Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: ANH VUONG MANOCHI
Interviewer: Loan Xuan Tran
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LXT: My name is Loan Tran and today is May 16th, 2014. I am going to interview Anh Manochi and we are at the Bruggemeyer Library in Monterey Park, California and this interview is for the Vietnamese American Oral History project. I like to ask you if you can state your name, age, and where do you live currently.

AVM: My name is Anh Manochi. I’m fifty-one years old and I live in Monterey Park, California.

LXT: And can you tell me your day of your birth?

AVM: My day of birth is March 8th, 1963.

LXT: And can you tell me where were you born?

AVM: I was born in Vietnam.

LXT: Did you grew up there?

AVM: I grow up until sixteen.

LXT: Sixteen?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: And that’s when you left the country?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: And can you describe to me a bit about your parents?

AVM: My parents—my father and my mother are both from China and they were born in Vietnam also. My dad passed away when I was young—when I was about eight. And when I was
about sixteen the Communist from the North came and took over. My mom took me and my sister and left the country.

LXT: Did you know how your father died?

AVM: Some kind of disease. Sick.

LXT: And how did they meet?

AVM: Well, she—they don’t talk much about—my mom don’t talk much about that and even if I asked she don’t say—.it’s more like—it’s too intimate to tell their children how they met. That’s the culture. Back then it’s very old-fashioned way. You don’t get involved to know how they met.

LXT: Does your mom still talk about your father?

AVM: No. No. Not if I have to ask her, but she usually answer—.run around—never give me straight-forward answer.

LXT: And do you still have any memories about your father?

AVM: No. Not that much. All I remember when I was a kid—I look—my memories all from a pictures—photo pictures—that my mom have—taking from when my father was still alive.

LXT: And how many siblings do you have? Can you tell me their names?

AVM: I have one older brother—three years older than me—and one younger sister—two years younger.

LXT: And what do you remember most about growing up in Vietnam?

AVM: Back then—just being a child—.play—go school—nothing to worry about it until the Communists come in—all I see is people running—you know—they think they have a happy life since the war is over, but it’s not.
LXT: And what languages do you speak?

AVM: I speak Vietnamese, Cantonese, a little Mandarin.

LXT: And do you speak different languages in different settings? Like—at a certain place—home, school, work?

AVM: Right now I speak—most is English, Vietnamese and Cantonese. It depends on my friends. We speak like a—.if I have a Chinese Vietnamese friend, I speak all three languages with them—like English, Cantonese, and Vietnamese. And if I have an American friend, I speak English. It depends.

LXT: And what did your family members did for work in Vietnam?

AVM: Business. We selling—my uncle—he’s selling propane gas—some kind of business.

LXT: You don’t remember?

AVM: No. My grandma—she’s a wholesale produce—like vegetables—like produce—wholesale—.in market. And my mom is helping my grandma. And my uncle—he has his own business—since my dad passed away when we were young so my mom have to take my brother and my sister and go live with my grandma, because by herself she cannot support three children—.so she has to go and move in to live with her mother-in-law—which is my grandma and that’s how my mom and my grandma raised us—my brother, me and my sister.

LXT: And what is your current job occupation?

AVM: I’m more like a poker dealer in casino.

LXT: Have you have any jobs before? Any other jobs before—

AVM: When I just came to the United States, I do all kinds of work..like in a restaurant and I’m a waitress when I’m in school and when I moved out in California. I just happened to find jobs in casino and most of my jobs is in casino for twenty something years.
LXT: And how many times have you been married?

AVM: Two times.

LXT: And can you tell me a bit about your first husband?

AVM: I met him in college and then we got married. No, actually, we were in college and as soon as we finished school and we moved out to California and we get married so that’s how I have two children with him and then we get divorced.

LXT: Is there a reason why you guys got divorced?

AVM: Conflict of interests, I guess. Fall out of love, I guess.

LXT: And what is his ethnicity?

AVM: Uh?

LXT: What is his ethnicity? Like what—what is—what race is he?

AVM: What race?

LXT: Yeah.

AVM: He’s a Vietnamese refugee also—yes.

LXT: And can you tell me about your second husband? How did you guys meet?

AVM: My current husband is in a—I meet him through work and we dating and we just happened to get married and he’s a very good man.

LXT: And what ethnicity is he?

AVM: He’s Italian.

LXT: Okay. And did your parents have any issue with you marrying an Italian compared to a Vietnamese person?

AVM: No, I think—I guess. At first, she don’t like—she’s old-fashioned—back in her culture she’s don’t like—kids marry different race. When it came to me, she don’t object that much be-
cause this is my second marriage anyway. My sister—before I married my current husband—she married to a—an American also—so my mom get over with that—she got no objections—she didn’t say anything.

LXT: And what are some of the family traditions and customs you kept here in America? Like is there something you usually do in Vietnam that you don’t do here?

AVM: We don’t do—I don’t celebrate that much—since my mom is not live close to me—so I don’t keep up with those old traditions that much. The only thing that I keep up with is Chinese New’s Year because my aunt is here and she’s kind of like my second mom so—Chinese New’s Year I usually go over and wish her a happy new year and good health—good life for the new year.

LXT: Did you guys try to keep with traditions or customs when you guys first arrived here from Vietnam?

AVM: Traditions—it’s kind of like—to me—the good one I keep..the bad one—is—like—traditions—how to say—Chinese people is more like teaching their children respect to the elderly and when they need help and you suppose to help out—that kind of culture. Traditions—

LXT: Did you guys practiced your Chinese customs and traditions in Vietnam?

AVM: In Vietnam—well—we have the same culture and the same traditions and all the New’s Years and it’s all happened so it’s always practice with that. But in America everybody is spread out and if you have family close by in the same city you can keep up with the old traditions, but since my brother and my sister in different state and different city and my cousins is in other state and other city—or other country—so it’s hard to keep with the traditions.

LXT: Since you guys—
AVM: We try once in awhile to come by and we all try to get together and go eat together and keep up with the update—get in touch—otherwise everybody’s busy—making a living.

LXT: Like for your marriages—did you did the whole Christian religion way or the Chinese way?

AVM: It’s more like a Christian way—he’s a Catholic, but—we—it’s the Christian way.

LXT: Do you practice Catholicism?

AVM: No.

LXT: But do you believe in anything?

AVM: No.

LXT: Have you ever experimented?

AVM: No. I believe don’t harm nobody and don’t make wrong stuff—just live like a right person—no cheat, no steal. Don’t do nobody harm.

LXT: So let’s talk about the war time and post-war experiences. How did the war in Vietnam affect your family and your community?

AVM: The war is—I live in the city so I don’t see the war happen—so I don’t know how bad that is but after the Americans redraw and the North came over and took it. They try to do anything to take your stuff and that’s why we have to leave Vietnam. And family—relatives is all spread out. So it’s hard—in a way it’s more sad that family is spread out and family is not around close together and it’s not as close as we want to be.

LXT: Can you name some of the places where your family lives now?

AVM: I have uncle—one uncle in Switzerland—one aunt in Australia—one cousin in Boston—I have..some—one cousin in France—and that’s it. Canada. An uncle in Canada. Some cousin in Canada.
LXT: How did you feel when the Americans withdrew from the War?

AVM: How I feel back then?

LXT: Yeah.

AVM: Well—I feel nothing—just kid. We thought the war over and everything is going to be peaceful and we do celebrate it, but just right after—the government—the Communist try to take everything. They put my uncle in jail. My aunt in jail. And took our property and say that—make us sign papers..so they can have it—so it’s just robbing you blind.

LXT: Were did you live during the war?


LXT: Saigon?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: And were any of your family members involved in the war?

AVM: No. Nobody involved in the war.

LXT: Did they mostly try to keep to themselves?

AVM: We have nothing to do with the war. We just live—we just live like a normal person.

LXT: Did your mom or your dad talk about—

AVM: My mom don’t talk about it. We usually don’t talk about that.

LXT: And what do you remember most about the war? Like your impressions?

AVM: We were young, so I don’t remember much. All I see is some of it on TV—the fighting and people dying on TV. Like I said, I lived in the city—I never see the fight—not like the central Vietnam—I lived all the way to the South so I don’t see the fighting so I don’t know how bad the war is and too young to know anyway.

LXT: Do you have any specific memories you remember about the final days of the war?
AVM: On the final days, all I hear is fighting and once in a while—back then I’m still kid—still run outside and play and when I hear a bump or a big noise I just run back in the house for an hour, half an hour and if everything is quiet I run outside and play again. So just being a kid.

LXT: What is it like leaving your home and country? How did you feel?

AVM: How do I feel? Actually—I scared. When my mom tell—one day my mom came home she said let’s pack and go so we all pack and go with her quietly and I found out we’re gonna sneak out to the boat so we can leave the country. Scared, scared of getting caught and if we get caught they are going to throw us in jail and I never been in jail before so I don’t know—I’m scared so just sneak out quietly and luckily—everything’s is smooth. Nothing happened.

LXT: What was the reason your mom gave you to—the reason why you guys leave Vietnam?

AVM: That I really don’t know why she makes the decision to leave because my uncle leaving and lot of her friends leaving—either you have money you can pay the government by go—to get out—legally they will not put you in jail or you can try to sneak out—and if you sneak out and then you get caught they put you in jail and that’s reason why she made the decision to go. Actually, probably because they think there is no future to live there. If you have a little bit of property or business or two or three houses—they come in and they just take it or they find all kind of reasons to put you in jail say—being rich is still—it’s guilty for no reason they just put you in jail—they say they are going to—reform— actually the word I was thinking about and I just remember is called reform—they are going to reform you—they put you in jail and they want to educate you and reform you and they make you sign a piece of paper and they just take your properties—your house, your car—and they say you willing to let them lend and use your property—that’s is I think that’s why probably is why mom decide to leave. But my mom
doesn’t have money so—not enough to pay to go out legally, so we just snuck in—I mean snuck out. Try to escape.

LXT: Could it be also..do you think it could also be about you’re Chinese living in Vietnam?

AVM: Not really. Vietnamese the same way. If you—even my uncle..he’s whole—my uncle the one I live with—he just have a small job before—the government—the Communist took over. He’s more like a—they divide by village—like a city—maybe a town. Each town they have a town dealer like a—maybe it’s called like a city council here—in American it’s more like a city council. Each city they have several council here, but in Vietnam it’s more like a town they divide how many towns, town leader, something like a that—just a small job but they still have to put him in jail—I mean reform.

LXT: Like a reeducation camp?

AVM: It’s more a reform—they use the school facility to tell you—we were kids—we have nothing to do with the officials or city officials anyway. Every weekend they tell you call every household to go meeting at night—like after 6 o’clock a night. And we go—sometimes we go in meeting—some higher officials go meeting—they just lock you in the facility and take the bus and they make you go on the bus and load you out—reform—they call reform—what’s the word I just use?

LXT: Reeducate?

AVM: No. The other word. It’s more like a reform. It’s more like they want to brainwash you.

LXT: Did you attend school after the war?

AVM: Yes. I did. A couple of years. It’s 1975-76-77. I did go to Vietnamese class so those two years I go school. But every time I go school they don’t teach you—educate you anything—it’s just every day we go school it’s more like reform you—they teaching you how to—they want to
brainwash you. It’s no more education. So finally I just give up. I told my mom I don’t want to school anymore and then ’78 that’s when I left Vietnam in 1978.

LXT: Did you actually stop going to school?

AVM: I stop going to school too.

LXT: Where there any like—.

AVM: In ’76, ’77 I go school. My mom—I remember going school but it doesn’t have anything to learn much. All they say is about how good the Communist and this and that—it’s more like they brainwash you and try to reform you—so I just give up—I told mom I don’t want to go school anymore and then a year later we just left the country.

LXT: Was the name Ho Chi Minh talked about a lot during school?

AVM: They talked how good is Ho Chi Minh—yeah it’s more like how they keep telling you Ho Chi Minh and how good the Communist is and all those stuff.

LXT: How did your family supported during the war? Were they for the North or South? Was there any division?

AVM: They don’t support any side. They just live like a normal—in the South—doing business—like ordinary people. I guess—they have nothing to do with the war.

LXT: They don’t want to have anything to done with the war?

AVM: No.

LXT: They don’t have a preference for which side they want to win?

AVM: Of course we want the South. We want the South, but to me they don’t want to be in the North—to me back then I was still young, I don’t know what they thinking—all I know is is that once the war is over we thought it’s going to be peaceful and nobody’s going to—they not going
to draft the sons to go into the military anymore so we all happy, but short happy. They just—and the next day they just coming over and try to take from you.

LXT: So how did you leave Vietnam? Can you describe to me the journey?

AVM: My uncle, which is my mom brother, older’s brother—one day—he has money so he paid—he paid the government to get out of Vietnam—the government—the Communist—they crooked—they took money—but they took American money, US money or gold—so each person have to pay how many piece of gold for each person or how much American money to get out of Vietnam. So my uncle—he has money—so he paid for his whole family—his wife and his children and his mother-in-law. He told my mom—say we are going out tonight and let’s us go, so if you want to come just come and try to sick in. So mom come home and mom said let’s pack and go so we all go and luckily we snuck in the boat before they discover—I mean—we go to from one checkpoint to the next checkpoint and we got lucky to get in. The government—the one doing the checkpoint—it was so dark—they don’t care, they try to do count and they don’t go by name—they count each family how many people pay to get in so they count—so we snuck in—and then we lucky that we snuck in. We don’t have to pay. Actually, my mom don’t have money to pay. Because all her life after my dad passed away she’s working with my grandma and all the money they make—my grandma get money, but my mom did ask my grandma for money so she can send her children out but my grandma—she said no. But my uncle took my mom—my mom’s brother—he’s the one living in Canada right now. So, we get out that time. Actually, my brother—my older brother, and my cousin, a year older than me, all the male in my family—they snuck out in a small boat. It’s small like a—it’s not really a boat—what’s that thing—smaller than a boat—that you can do the paddle.

LXT: I think it’s called oar boat? I’m not sure.
AVM: It’s a very small boat. It can sit up to twelve people and it filled up. Very small boat and it’s just—they hook the motor machine in that small boat like that and then they just go out in the ocean—they lucky—the first time they attempt to go out to the ocean—the motor broke down so they have to come back, and they lucky they didn’t get caught by the coast guard. The second time they attempt to go out, they get out. I think they get out to Malaysia—

LXT: Cambodia?

AVM: No, Malaysia.

LXT: Malaysia? Philippines.

AVM: No. Malaysia. I think—maybe Thai came.

LXT: You mean, the Thai pirates?

AVM: No. The country around the ocean is—a Vietnam.

LXT: There’s Laos. There’s Cambodia. There’s Thailand.

AVM: Most of the people get to Thai and they have a camp there, refugee camp. He get there and a couple of months later, several months later, he gets sponsored by an American so that’s how he came to Port Arthur, Texas and my mom, me and my sister snuck in with my uncle and we left with a in a big ship, a big cargo ship and we end up to the Philippines. We stay there for half a year and we got information from my brother and then my brother sponsored my mom and me to America and that’s in 1979.

LXT: Your brother—what year did he leave?

AVM: He leave about several months—a year before I leave. He leave about 1977 or 1978.

LXT: And do you know how you got sponsored?

AVM: Some American. Some American—some orientations sponsored him and my cousins together. I have two cousins on that boat and they might be eight to ten guys—men. Most of
them—the youngest one is about seventeen, which is my brother—let me see—he’s about eighteen—I think he’s the youngest one—eighteen to twenty something—young men—most of them are young men.

LXT: Was there a reason why most of the males in your family left first?

AVM: Well, they have to let the males go first because otherwise the Communists—the government wants them to go—draft them and make them go in the military or reform—they call reform—now I remember the word, reform. You too American now, so if you work for the government you—everything say American good good, foreign war good good. The Communist don’t want to let you know about freedom good. They want to reform you. They want to brainwash you. That’s the word—a nice way they say they want to reform you.

LXT: And did he tell you or your mom that he was leaving or did he just left? Or was he encouraged to leave?

AVM: I know he’s leaving because my mom was doing preparations—get ready for him to leave because we were trying to do some dry food so he could bring with him and they—when they try to sneak out of the country.

LXT: And how did your brother find you guys in the camp afterwards? I’m pretty sure that was—

AVM: That time my aunt is still in Vietnam so they probably try to—I don’t know—by letters—we receive letters from him—somehow my mom receive the letters in the Philippines say that he arrived in America and got his address and his information and she just—actually we were was—Canada wants to sponsor my mom and that time my mom just got information that my brother just accept and is in America and so my mom just said no I don’t want to go to Canada—I wait for my son to sponsor me because my son is in America. That’s why I end up in America.
LXT: Did he already have a job by then?
AVM: No. I don’t know.
LXT: Was he a US citizen?
AVM: You have to be five years later to become a US citizen.
LXT: Okay. The fact that he found you guys—.
AVM: He go school—he come here—people back then you just come over they support you for the period that you they send you to school and you need to learn English or learn some working skill that—they train you—they have orientation—there’s a group of people to get start like learn English—how to get a job and we go from there.
LXT: Going back to your uncle, was it the same uncle that was put in jail?
AVM: No. That uncle is form my father’s side. The uncle I left with is from my mom—it’s my mom’s brother.
LXT: And when the war ended—completely ended—did any of them felt relieved that the war ended—that the Communist won.
AVM: I’m sure that they felt relieved—just relieved—I can feel that that time the war was over that I see everybody is happy, even the neighbors is happy and come out. But as soon as they come in in the next week or so the Communist people start taking your property away or they make you put your money in the bank and change the value of the money and you get no freedom. That’s how the people found out that the government is going to take everything that’s why people leave.
LXT: So you mentioned you and your mom. Did anyone else snuck in with you guys? What happened to your sister?
AVM: Three of us.
LXT: The three of you?

AVM: Yes. Three of us. My mom, me, and my sister all snuck in.

LXT: And did your uncle try to bring anyone else besides the three of you guys?

AVM: He brought one of my cousins—a lady—as soon as get sponsored—my brother to America—I didn’t get any touch with her. I think she come to America too. One man he working for my uncle for a long time and my uncle told him if he can snuck in he can go. So my uncle snuck five people in to the ship.

LXT: In the community that you lived, where a lot of people try to leave? Or did most want to stay in Vietnam?

AVM: Not really. Nobody knows who leaving and who’s staying. You are not suppose to let nobody know. If you let somebody know and if that person don’t like you, they report you to the Communist and they will come and take you and put you in jail. I’m sure nobody tell nobody. Close family know that you going.

LXT: Did you notice like a lot of people that suddenly disappear?

AVM: No. I don’t know.

LXT: You kept to yourself?

AVM: Like I say—I was too young to know.

LXT: So what happened to your grandma, the one that stayed in Vietnam. Did she stay in Vietnam for all her life?

AVM: Yeah. She passed—that time she’s old—1975 she’s already old. So she’s not living that long. She passed away maybe five, six years later after the government took over. So she’s gone.

LXT: Did anyone stayed with your grandma? Take care of her?

AVM: My uncle there—still there that time—
LXT: The one in jail?
AVM: No. My father’s side has a lot of uncles.
LXT: Really? How many siblings does he have?
AVM: My father he has two uncles—he has two brothers, two sisters. My grandma lived with one of my uncle.
LXT: And do you still have family in Vietnam?
AVM: Not. Most of them are out of country,
LXT: Do you still have family in China?
AVM: Couple of my cousins is there, but just passed away. Not many, no. I guess no more relatives. All I know that I have one cousin, lady, one cousin, man, and they all passed away. No, not much family left.
LXT: What about China? Do you still have family in China?
AVM: No. That’s my mom’s side, a long time ago.
LXT: How did your family come from China to Vietnam? Was there a particular reason why?
AVM: I really don’t know. Probably business and it’s just like in Vietnam. When the Communist taking over, they don’t like the Communist—they just spread out.
LXT: And—
AVM: You know China was Communist way before Vietnam.
LXT: Were your parents also young when they left China?
AVM: My parents were born in Vietnam.
LXT: Okay, so it was your grandparents?
AVM: Yeah. Probably about business also. Chinese people is like business-minded. They don’t work for nobody. 9 out 10 they all doing business, they don’t like to work for people.
LXT: When you guys left Vietnam did you guys try to bring any certain items or processions?

AVM: We just bring the clothes on our back and just it.

LXT: They snuck you guys on a boat and then from the boat—

AVM: They take us out to the ocean and they load us to a ship. Because my uncle paid to go out legally, so they put a bunch of people in a big ship.

LXT: So he went on legally, but you guys snuck on illegally.

AVM: Yes. We snuck on illegal.

LXT: Once you guys transferred from the small boat to the big boat, did they try to keep track of everyone?

AVM: They don’t keep track. When they are counting the people to go to the small boat, we snuck in and that’s it.

LXT: How long were you guys there? What was the journey like?

AVM: We leaving late at night so it was very dark—it’s probably not a full money—so it’s very dark—it’s hard to tell. That’s why they can’t tell how many people were going into the boat. There’s five of us, my uncle snuck five people into the small boat.

LXT: What would of happened if you guys were caught?

AVM: If we get caught, we go in jail. Straight to jail and we don’t know how long we stay in jail. But if you are in jail, if you have money to pay them, bribe them they let you out a little bit early, I guess.

LXT: Would anything happened worst to your uncle because he was trying to sneak in other people?

AVM: Like I said we didn’t get caught so we don’t know.
LXT: So you guys came to the United States after getting sponsorship from your brother, what was your first impression of the US? Actually, first—where did you guys first arrived in the US? Do you remember?

AVM: When we first arrived, I think it was in California, San Francisco. And they have a bus to come pick us up, because it was a long fight, so we land in San Francisco I remember because they have a bus to come pick us up and put us in the hotel for the night and the next morning they take us out to the airport and we continue to the flight to Port Arthur, Texas and then we met my brother there.

LXT: From the time you left Vietnam to arriving to the US, do you know how long that was? Months? Years?

AVM: Actually, the ship that we driving, the journey was horrible, because the waves was so high and the ocean water kept coming into the ship, but the ship came to Indonesia and the captain wants to unload us there, but the government in Indonesia wouldn’t let us down, so they give us some supplies and tell us to leave and we end up in the Philippines and we have to park out in the ocean, they won’t let us in the port. The military ship from the Philippines came out and they park right next to us and they assist us and they make us park outside in the ocean and every day they have one ship come out and bring the food out. And sometimes the weather was so hot and sometime the food—.was put in plastic bags and each family has one bag, two bags of food, with the rice and meat in there, but sometimes it spoiled and we have to eat what they give us. We stay there for at least 6 months, and some of them get sponsored by other countries, depending on what countries, some of them go to Canada, United States. Some of them go to France, you know different country. When it come to a—Canada wants to sponsor my mom, me and my sister, my mom got just got information about my brother and she say she’s are going to wait. So,
we get pick to go to America and they pick a lot of people that already have some sponsored and just wait for paper to process to go into Philippines city where the refugee camp and the rest of it no sponsor like my uncle, nobody sponsored him and his wife and his five children and they have to go to the island camp and that how they have the Philippines camps in the islands. Later on, he get sponsored by Canada—country so he how he live in Canada now. I live in there for about—actually we came out in ’78, during Christmas time and by the time we get paper and process, me and my mom end in America end up in Sept ’79 so it was less than a year.

LXT: So late 1978?

AVM: Yeah, it was right before Christmas because I remembered that right when we get to the Philippines it was Christmas time and from outside looking in, it was a beautiful city. Because Christmas time all the lights—and by the time we get sponsored and come to America, it was less than a year.

LXT: It’s less than a year.

AVM: Yeah.

LXT: And you went from San Francisco to Texas?

AVM: From Philippines, to San Francisco—rest one night—and fly from San Francisco to Texas.

LXT: You flew from the Philippines to San Francisco to Texas. What was it like to fly on the time? I’m pretty sure that it was your first time.

AVM: Yeah, it was my first time. I just remember sleeping a lot.

LXT: Were you scared at all?

AVM: Nah. Not really. The scariest thing was sneaking out, being afraid of getting caught. It was so quiet. It was so quiet. It was like—miles—we try not to draw attention or get caught.
LXT: Where there other refugees on the plane as well? To San Francisco?

AVM: I don’t remember that much on that. I just being happy to get out. Yeah. And go to the new land. We called it a new land, new opportunity.

LXT: Do you remember hearing stories about America when you were little?

AVM: No.

LXT: You just know that they were part of the war?

AVM: Hmm. We don’t know anything. All I know is just go school, play, eat.

LXT: Was there a reason why you settled in Texas? Was it because your brother was there?

AVM: Yeah. The sponsor was in Texas. That’s how he end up there.

LXT: And when you stepped off the plane and into San Francisco, what was your first impression like of the US?


LXT: Radically different from what you experienced in Vietnam and in the Philippines?

AVM: Doesn’t think much anyway, because the worry is over. It just happy to get here.

LXT: I know that you settled in Texas—why did—how did you came to live here in Southern California?

AVM: I met—like I say—I met my first husband when I was in school and he finished school and try to find a job and I end up coming out here with him.

LXT: So when you arrived in Texas, they put you in school?

AVM: Yeah. We were young. They try to put us in middle school or high school.

LXT: Like where you supposed to be at at your age level?

AVM: Actually, they put me one year back because I’m a bit older, but since I don’t know anything—no English or anything—that’s why they put us in school. By the time I come in 79, I’m
16 and they put me in eighth grade, actually at that age I’m suppose to be in ninth grade, but they put my in eighth grade. They call it ESL, English as a second language, something like that. And we have two, three periods of English, one period of math and one period of history. And history—I don’t understand that much because I don’t understand English so usually I fall asleep in class. I try to learn English as much as possible.

LXT: Like how did you feel—

AVM: But math is no problem, I got taught in Vietnam and math is easy for me.

LXT: Like how did you feel about being put in a school, in eighth grade, and with no prior experience with speaking English.

AVM: It’s nothing we can do, it just that have to learn as much as we can. It’s just survival. In order to move on with your life, you need to learn some English. And if you want to go to work, you need to learn English anyway—so

LXT: Did your mom try to learn English?

AVM: Yeah. It’s hard for her to learn English.

LXT: You mentioned an aunt here, like living close to here, how did she leave Vietnam?

AVM: Her son sponsored here. So she came in 1990—.maybe 80s something. Her son is doing the paperwork to sponsor her from Vietnam. She came out legal, by sponsor.

LXT: So she live in Vietnam longer than you guys?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: You mentioned how you came to live in Southern California and school. By the way, did you went to a university after high school?

AVM: Yeah, I went to a university.

LXT: Which university?
AVM: Lamar University of Beaumont, Texas. I finished—take me five years to finish—I still have some problem with my English. I know just enough to get by, but to me if I can—I think at time it doesn’t matter. I try to learn as much as I can and if I don’t know that much—I still learn a little bit.

LXT: And do you remember the first city you lived in California?


LXT: And from Texas to California is that your first time you lived in another state than Texas?

AVM: Yeah. That’s when I finished school and my first husband is moving out—actually I moved from Texas out to Vegas. I live in Vegas for less than a year and then he decide to move out to California because of the job—the man that my ex-husband worked with moved out to California to open a casino. So he moved out and that how we end up in California.

LXT: When you first arrived here to the US from Vietnam, did you received any financial support from any organizations, church, individuals, family?

AVM: I’m sure my mom received some support because—a little support till we get a job—so as soon as we get a job—most of the paperwork or stuff is run by a non-profit immigration so it’s free. If we need some paperwork or something like that, we go to that—I think it’s called Immigration Center—Refugee Center thing—so we have any problem with paperwork we go there to help us fill out the paperwork and it’s non-profit so we don’t have to pay and that time it’s easy to get a job. My mom found a job at a restaurant—working—helping out in the kitchen—even me I work summertime, too. School time is from September to June, but summertime we get three months—so I have that three months in a Chinese restaurant—so they hire to help out in the kitchen doing some work, doing some cleaning so we get paid.
LXT: You mentioned that you went to college. Do you remember your major?

AVM: I was accounting major.

LXT: So how did you end up working in a casino, becoming a poker dealer for most of your life?

AVM: Casino—it’s—that time they need a lot of—they hire you right away. You know how to run the game, they hire you, so it’s easy for you to get a job and the pay is good, so that how I ended up on a casino.

LXT: So how do you feel about your decision to come to the US?

AVM: I feel—that my mom make the right decision, I think. I don’t think I can survive in Vietnam. With all the freedom here and the opportunity that we—it get me a chance to educate myself—improve myself—then I think it’s the best way that my mom decided to come—I mean to get out of Vietnam.

LXT: So you think your mom made the right decision?

AVM: I’m sure, yes. Never look back. Hundred percent we are happy here.

LXT: Okay. What were some of the challenges you experienced in starting a new life here? Like learning how to speak English?

AVM: At first—it’s hard, but I get use to it.

LXT: Okay. Who helped you find a home here in the US? Or did you moved in with your brother?

AVM: Yeah, we all moved in. We all lived together with my brother and my cousin. Let me see—1 2 3 4 5—plus—actually 8 of us living in one room—two room house—8 of us. All I remember when we first came to the United States—all the women was in one room and all the men in another room. Actually, I think it’s a 1 room apartment—house. It’s a very small house. Some of them have to live in the living room. And then when we got a job, and I have a part-
time job, we make a little bit of money and we moved to a bigger house. We moved to a 2 room house—apartment. And then we just work and save money and move from a better house and a better house.

LXT: And did your brother receive any help? Financially to get that first house?

AVM: Oh, that I don’t know.

LXT: You don’t know?

AVM: By then, I was in school. All I remember of that time was me going to school and working part-time and we pay our own rent—our own food.

LXT: And how old were you when you got your first job?

AVM: Oh, first job. Let me see. I go school and then I go work in summertime. I remember in summertime I go work. Three months. I never see my pay, because the restaurant that hired me is Chinese and my mom is Chinese and they speak Chinese and every time I get paid, they paid my mom. I don’t see my paid check. I actually just glad to help out my mom anyway. My brother when he go school—when he’s in high school—he still work part-time in the restaurant as a bus-boy—so we all worked. The person that doesn’t work was my sister.

LXT: What are some similarities and differences between your old community in back in Vietnam and your new one here in the US?

AVM: Community—everybody has their own lives here—they mind their own business—more privacy.

LXT: Is that different in Vietnam? Was there more of a community togetherness?

AVM: I really don’t pay attention. Anyway, like I say back in Vietnam I was still young—I remember go to school and go out and play with friends and that it, nothing else.

LXT: And have you ever encountered racism in your neighborhood or work place?
AVM: Not—a little bit.

LXT: Like, what? Words or actions or anything that they did to you?

AVM: Just a little bit. The first one I encounter was in California and a woman said Chinese people something like that and I said what about Chinese? That’s it. Nothing really major. Actually, I don’t take things seriously, you know. If they don’t—they joking around—I take it as a joke—but if they pushing again and I will say something, but if they say Chinese people this and that and I just say ‘Are you sure?’ and they say something else and I say they joking around so I don’t take it serious.

LXT: Do you think that they don’t encounter people of a different race as much? Since you live in Monterey Park and it’s mostly—

AVM: No. I was really surprised when I came to California. I see so many different race—different ethnic group—so many—back in Texas all I see is Chinese or Vietnamese or Black and White people. Here, I see all different race like Philippines—all different ethnic group—so many—I was so surprised.

LXT: What were the reason why you choose to live in Monterey Park today?

AVM: My aunt live in Monterey Park and I’m having problems with my first marriage and my aunt is the one who is helping with my kids so that why I end up in Monterey Park.

LXT: And this aunt is your mother’s—

AVM: My mom’s older sister.

LXT: The one that left Vietnam later than you guys?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: How do you identify yourself in American society? Like Asian, Asian American, Chinese American?
AVM: Asian. I am an Asian American. If I hang around with my Chinese friends—they say this I say I’m more an American kid. My culture is more like an American culture.

LXT: Do you have any funny or memorable experience of culture shock?

AVM: No.

LXT: Anything that was too surprising or did you just took it in?

AVM: Yeah.

LXT: And are you a citizen?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: What was the process like to become a US citizen?

AVM: Five years, if you live in America for five years you can become a citizen.

LXT: Do you have to take a test?

AVM: Yes. You have to put the application in and they call you in for an interview and you become a citizen and after you become a citizen you sworn in to get your citizenship.

LXT: So is everyone in your family is a citizen now?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: Do you vote in the US elections?

AVM: Yes.

LXT: Is there any particular reasons why or did you just want to vote?

AVM: I want to vote. For myself—for better the country—so they can hear your voice.

LXT: In contrast to—.

AVM: Yeah, to get involved.

LXT: In contrast to what you experienced in Vietnam?

AVM: Yes.
LXT: And how do you get news and information? Like TV, radio, newspaper?

AVM: Nowadays, it’s TV. Likely, I get the news from my radio because I spend so much time driving—it’s on the radio—I listen to radio news and traffic. Most of my news is from the radio now.

LXT: Where you get the news is it primary in English or Vietnamese?

AVM: English.

LXT: Have you ever gone back to visit Vietnam?

AVM: I haven’t. My mom went back a couple of time. Several times. But I haven’t. I probably won’t go back—for travel—to visit—yes, maybe—but I haven’t gone back.

LXT: Was there a reason why your mom went back to Vietnam?

AVM: She still—she went back there to see my cousin. She like to travel. She retire now. She’s not working, every where she goes somewhere. Vietnam or to Australia to see my aunt or Canada to see my uncle. Every year, she picks one spot and she goes. She 70 something now and all she do is go too many places as possible when she can.

LXT: When she first go back to Vietnam, how did she feel about that? Did she tell you about it?

AVM: I don’t know. She don’t tell me much.

LXT: And do you keep in touch with family members that are spread out—

AVM: Not much. No. My uncle I never get in touch, only my mom.

LXT: And are there any songs, images, or artifacts that reminds you of Vietnam?

AVM: No. Actually, no.

LXT: And—
AVM: There’s no bad memory or anything. It just—all I remember of that time is me go school, eat and play, that’s it. And only little bit scary memories when the North came close to the South and all I hear the noise from the fight, that’s it. Once in awhile, I hear a big bomb and that’s it.

LXT: And in your opinion, what would become of Vietnamese culture in America?

AVM: Technically, I’m more of a Chinese culture. Vietnamese culture—I don’t adapt to that because in Chinese culture—my mom is—my grandma and my uncle all celebrate old Chinese traditions culture and when I come to America those culture slowly disappear.

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

AVM: First generation—my mom’s generation?

LXT: No. It would be you.

AVM: Since I live in America for so long, I think I’m more like an American generation, a little bit—I think I’m more open-minded. I think my kid’s generation they more like American generation. I’m open-minded. Very opened minded. Nothing bothered me, like different races—I see everybody the same—I try to treat everybody the same. I got no opinions. I don’t think bad things about different race.

LXT: Since you don’t really follow Vietnamese culture or traditions, is there any aspect from Vietnam—like Vietnamese aspect you keep—like do you eat the food—listen to the music?

AVM: I eat the food. I cook that food myself sometime. But—I eat all different kind of food.

LXT: And have you ever been to Little Saigon in Orange County?

AVM: When I first came to California, I go to Westminster and Little Saigon a lot—that’s when I’m still with my first husband. But now—I live in Monterey Park—busy life—kids and work—I don’t go to Little Saigon that much.
LXT: And what are the some important things future generation should—like Vietnamese, Chinese, Asian American—should remember about their heritage?

AVM: Their heritage—I don’t expect my kids much. All I expect my kids is to be a good person and study and get a good job and that’s all I expect, that’s it.

LXT: Do you feel like there is a sense of lost?

AVM: No, not really. Since that’s not my heritage—like I say I’m a Chinese—my grandma—my ancestors are all from China—even I was born in Vietnam, but it’s more like a Chinese heritage—Vietnamese heritage is not my heritage so I don’t.

LXT: Even with the Chinese heritage, do you feel like there is a sense of lost? Between you and your kids?

AVM: No.

LXT: Like do you wish that they know a bit more about certain things?

AVM: No, not really because it’s more—those are old traditions—it’s more—it’s not open-minded. Some of them are not open-minded things and I don’t want my kids—I want my kids to be open-minded, to think freely and not have to tie down with certain heritage that you cannot think freely because of your heritage or your culture. I want my kids to be more free and more open-minded—that different ethnic and different race is okay. It doesn’t matter. It doesn’t have to be married to the same race, same—something like that. I’m okay with everything. I’m open-minded. Like I say, I’m more of an American since I live—my memories—it’s more of American way than a Chinese, Vietnamese way.

LXT: So, do you prefer certain aspect of American culture identity than Vietnamese?

AVM: I don’t really know. All I ask is respect—if you respect people, they give you respect back, and to treat people like they will treat you, that’s it.
LXT: You views have been influenced by living in America. Does your parents—your mom have certain views that she will never change? Or has she grown to since living here in America?

AVM: I think she change. She not that happy when my sister married an American, but she came to accept it and when I marry to my second husband—an American—she accept it—she changed.

LXT: When you married your first husband, who is a Vietnamese refugee as well, does she has no—did she approve of that pairing?

AVM: No. She doesn’t approve that much, because he’s a Vietnamese and not Chinese, even though he’s Asian, but she’s Asian.

LXT: She prefer you guys to marry another Chinese guy.

AVM: Yeah, that’s why I say about the heritage—not open-minded. I don’t miss all that. It’s more like a old culture, old tradition way. They try to set me up like a arrange marry—I will not tell her no, but I do some things to get the other person to turn away and run. But she did—she even did try to arrange marry to me, but I pick the one I want to get marry and by then when I marry my first husband, it’s too late for her to say anything. So she just let it go. Like I say, you ask me if I miss most about the heritage—all the old heritage is to respect elderly and taking care of your elderly, that’s the one I like. But the other old traditions thing. I don’t miss it that much. Like I say, I am an open-minded person.

LXT: So can you say that you pick and choose what you like from the Asian culture and from the American culture.

AVM: Yeah, which one is good one, I keep it.

LXT: Okay. I don’t have anymore questions. Is there any last words you want to say?
AVM: No. All I say that I come to live to America. It give me opportunity. It’s—when you come to America, as long as you are willing to work, you survive. In Vietnam, you never know when you get no job or anything and even if you have a job or money, the government tries to squeeze you and you cannot breathe. Even nowsaday, once in awhile, when I open the Vietnamese radio I hear some—you cannot talk freely in Vietnam. If you tell me to go live there, I don’t know if I can go live there.

LXT: Okay. Well, thank you very much for letting me interview you.

AVM: I hope I can do you some help.

LXT: I learn a lot today. You lived a hard life.