?

NQN: My sponsor.

JL: What were the occupations that you had in the U.S.?

NQN: I was a engineer, computer engineer. And then I quit the job to be a real estate broker.
JL: Why did you quit your job?

NQN: Why? The main reason is my I have my little daughter and I want flexible time so I can take good care of her. So I decided to switch my career.

JL: Was switching your career difficult?

NQN: Yes, it’s difficult. It’s difficult but it’s - I was lucky that I - my wife she supported me and yeah. But it’s still difficult. It’s still difficult. Switching from one to another that you know - don’t have any – anything - what was it rel…what do we say?

JL: Similarities?

NQN: Yeah, it doesn’t have any related to it. Nothing related to it nothing to each…one another.

JL: Have you ever encountered racism in your neighborhood or in your work place?

NQN: Um…let’s see. Yes but not it’s not clear. But we can feel it. I can feel that. But um…but I think California is I felt that more clear in the Oregon when the most population are white. I feel it clearer but when I move to California where the society is more diverse, I see not see that more often. But yeah, it does happen. It does happen.

JL: What’s the ethnicity of most of your co-workers? And do you get along with them?

NQN: Yes, I do. We still say that most of them – no - not white but it’s more diverse. I saw a lot of Asians, Latinos, Whites, not…

JL: So it’s pretty diverse?

NQN: Yeah, it’s pretty diverse.

JL: How do you identify yourself in American society? Like do you identify yourself as Asian, Vietnamese-American, or just Vietnamese?

NQN: I think I’m a Vietnamese-American. Asian, yes of course.

JL: Do you have any memorable experience of culture shock?
NQN: Uh…culture shock. One thing that I remember like this….but it’s we can say it’s a language barrier. The first time you know one… the first day that I went when the the first day I came to the U.S - our luggage get lost - the 2 luggages get lost and I went to the the information to ask for the luggage. And you know, I-I the person that answer me they are white. One of the white guy. And he just standing there talking talking and I stand there listening but I don’t understand anything. It’s just like I just don’t get anything from him. Anything that I heard it’s just like a somebody sh shhshshshsh like that. It’s very hard to you know, listen. And at that time I realized that the all the English class that I went to in Vietnam all the listening we have the cassette and then we heard people talking and then we have to listen to the cassette to practice our listening skills - but that’s nothing! I realize that that’s nothing. All I heard is shshshshshs. I don’t even recognize a word but the sponsor family they came with us and they talk back and forth and I just stand right there and I don’t understand anything. And yeah, at that time, I realized wow, studying English in Vietnam you know listening to the real the real conversation real people talking is so much different and as time go by, it’s getting better and better. I think it’s getting better now. But you know listening skill is hard. I think it’s hard.

JL: Are you a citizen?

NQN: Yes, I do.

JL: What was the process like?

NQN: The process?

JL: Yeah, becoming a citizen.

NQN: Oh yeah - umm we we have to live in the U.S. for 5 years to qualify to apply for the citizenship and yeah, we have once we we send in the forms with the pictures, of course with a check at that time. I think at that time I sent in a check for $400 or something and for a while, the
INS, yeah the INS, right now they change their name to Homeland Security but the INS they send us a letter to go have our fingerprint and and they schedule for an interview. Yeah, when I passed the interview, they gave us a day to take an oath to become a citizen. And yeah dew months later, we went to we went to a place that you know, thousands of people that where I saw one thousand people to get together to give an oath before a judge and yeah after that and then we get our certificate of citizenship. And that’s how I get it.

JL: Do you vote in U.S. elections?

NQN: Yes, I do.

JL: Why do you choose to vote?

NQN: Why do I what?

JL: Why do you choose to vote?

NQN: Why do I choose to vote uh I think that’s my right and I choose to to express my myself through our right of voting.

JL: Do you volunteer with any political party?

NQN: No, I don’t.

JL: How do you get your news and information? Internet, newspaper

NQN: Right, most of the time I get the news from the internet. Both until now I still get the news in English and Vietnamese, both sources.

JL: Do you prefer your news in English or Vietnamese or both?

NQN: In both.

JL: Both languages. Do you keep in touch with your family and relatives from Vietnam?

NQN: Yes, we keep in touch closely, I mean.

JL: What’s your method of communication?
NQN: Email and chatting and facebooking.

JL: Have you gone back to visit Vietnam?

NQN: Uh huh.

JL: What was that like?

NQN: A few times. The first time that I went back to Vietnam is back then in 2007. And the feeling is so strange and you know, very exciting. Yeah and the I have anxiety too and when I when I get back to Saigon, I don’t even recognize the city that I grew up in before you know it changed a lot. Just 12 years and it changed a lot and I don’t even recognize the the place that I grew up in it took me like about 2 weeks to get used to it and to get back my memory and yeah.

JL: What did you do when you were in Vietnam?

NQN: What did I do?

JL: Did you travel, sightseeing?

NQN: Oh yeah. The thing that I like I like most is the landscape photography and I do I have a camera that I remember that it’s the Canon 8e1. And I took most of the pictures with that camera. I travel a lot to the countryside to took pictures.

JL: In your opinion, what do you think will become of Vietnamese culture in America?

NQN: I don’t quite get the question.

JL: Do you think the Vietnamese culture right now in America - do you think it’s going to stay the same? Do you think it’s going to change over time? Like to become more Americanized?

NQN: Oh yeah, yeah of course. I think it’s going to be more toward like the Americanized.

JL: From the time you came here to America and now, how do you think the Vietnamese community has changed, if they’ve changed at all?
NQN: I can see that it’s changing but not a lot but but it-okay, it’s like this. For the period of 20 years, the day that I came to the U.S. I can see it changing. It change just a little bit by a little bit and if we take a period like about 1 or 2 years, we don’t see a lot of change but then you know in 20 years, it a lot of change going on and just take away the center part, the one that time in between you see that you know, you see in 20 years, the day that I came here in 1994 and now - 2014 the 2 Vietnamese community changed a lot. Before people - everything that related to Vietnamese government back then in Vietnam, anything that related to it people go against it, you know. They protest against the singers from the mainland and they protest any business doing business with the mainland. If you wear if you wear some shirt or hat that have the symbol of the Communist party or the government in Vietnam then they protest you too. They kick you, they fight you, they can kill you back then. But right now, things shift and people get used to it. People get used to the singers from Vietnam you know go to the U.S. to sing and singers from the U.S., the Vietnamese singers from the U.S. they can go back to the Vietnam to sing. People still protest but…

JL: They’re not as sensitive?

NQN: Uh huh. Yeah.

JL: What do you think are the differences between the first generation and the second generation here?

NQN: The first generation and the second generation - there’s a lot of differences because the…the generation that experience the war in Vietnam and they are the generation that take hard hit by the war. They lost a lot of things. They lost their properties, their relatives, they lost their wives and children…you know and and when they they don’t have anything when they came to the U.S. They start they have to start all over again with bare hands. So they have the hard
feeling for the people that make their suffering - make them suffer because as the first sigh, first place, they don’t want to go to the U.S. at all. You know, their first choice always in Vietnam and because they don’t have any choice, so they have to left Vietnam for the U.S. At that time, they don’t even know what the U.S. is. It just the far away country that they don’t know about, you know. They don’t have they don’t have the feeling like the second generation. The second generation we born like after the war or maybe like a few years before the war ended. I think about 4 or 4 or 5, 6 years we still don’t know what is the war is about. But so we don’t have a very hard feeling about the the Vietnamese government. I mean the communist government they Vietnamese people back then. The thing that we don’t like is just because we want that’s the dictationship in Vietnam right now. Just one party – they don’t have multiple parties they only have one party so we don’t want it that way. We want the power have to be shared with the people. Right here, you can form a party and you can go to you can be the candidate. If people like you, people vote for you. But in Vietnam, you have to be a communist member to do that. You cannot form any party at all. We don’t want that. We want the what we say - the democrat for Vietnam. I think most…if the communist party they share the power, they decide to become a democrat system…you know. We are fine. But they choose the dictationship for they want to keep they party for themselves. We don’t want that. But the image about the war with the second generation…I don’t think we have that. We don’t think.

JL: Are you involved in any local organizations?

NQN: I do but yes I do.

JL: Are they like volunteer organizations?
NQN: No, this is one of the political parties that my friend formed and he has a dream that his party going to be become a strong party and it’s going to help bring the democrat to Vietnam.

JL: Do you visit Little Saigon, Orange County?

NQN: Yeah, I live in the heart of Little Saigon.

JL: What do you think of Little Saigon?

NQN: Little Saigon, okay. I kind of proud, little proud about what the Vietnamese people accomplish in Little Saigon in the American society, The first time that I went to Little Saigon was 18 years ago. I saw - I went along Bolsa Avenue and I saw all the 2 sides of the avenue…all kinds of Vietnamese businesses. I just surprised…wow so many Vietnamese people are so good. We have in America…we have all kinds of businesses. I kind of surprised and a little proud of Vietnamese people. I feel that way, you know. Every community have a good side and bad side I think I still despite all the bad things that little thing that affect the Vietnamese community, I still very proud what the Vietnamese people, the Vietnamese community did in the U.S - done in the U.S. I mean.

JL: Do you have any hobbies? And what do you do for entertainment?

NQN: Yeah, I play guitar. I do oh yeah I write music too. I write songs.

JL: What are the most important things that future generations of Vietnamese Americans should remember about their heritage?

NQN: Okay…the thing that I want my offspring remember is the language, firstly. The language because when you - when you know the language then that’s the culture right there. And I want the my kids remember the history. I don’t want them to have the hate feeling but I like them to know the history and learn from it - to learn from it. So they know…they know how the bad thing happen and to prevent it from happening again. I don’t…I don’t want them to remember or
to know the history to hate but to learn from it. So I will…I will tell them the story and yeah tell them story about…about the war and how we get here and how we survive - how we yeah I think how we study and we keep we keep going and going in the U.S.

JL: Are there any other stories that you would like to share?

NQN: The story - let’s see. I have too many stories and I don’t know what exactly…okay. Oh one of the stories about this. It’s about my songs. I wrote a song in 2007 and one of the motivations that make me write that song is the protest of the youth in Vietnam. And the thing that fueled the protest is the conflict between the Vietnamese people and the Chinese over the Spratly Islands. The youth in Vietnam they take it to the street and they go to protest the Chinese. I - that day I when I read the story from the internet, and I feel so - I feel like I have to do something for the youth. I couldn’t go back there to join them and so I think I have to do something, I have to do something. Maybe I hope that if I do something I can keep that - the - what we say - when you do something and we you want to keep that going? What is that saying…what is the word?

JL: Maintain?

NQN: It’s not maintain. The thing that you make you do that…

JL: Motivation?

NQN: No, not…motivation. Yeah…

JL: Determination?

NQN: Oh how…I forgot that. Okay. It’s like okay. I just want it to keep on going and getting bigger and bigger and spread out. So I think okay, so they need a song to the song that make them feel good that can make them put more energy into the youth and then I sit down and write a song. In about 15-20 minutes and I finish the song and you know and I brought my guitar and
play it. I upload it to the internet…a forum where all the friends that I have in the internet and I ask them if they can help me to spread it out. And one of my friends, he’s a musician, a musician, he help me to edit the song and then there’s I think, there’s one group in San Jose and they try to do they try to do the song with them. It’s like a “hop ca” lots of people go to sing their song and the they done it. The very special thing about that song is there’s a lot of people from around the world, they send their voices you know to the composer in Paris and that composer, he put all the voices together to make it to be a song. Very powerful songs. And then the people that protest you know…protest the Chinese embassies here in the U.S. adapt that song. The people in Berlin, Germany adapt that song. In Paris too. So yeah I feel like okay, I did something for the country but I don’t know if the people n the Vietnam have a chance to use it or not, for that I don’t know. But then the…just a few months after I release the songs and I decided to come back to Vietnam to visit my relatives and friends and I kind of afraid of the government going to you know…to catch me because that song, somehow you know, against the government. But that didn’t happen. But yeah, that’s the story I think…pretty interesting to tell. 

JL: Yeah, that was the last question of the interview. I have a question about what you said earlier you said something about the province you lived in your childhood. It started with a B I think. 

NQN: Yeah, yeah. I can write it down for you.