Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: HUNG QUOC LUU
Interviewer: Vivian Luu
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Track 1 (00:27:28)

VL: Hello. Today is Saturday, May 3rd, 2014. This is Vivian Luu with the Vietnamese [American] Oral History Project. I am interviewing Hung Luu at his home in Temple City, California.

VL: Can you please state your full name, age, and where you live currently?

HL: Tên là Hùng Quốc Lưu. Sinh ngày 29 tháng 1 năm 1959. Sinh ở Phan Thiết, Bình Thuận, Việt Nam.¹

VL: What are the names of your parents?

HL: My parents – my dad’s name is Lưu Xướng.

VL: Can you spell that out please?

HL: L-U-U, last name. First name, X-U-O-N-G.

VL: How about your mother’s name?

HL: My mother’s name is Trác Thị Dương. Last name, T-R-A-C. Middle name, T-H-I. First name, D-U-O-C.

VL: Can you please describe your parents?

HL: My parents is- they live in Phan Thiết, Bình Thuận in Vietnam on the small town.

VL: What did they do?

¹ My name is Hung Quoc Luu. I was born on January 29th, 1959. I was born in Phan Thiết, Bình Thuận, Vietnam.
HL: They got a business for chop the pork.

VL: Pork?

HL: Pork.

VL: Okay, and how many siblings did you have?

*Pause in Recording*

VL: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

HL: I got total three brothers and three sisters.

VL: Were you the oldest, the youngest? What was the birth order?

HL: The older is – his name is Lưu Thọ. Last name, L-U-U. First name, T-H-O. The older, the older sister – her name – last name L-U-U, middle name M-Y, first name L-I-E-N [Lưu Thị Mỹ Liên]. The number three is older brother – last name is Lưu, L-U-U, first name P-H-U-O-C [Lưu Phước]. The next one is my older brother – last name: L-U-U, first name: Lộc, L-O-C [Lưu Lộc]. The next one, older sister – last name, Lưu, L-U-U, middle name T-H-I, and first name A-N-H [Lưu Thị Kim Anh]. The last one, my younger sister – last name, Lưu, L-U-U, middle name M-Y, first name D-U-N-G [Lưu Thị Mỹ Dung].

VL: Can you describe your hometown to us?

HL: My hometown is Phan Thiết, Bình Thuận in Vietnam. Not a small town, but the town is kind of in the middle of my city. I live in the big city, but on my town.

VL: What are the main industries in your hometown?


VL: Oh, I was asking if your town had like major industries like was it a fishing town? Farming town?
HL: Oh, my town is the main thing is a fishing town. They can make everything like the fish sauce, so they can import and export out to another city – big city with the fish, shrimp, and all kind of seafood. The main thing is the sea whatever, the fish sauce, the fish.

VL: So, what did you do on your free time with your friends or family members?

HL: I usually in my free time and after my school, I can come back home and help my family, my dad and my mom, you know some - the small business. By that time, if I got some free time after I help my parents, I just be go play around with my friends by that time.

VL: Can you describe your schooling in Vietnam – how was your elementary school, middle school, or high school?

HL: The elementary school is a small school – they call the name, it’s Đức Thắng. D-U-C T-H-A-N-G. That’s the elementary school. When I go up another high school, so I transfer different school. The name of school – high school is P-H-A-N B-O-I C-H-A-U [Phan Bội Châu].

VL: Did you like school? What were your favorite subjects?

HL: That school is very good – I like that school. My favorite school is famous in my city. Everybody go to that school on high school. The favorite of mine in high school is I play the soccer. After school, I just go out and play with all my friends on the soccer by that time after school.

VL: What position did you play?

HL: I just play the midfield.

VL: Can you tell me more about your childhood memories?

HL: House?

VL: Like your house, maybe your neighborhood.
HL: Oh, the memory of my neighborhood so very, you know, friendly. We go all around and play with all my friend. All the neighbor the same age with me by that time. So, after I help my parents, so we just go around – play with all my neighbor and all my friend. I come all different – the same city, but all different streets. We just be hang out and play around and sit down and talking. It’s all the same thing, we just ride the bike and go around the city for fun.

VL: So, after you graduated, what did you do?

HL: After I graduate my high school and then I applied to go to college in the Saigon city. But by that time, they request a lot of the things and I’m just fail on that time, so I cannot pass on to go to college. And after that, I have to – my parents scared I go to the little soldier, go to Cambodia, so I’m just uh…inform I go to do for the Communist government. So, they call look like CALTRAN. So, I work in there too many years. Far from city I live, and sometimes I come back a month or two months. And that’s after I graduate high school.

VL: What did you do in that job that you just said was like the CALTRANS?

HL: CALTRANS – kind of look like I work outside in the street, mostly a lot, all the time every day. And we just work the way they want, so CALTRANS, you know fix on the street. You know, but they make the big job, the one I work on CALTRANS is kind of a big division I’m working. So, usually, I travel, work, and go all around the different city – up to South and North. Mostly I just stay out more than at my family.

VL: So, how did the Vietnam War affect your family and your community?

HL: Yes, the Communist affect a lot of my family. Mostly, they took away, they shut down all the business – so, affecting everything in my family. So, we cannot do anymore business, so we just run out. And all the neighbor kind look like a little change, so we cannot do anything about that. So, we have to stay away with my family – my brother, my sister. Everybody had to be go
on different way. We cannot depend on my parents no more with the business, because that is the way, you know, we cannot do alone like this.

VL: So, all your siblings moved to different places other than Phan Thiệt?

HL: That’s correct. We go all different city with my brother, except only my sister still hang around with my parents. But all my brother – we have to be go some whole different, you know, situation by that time. We have to move around, so can make a living.

VL: What happened to your parents’ pork business?

HL: Well, we just shut them down like this, so we cannot do anything about this stuff because they wanna go in the Communist rule from them. But my parents don’t like the way it is. And affect on the Communist, they count look like – the way before and by that time. The Communist changed all different way, so we cannot allow to do something because all my older brothers, they on the Vietnamese government and so affect on there. So, they cannot allow you to do anything by that time.

VL: So, where did you and your brother go to?

HL: Myself, I work at the CALTRANS. And my older brother, he have to go to Communist training – whatever in the camp. So, my second older brother, he lost in the war after 1975. We don’t know where they at right now, they just lost, probably they dead by that time. The number three – my older brother, he just went all the way down to South. So, he just go somewhere he work down in there. And my older brother, he go to the Communist training camp and after he came back, and then he just passed away.

VL: So you mentioned that your brother went to a Communist camp – do you know if it was a training camp or a re-education camp?
HL: They call it training camp education, but whole different rule and law in there. So, kind of look like they gotta be punish old government Vietnamese before.

VL: So, what do you remember most about the period – this time period in Vietnam? Did you see any violence happening in your hometown or did you see it while you were traveling and working?

HL: Yes, so I see a lot of different, you know, because they shut down all the business people, the one on the rich people before in Vietnam. So, they just shut them down. They go to took over, they try to rip off and take it out all from them stuff. Whatever they just call it – they just do something, they don’t want them to do business no more. They shut them down. They do too many ways, so let you disappoint and then, they can take away or whatever they can do. Kind of look like the new thing, so mostly every people, you know, they look like upset and nothing they can do. Kind of look like done, whatever they all shut down like this. That’s the way how Communists do it.

VL: So, where were you in the last days of the war – so, the last few days of the war?

HL: I’m just at home with my parents and by that time, I’m just hang around there. I cannot go anywhere. By this time, you know, the Communist took over, so I had to be stay home with them. And all my brothers still stay home with them too, but except only the second older brother. So, after 1975, so I don’t know where he move. Usually before he go up North, so we just thought he lost on by that war.

VL: So, when did you leave Vietnam officially?

HL: I leave Vietnam in 1979. By that time, I working at the CALTRANS and my older sister, she just connect to the boat whatever we try to escape. Well, actually, it’s not escape you know, we try to do the legal because Communist let you go. And my older sister – she applied for that
for me go and then she usually send some message for me, so I can catch up with that. And we just connect like this – I say what time we go, she let me know and I come back by that time. I leaving Vietnam from 1979 by the boat.

VL: So, why did your sister apply for you to go on the boat, but not herself?

HL: Because my parents, by that time, a lot of the younger look like me, so my parents don’t want me to go to war with Cambodia and Laos. By that time, the Communist people try always to be take away younger life people, you know, put in the war – whatever in the middle like this, so, they don’t care. So my parents – they don’t want me do me again, so they just get me out of that.

VL: So you said you were able to leave the country legally through the government – how was that possible?

HL: Yeah because I’m leaving legally. By that time, the Communist – they said if you part Vietnamese and Chinese, so you can go. So, that’s the way they want. And I have to show them all the paperwork and then that’s legal, so they leave me like this. My parents – so, they want me to go. And then I apply for that and they approve for that and then I can go.

VL: How did you feel leaving your family?

HL: Well, kind of look like I don’t want to go. I miss them, but by that time, I had to go. So, I had no choice. If I stay there, it’s might be my life will be miserable or different. You know, so it’s the way my parents think for me for the future. So anything in there, they can do whatever they want, whatever they can, so they can help get me out of the country by that time.

VL: What age were you at when you leave Vietnam?

HL: When I left there, I was around 19 years old.

VL: And were you leaving with people you knew or were they complete strangers?
HL: No, actually, all the people whatever I go on the boat are whole different. Some are from the same my city, I know. And some of them are all different city, kind of look like a mix. We just go in them, on the boat. We just stay right there, wherever they just arrival, wherever they landing on the boat. We don’t know. So, we know that we go different way. We just find out where we go onto a different future. That’s the way how they go.

VL: What was the boat journey like?

HL: The boat?

VL: Yeah, how was the trip to wherever you were going?

HL: Oh, the boat we just go on travel and we got a lot of people – over 300 people on the boat. We have to be sit there and whatever we can fight for that stuff. By that time, we all on the sea. Up and down, raining or whatever by that time. Storm – whatever is there. You have to be fight for that stuff. So kind of look like a little memory for me by that time, we got a lot of thing happen. We fighting on the boat for something else – for food or anything by that time on the boat. You have to be sacrifice like this.

VL: When you left Vietnam, what possessions did you bring with you? What family items did you bring? Did you bring any family items?

HL: No, you cannot bring anything in there – only clothes. And then my parents give me some gold – it’s about an ounce or something like this for the way I live. When I leave my family, just a little one or two ounce gold, so I can take myself and live with that. That’s it, nothing else I can bring because they don’t allow you to bring a lot.

VL: Do you still have that piece of gold by any chance?

HL: No, actually, it’s not. When I go arrival in Hong Kong, I got a little one or two ounce…I think a ring and the chain. And then when I arrival in Hong Kong, after the – they call the Black
Camp, the Sham Shui Po. After they living in there, and then I had to go out and sell this stuff. So, I can buy something stuff, so I can use daily every day before I looking for the job in Hong Kong.

VL: So, your boat took you to Hong Kong?
HL: Yes.

VL: Can you describe the Black Camp that you mentioned or the refugee camps you were at in Hong Kong?
HL: Oh, the refugee camp is Sham Shui Po – kind of look like really miserable, kind of look like they treat you like refugee. You have to listen what they say. Sometime whatever they want – kind of look like raining, they call every people come out and then they just count how many people in the camp. They want to make sure no one escape at that camp because if you escape or whatever any reason in there, you can be punished. So, all kinds of different punish in there, kind of look like some nasty stuff when I lived in the Sham Shui Po camp in Hong Kong.

VL: What kind of nasty things happened?
HL: They can hit you by the baton or whatever you do something wrong, they can punish you. Maybe they put you somewhere else or whatever they can hit you. Whatever they want.

VL: Was that the only camp you were at while you were in Hong Kong?
HL: Yes, the first camp. I have to live in there. That camp – Sham Shui Po.

VL: So, where did you move afterwards?
HL: After that, so I had to get all the paperwork. They transferred me to Kowloon, Tuen Mun – that is the camp I have to live over there. So, that’s the way I process paperwork and I live over there, Tuen Mun.
VL: How was the camp?

HL: The camp looked very good. Everybody – you have to be, all people in the big room and whatever you find out somewhere you can sleep. Not enough space, so you can sleep. But you have to find out wherever some place, so you can sleep. They give you food to survive for one or two weeks and the food from the government from Hong Kong. After that, you have to go looking for a job by yourself, so you can survive living every day before you got any different country pick you up.

VL: Did you take on any jobs while you were there?

HL: Yes, so I got two or three jobs over there. I just- actually, I cannot speak Chinese on Hong Kong, Cantonese. So, I had to get some on the friends on the boat on the way we go together. They help me out, so I just follow with them, go to work with them – kind of look like I do some the aluminum can, whatever the canned food. After that job, so I had to go another job. I work far away from the camp I living – it’s about 2-3 hours. Sometime I live over there, so whenever 1-2 weeks, I come back and then I take a look at the little office. If any of my name can call for interview, what country can pick me up. And then the last job I worked was wash the bus – the bus washer at the bus station in Hong Kong, the big station bus.

VL: So, you mentioned that you would go to the office to see if your name was on the list for interviews?

HL: Yes.

VL: Did you have an interview and how was your interview?

HL: Well, it takes about 8 months or something. And then I got my name and then they say they got the United States of America to pick me up. And then I got an interview and they ask me how do you know your cousin? And then I say: yeah, I know my cousin in there. How do you
think – what do you think when you come to the US? Or whatever you want to do in there. Very simple interview. After that, I didn’t say – I didn’t know if I passed or fail or whatever. They just say you go home. I just follow the news in there and they put on the notice on the board, so you can take a look outside the office – the big board. So, it takes me a few weeks and then I see my name and which day I can go to get a checkup – kind of look like an x-ray and whatever checkup before got pass. Then I’m waiting for which day I can departure to go to the US.

VL: So, you said you were sponsored by a cousin?

HL: Yes.

VL: So, someone in the family?

HL: Yes.

VL: Was that the first sponsorship or was there a sponsorship before that too?

HL: No, that was the only one sponsorship. He can sponsor me to the US.

VL: Why did you choose the United States or did you not have a choice at all?

HL: I don’t have a choice – I cannot choose anything, that was the way how they goes. If you don’t have someone in the US or whatever, so any different country can pick you up. So, you cannot pick. Whenever you have it, you just got it. You don’t have no choice.

VL: When did you officially leave the refugee camp for the United States?

HL: I leave the camp November 1980.

VL: And where did you, um, move to when you came to the United States?

HL: The first one, I’m arrival at Indiana - Indiana. I live in a city called Hammond, Indiana. When I arrive there, my cousin picked me up. And then I just lived with them in there a few months. Whatever in there I’m living. And then I got another cousin on California and then I moved from Indiana back to California.
VL: How was your life in Indiana?

HL: Kind of look like whenever you go in there, you just, you know, they care of you. The sponsor take care of you. You just go to school. The first thing you have to be learn how to speak English. And on the weekend, I go to the church with them – with the big (?) sponsor or whatever they is. And then we just go like this. I just learn on the speak English. You know, it’s just the first thing I have to do in Indiana. I don’t do anything at all.

VL: So, you mentioned that a church also sponsored you? So, you said your cousin sponsored you, but was there another sponsorship involved with that?

HL: Yes, some of the sponsor involve in that stuff because it belonged to the church. The couple parent – the couple person in there, they got on the Church. So, I have to go to the Church with them, they belong a part of this. I have to follow that - make the sponsor kind of look like the way they really happy and the way they want.

VL: Did you go to school over in Indiana or did you just -um, in that first few months just try to adjust to life in America?

HL: No, I just go to the school to speak English first. That’s the way, you know, I want. Well, that’s the way how it goes like this. You cannot do anything about this stuff, you know what I mean. You have to do like this way. You go to school, got some English, whatever you can do activity every day with them. It’s the first thing on America.

VL: What activities did you learn during this time?

HL: Well, it’s activities on how you living in the US, in here – America. So, you have to be activity every day. Go to how to get along (?) with the people here, the way you talk, and then you have to be learn how the way it is life over here. So, I got to be learn like this. (phone rings)
Track 2 (00:39:02)

VL: What were your first impressions of America?

HL: The first thing when I arrival in America, so my cousin picked me up in America. So, when I’m from Indiana and I moved to California. My cousin picked me up at the airport – LAX airport. Then we come to his house and then, I be rest a few days. I still continue to go back to another community college – kind of look like training, I just study about the English and by this time, I got some more English. I continue to study for assembly electronics at the same community college I study. In the morning, I study English and then afternoon, I study with the training electronics assembly.

VL: Was electronics assembly the job you wanted to do or – ?

HL: I thought (?) I had to do something because I had to study something quickly, so I can get something for me, so I can living every day and survive. And I had to do something I learn quickly, so I can get for living and pay for the rent and take care of some of my family in Vietnam by that time.

VL: How did you keep in contact with your family while you were over here?

HL: By that time, it’s very hard, so only I write down the letter and send for them. By this time, there’s no phone, no contact whatever you can do anything. By this time, in Vietnam, kind of little tight up. So, only thing I just do for them is write down the letter and send for them. And then I don’t know how long they can receive that. And then I contact back from them, they send back me the letter whatever, how the situation in Vietnam.

VL: And what did you talk about in those letters and you mentioned the situation in Vietnam?
HL: The letter just talking how they doing over there. So, I know it’s nothing they do over there at that time. I’m just telling what I’m doing over here – go to school, got something, and then maybe got some the job, got something for survive and living in here because in America, it’s very clearly. Either you go to school or you go to work, so one way or the other way.

VL: And where did you find your first job and what was it?

HL: When I find the first job, it belonged to another cousin on his – my cousin’s friend. He working on that company before. And then after school, I asked him does his company open job and then I can apply. When I apply, one or two weeks later, they call me go for the interview the job. After my interview for the job in there, about a week later, I got the job from the place I work in Santa Monica.

VL: What did you do?

HL: First of all, I go do assembly electronics – kind of look like assembly electronics in here. The company do electronics for computers by that time.

VL: So, besides going to school and going to work, what did you do in your free time?

HL: Well, after work, I’m not go to school no more by that time. After work, I come back home and just relax. I not do anything, I not go anywhere because sometimes I go by the bus by that time. It take me a long time and come back late. And then I had to wake up early, so noting a lot of activity everyday. I just come back home and relax.

VL: How was – how was life in America or in California different than your life in Vietnam?

HL: Oh, the life you can see is totally different by this time I arrival here. Over here, do whatever you want. You can speak, anything. Whatever is there is different in Vietnam. Vietnam, by that time, you cannot do anything. You gotta be under their control, Communist control you. You cannot do whatever you want in there, they just put an eye on you. You don’t know who will
good, who will be bad, who follow you. But in here, kind of look like you got free. Do whatever you want, but follow the rules and laws in America. Kind of look like very comfortable.

VL: So, besides knowing your family members in California, did you know anybody else that lived in Southern California or anywhere in California?

HL: By this time, no – only the cousin I know. Wherever I go to school, so I know some friends. We still contact, sometime we just go together on the weekend only. If I don’t work on the weekend, so we just meet together on the friends I know in here.

VL: What was your work environment like? Did you feel comfortable there? Did you make a lot of friends? (laughs)

HL: Yeah, we just go work there and we got a lot of work. We had a lot of fun, I got some friends in there by that time. We just go in there and working and got some friends, feel comfortable. After work, get out and go home. So, how the way it is in here.

VL: So, what were some of the challenges you had when you were living in America?

HL: Well, the big thing for me is I had to got the job. If you don’t go school, you have to be got a job for living, period – the first priority. So I had to work in there, I had to got something take care of myself and take care of the family. Something living in here, no one help you out. By that time, you got to be take care of yourself. Do whatever you can, so you can help yourself. You don’t need to depend no one. That’s the point.

VL: So, even when you had family over here, you didn’t want to depend on them? You wanted to make it out on your own?

HL: No, either you have your family here and then you have to help your family first of all in here. Everything, the first thing in here is a little difficult. So, you have to take care together first. After that, you can figure out how the family if you have family here. If not, you have to take
care yourself. You can living, pay the rent, whatever you can share the room or anything else – food or your personal, you can take of that, you no depend no one.

VL: Have you ever thought about going back to school or did you – once you were done with school, you were like I’m just going to work from now on?

HL: By that time, I don’t think I go back to school because I’m just working early, come back late, so no time to go back to school. By that time, a little different challenge, so I decide I not go back to school by that time.

VL: So, did you or your family practice any religions while you were in Vietnam and while you were here?

HL: No, we got some religion in Vietnam – the Buddhist already in Vietnam. So, it’s nothing in here. So, already in Vietnam the religion is Buddhism with my parents, my family.

VL: How did you continue your practice of the religion over here? I know you mentioned that in Indiana, you went to church, but that doesn’t seem like something you did in Vietnam.

HL: Well, that seems why I had to do like this because in Indiana, it’s a part of this. I have to follow them, so I go in there kind of look like the church with them weekend on Sunday only. I mean, whatever you living, whatever situation like this, you have to follow like this. You cannot be say you cannot do it or you can do. You just follow whatever the current you live in, whatever the current what you have to do. You have to do what you have to do.

VL: Do you have a spouse?

HL: By that time, no, it’s not. I still single by that time.

VL: So, how did you meet your future spouse then?

HL: Because when I meet with my spouse here, it’s on my younger sister. The time when I go back to my country from 1990, I visiting my dad. By that time, he got very sick and then he got
some letter from someone. He want me go back over there to see him. By that time, I go back visit with them a couple weeks. That time, I just meet with my wife right now because introducing from my younger sister. We just contact after I come back to the US. I just contact her by the phone and by the letter. That’s the time I just contact with my wife.

VL: So, once you – how did your relationship grow from that communication?

HL: By this time, we just talk and contact by the letter. Some point, we agree with everything. She try to get over here. She can help her family. I say okay, let me do some of the paperwork. They call do some paperwork for the name fiancée. Paperwork by that time only.

VL: So, once you and your wife were over here, how was the married life over here? Was it different than how you would be like in Vietnam?

HL: By that time, I do the paperwork – take a few weeks, they call it fiancée paperwork. And then, I go back to my country and had to do some ceremony over there in Vietnam style. I do some paperwork in there and I had to fly to Thailand in the US embassy in Thailand. By that time. I had to do some more interview for my wife over there. We stayed in Thailand with the interview and checkup the health in Thailand about ten days. After passed the interview and checkup everything passed, I fly with her to America.

VL: How were you able to help her adjust to life in America because you were once in her situation too?

HL: Yes, by this time, I got some job over here – a little stable. When the first time she come over here, me and her live with my cousin’s sister. The first thing here is – she had to go to the same thing with me, got the English. Go to community college, study some English in the morning. Afternoon, she go to another school, study for the nails. By that time, they call manicurist study at the school. She just do like this.
VL: You mentioned before that you lived with your cousin. How did it feel like to move out of your cousin’s out and move into your house with your wife?

HL: Well, we live there a couple years – about a year and a half, something like this. After that, we decide we gotta be living separate. We cannot live with them longer because her kids are already grown up, so they need some room. We make for them comfortable. We decide tell them ahead, so we can living our own life for me and my wife right now. They agree with that, so we all happy when we get out.

VL: So, besides going to school and working for both you and your wife, what did you two during the weekends or during the nights?

HL: The night, she come back late and I come back early. So we got like like – the life. We just sit down and relax. She just go day-by-day like this. Later, we just decide – about a year later, we decide we got some baby, so we have to prepare first when that happen.

VL: So, how was that process like? Did you want to have kids when you were younger or was this just part of your life plan?

HL: No, we have to plan. When we have a kid, we have to plan about a year ahead. So, we can prepare for financial. A lot of things happen in here and costs a lot of money. By this time, I have to work and I got the insurance. It’s okay by that time, it’s good – they can cover everything. But you have to take care some financial, a lot of things. When we both work, so you gotta put the babysit. How much they cost and a lot of things happened, so we have to prepare for that stuff. We know that.

VL: So, how did you tell your family about your life over here? You’re married, you have a new job, now you have a child. How did they respond over there?
HL: Well, I let them know. When we got in there, we got a kid. They’re very happy – both sides, from my wife’s side and from my family’s side. They’re all very happy. They say you guys gotta be take care of that. We say we know that, so we just let them know we have the first child in here. They’re very happy.

VL: Have you been back to Vietnam since you left in 1979?

HL: Yes, I went back from 1990, visit my father when he got very illness. By that time, 1990. And then, I back from 1992 and I take my wife go fly back with me to the US.

VL: Any other further trips or was 1992 your last trip?

HL: No, after that, 1996 – I go back to go visit my parents. Not my parents, but my parents’ wife side. We go back in there to visit my family in 1996.

VL: When they saw you, did they say you look different?

HL: Well, actually, kind of look like different. I took my wife and my first child over there with me for the first time. They’re very happy. This time, my kid is four years old already. I bring back with them all together, they’re very happy. We all enjoy by that time.

VL: So…

HL: In Vietnam.

VL: I’m sorry. When you left Vietnam, you were 20 years old. When you came back, you were at least 30-40 years old. Did you see a difference in the country?

HL: Yes, kind of a little different. By that time, I’m 32 years old, kind of look like different. A lot of different by I’m leaving twelve years. Not a lot of differences, some kind change a lot, but not a lot. But by that time, it’s very good. They got a little time, it’s the same thing. Twelve years old.
VL: So, when you came back, was there anything that you missed from the Vietnam that you left?

HL: Well, that’s the way you miss your family whatever in there. A lot of things by the time you got a little kid, a lot of things we missing or some friends over there. You cannot find them anymore. They have to be living somewhere else for living. A lot of things will be changed. You know that will be happen. It cannot be the same look like the little kid before – neighbor, street, or whatever. A lot of change, so you know that.

VL: Are you an American citizen over here?

HL: Yes.

VL: And why did you choose to take citizenship over here?

HL: By that time, you have to be – why not? You gotta be changed, you have to be take it. After five years, apply right away for the citizenship. I cannot be waiting nomore. You have more chance than any people else in here. I say why not? Just do and finish. Whenever you travel or something else, it will be comfortable. You got all paperwork done, so you don’t need to be wait anything else.

VL: Why couldn’t you wait to be a citizen? You mentioned before that you couldn’t wait anymore.

HL: Well…

VL: Was there a time limit?

HL: No, no time limit. By that time, everyone want to do citizenship. You can go here, go to vote, or get something else the benefit here. Whatever they’re asking or anything else. They asking any some job can relate. They ask you citizenship. Just do it. I say, why not? Just take a little time do it.
VL: Have you ever voted in US elections?

HL: Yes.

VL: Do you still continue to or do you find that, um, you don’t understand or agree with their political views or beliefs?

HL: No, I just vote only one time. After that, something I disagree, so, I just stop by that time. I not to be continue this stuff.

VL: Do you ever feel like you’re gonna vote again? Or do you feel like when you vote, your voice matters?

HL: Well, just depends. Not right now. I’m still thinking what is the benefit or anything else whenever the vote is going to be happen.

VL: When you think about yourself in the American society? Do you see yourself as Vietnamese or Vietnamese-American or just American? Like, how do you see yourself?

HL: Well, that – Sometime I think some American, US – American is more than Vietnamese-America. So kind of look like you living here, kind of look like you have to follow them. Whatever is more active every day. The fact is it’s America. The Vietnamese kind of a little, kind of look like a small thing in here. That’s not really big for me on Vietnamese in America. It’s America, it’s the lives whatever in here. You challenge, you got more than the Vietnamese community here. That’s the way I think. America, you gotta be more than your community in America, right here.

VL: Do you feel like you’re losing a bit of your Vietnamese-ness or your Vietnamese identity while you’re here in America?

HL: Well, you lose – you not lose. You missing something, not really in here. In here, you living is a part of this. But, if you’re not political or whatever anything in here, probably not really you
missing something. I mean, kind of look like you got part of the living, kind of like Little Saigon in Orange County and something in there. But, if you don’t get along, you don’t like it this way – not really you missing in there. For me, it’s different opinion than some the other person.

VL: So, did your families – did you family have any traditions that you still keep within your family here in America? Did they celebrate certain holidays or do certain things on specific days that you still um do today?

HL: Well, something traditional on Vietnam in here – I still missing. Most likely, you missing is Chinese New Year, Vietnamese New Year. Most things are traditional – long, long time from Vietnam, so every year, you got like this. Kind of look like you missing the family, whenever – your entire family, your neighbors, your friends from the old times before. When you celebrate here, it’s okay. But you still missing a lot of things when you’re a kid, older a little bit and your family is there. Kind of look like missing a lot.

VL: So, you were here when the Vietnamese-American community – um, or the Vietnamese community was first started in California. Um, how has the Vietnamese community changed in your opinion?

HL: Well, it’s totally different. Community and neighbor in Vietnam and in here is totally different. In Vietnam before, you can go with them – house to house. We can talk, we can got anything you can say. But in America, it’s totally different. Whatever you in there your house, you got your neighbor – you just say hi. You cannot be no time hang around or talk something because they have something different. They got all different opinion. You cannot be come to them house all the time. Maybe they don’t like, but they want to be privacy or relax after work. That’s the way how the neighbor is over here. So, we just respect for them.
VL: Do you visit Little Saigon or Orange County often? And what do you usually do there when you’re in that community?

HL: Not really I come down to Little Saigon for the Vietnamese community down there. We just go sometime visit the friend or any friend from different country or different state, so we take them down go there and see Little Saigon. And sometime we just come down there to get some food or something else we can buy down there. Not really the part we go down there.

VL: Is there a reason why you don’t go down there that often? Or do you not feel comfortable in that space anymore?

HL: Well, the fact you can see I’m not really comfortable down there. But, nothing really make you want down there a lot because sometime you live down here, you don’t want – it’s a lot of very big noise whatever the way you like it in Orange County, Little Saigon. For me, all different opinion, so not really I be hang around there a lot. Sometime, I just take some people go down there only or visit the friend or go down there or you need to buy something down there. For me, I not really like Little Saigon a lot. There’s nothing else we can do down there. Because some people want to hang around with the community Vietnamese, but for me, I’m not really want a lot of this. I got different opinion with them.

VL: Have you ever had the interest of hanging or hanging out with the Vietnamese community out there? Or did your opinions just change the longer you were here?

HL: That changed for me. The longer I live over here and then I don’t live a lot of the community Vietnamese, so that make for me a lot of change. That for me, I got different opinion, different my type, different my style. I’m just say, I be on the part of live with American more than community Vietnamese because I’m just not live with community Vietnamese side a lot. I got whole different thing, so that’s the way I want. I say okay, just go in this way because I live
around in here, around with them a long time. My style kind of look like US, American style more than community Vietnamese side. That’s it.

VL: Do you still follow Vietnamese newspaper, news outlets, or entertainment like Paris by Night or ASIA?

HL: Ahh, not really. Only sometime, I just have free time, we can listen to the entertainment from Paris by Night or ASIA or something else. But, not really all the time. It’s only relax and entertainment, that’s all. It’s not a big part of this for me. So, depends, I’m just not really want to watch a lot anyway.

VL: What do you do in your free time now?

HL: Well, some free time right now after work, I just go home and relax and take care all of the kids – my son or the family. Just relax, so what else you can do? It’s part of the life. You have to take care of that.

VL: So, you’ve been in America for about 34 years? Um, yeah, 34 years. How has it changed since you first came here?

HL: The part 34 years, what is changed for me is I know what is life in America here. What the part of this – it changed a lot. It’s taught me a lot of things. I have to learn. It’s free country, so make you comfortable everything. You don’t have it in your country, so when you come here, the country help you a lot of thing in here. You gotta be grown up. Anything else whatever you want in there. The part of this is might make your life change. You happy and what else you can do? Over here, work or you go to school. Either way, so you cannot be in between the middle. You cannot got anything between that, so you have to do that. No choice.

VL: Was that different in Vietnam? Was there – could you do something other than work and go to school? How did you see the lifestyle over there?
HL: Oh, in Vietnam, either way – the same thing. If your parents got the business, so afterschool, you gotta help them. That’s the way how you do. You don’t want to go work in there, you have to be help your parents. Afterschool, you growing up more, maybe you go work in your life. Maybe you go to work. You don’t want to do your business with your parents, so you can, afterschool, you can go to work. Look like the same here. Everywhere, wherever it is – the same thing. You want make a living by yourself, you don’t want to depend, so do it.

VL: So, you lived in Vietnam. You were born and raised in Vietnam for 20 years. But, you’ve lived in America for about 34 years so far. Where do you feel like you’ve grown up the most? Like –

HL: Well, it’s only 14 year different, so the most is on Vietnam. Because wherever you born, wherever you grow up, it’s a lot of memories – more things in the country where you grow up more. I know that 34 more years here is different. You growing up in here is different – the rate (??). But, the rate (??) in Vietnam, you live with your parents, your sister, brother, your family, part of your neighbor. The country you like it, it’s always. I will be part of my country in Vietnam, it’s the one I’m a lot missing. Over here, the same thing, the part of all different life. Kind of look like one and two, you cannot be put on the same.

VL: So, you mentioned that you don’t follow Vietnamese entertainment or music often over here? Um, so when you came over here, what did you listen to? Did you watch any TV shows? Did you watch any sports – sports team, follow them?

HL: Yeah, the part of right here – entertainment over here, I’m just watch something a lot for the sports and the news. A lot of entertainment here, a lot of things here you watch. That’s the way I want it. A lot of activities here too, so I just got used to be like this in here.

VL: What’s your favorite sports? Sports teams?
HL: Sports all the favorite is basketball and football sports here.

VL: What specific teams do you like?

HL: The specific team – basketball is the Lakers team, the football is the St. Louis Rams. That’s all the part of me, I like it. Sometimes, basketball and football don’t have it, I just watch the baseball. That’s the sport, you have to be enjoy like this in here.

VL: What other types of activities did you do in America or have you done so far?

HL: After activity here at America, I’m not done a lot so far. Before I not marry, so I be go with my friend. We just hang around, play around something like this. After when you get married here, it’s nothing else you be activity a lot. You just support your family, living in here – kind of little different way you have to change from single to married. That’s the way everybody has to do like this. Nothing else.

VL: Besides, leaving – besides leaving America to go back to Vietnam, have you ever travelled anywhere else in the world?

HL: Yes, I travel the world with my friend when I still single from 1990. No, 1988 – something like this. I travel with my friends to Europe. We just go travel to Europe by that time. A lot with my friend, we go to England, Germany, France, Holland, Netherlands. Yeah, we got a lot of good time when travelling with my friend when I’m single. So, I will be a lot of good time when I’m still single at that time.

VL: Um, and what are the most important things that you feel that the future generation of Vietnamese-Americans should remember about their heritage?

HL: Well, they have to – the kids, when they grown up more in here in the Vietnamese traditional. All the kids here, I think they should be remember all the things – all the Vietnamese style, traditional, everything. Hopefully, the kids can learn with this stuff, so they continue the
old people and the new generation over here. They can keep going with old, traditional Vietnamese. Hopefully, they don’t forgot anything. Whatever behind is put behind. We just forward with the future. I hope the new generation will be continue, but don’t forget old, Vietnamese traditional. They have to keep the same way it is, never change.

VL: So, speaking of traditions and culture, um – when you were in America, have you or did you ever read any history or news about what happened in Vietnam?

HL: Yes.

VL: Like, regarding the Vietnam War?

HL: Yes, the history of Vietnam is only the war. Everybody know that. From the war to war, when I’m still a little kid in Vietnam, there’s still the war. All the time happen like this – the war. Between both the government from North and South, they always fighting. That’s the way how they do like this. We just living for that. The part of the war, you have to be follow. Nothing else you can do, so like this.

VL: So, what you read over here, did you find that it was accurate? That it was true to life, what you saw in Vietnam or was it not true at all?

HL: Well, it’s the part by that time I’m not sure if truth or lie or whatever. It’s politics, it’s the way how the war (?) like this. You don’t know who they for – from North and South. Who pushed them or the land whatever anything in there. It’s a different part, kind of look like the war. By this time, nothing else you can do. You don’t know who is true or false. By this time, you live in South, you hate the part in the North because they always come to fighting. They want the land and all different situation. Nothing you can do. What can you do? When the war coming, it’s war coming. Nothing you can – no one stop it.

Pause in Recording
VL: So, my final question – have you encountered any racism in your neighborhood or in your workplace? What was that experience like if you did?

HL: No.

VL: - if you did?

HL: No, you cannot be racist. You cannot be do anything in here. You gotta be respect them, doesn’t matter where they come from, how they look, or whatsoever. You respect them, they respect you. The most important thing in your life – you gotta keep neighbor, keep your relationship with your friend, everywhere wherever you live. Don’t do anything wrong. Whatever you do, you have to think before you do. That is part of the life in America here, so never challenge, never got anything change some people - from love to hate. Got to be put all together, doesn’t matter what situation. You gotta be control, so make you, your family, your neighbor in here keep safety and they all happy. That’s the way how you live in here.

VL: So, have you, yourself, experienced any racism? Has anyone said anything racist towards you, done anything towards you?

HL: No, nothing to be racist. No. Either at work or whatever, from last to present right now, so nothing. We not talking about this part. Doesn’t matter where they (??) come from. Okay, we never got anything change. Don’t be do like this. Keep the same way when you were before until now. Keep the same way, you gotta keep like this – forward.

VL: And are there any other memories or stories you would like to share in this interview? Any last words?

HL: No, that will be - it’s no comment this stuff. I would be happy do the interview like this. I can tell a little part of myself, so what I have to be say with that the interview right now, today.

VL: Alright, thank you very much for allowing me to interview you.
HL: Okay.

_End of Interview_