Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: ANNTHY THAO NGUYEN
Interviewer: Thuy Vo Dang
Date: January 12, 2013
Location: Westminster, California
Sub-collection: Thuy Vo Dang Oral Histories
Length of Interview: 01:00:12

FIELD NOTES

I was introduced to Ms. Annty Thao Nguyen by her sister, Huong Tho, who is a host for Little Saigon TV. Huong Tho interviewed me for her talk show broadcasted on that channel and she offered to recruit more female narrators for me. Houng Tho told me her sister has an interesting story, based on her experience being separated from her family during the Fall of Saigon. I set up the interview with Annty Thao Nguyen at the Vien Dong Daily News conference room and was also accompanied by a UC Irvine undergraduate student, Kevin Ta, who was interested in learning more about the oral history project. He only observed the interview and did not take part in it.

Annty Thao Nguyen was very casually dressed and informal during the interview, which allowed us to be at ease for most of the time. I especially appreciated how open she was about her experiences being left behind when most of her family (including her parents) escaped Vietnam in 1975. She is the seventh child in a large family of 11, so many of her older siblings who already established their own families did not leave with her parents. In the chaos of the mass evacuations happening around them, she was separated from the rest of the group when there was an explosion near her caravan. Her parents left thinking she was dead.

She described the years she stayed in Saigon after the communist takeover as being very difficult, with little opportunity for her to advance her education. She was already 19 years old when the south collapsed and because her father worked for USAID, she was discriminated against by the new regime. She eked out a living by selling anything she could get her hands on. She escaped Vietnam on her second attempt by boat and arrived at Pulau Bidong refugee camp in Malaysia. At 23 she reunited with her family in the U.S. Today she lives in Orange County, California close to her sisters and their families, having never married or had any kids of her own. She completed a college degree at CSU Long Beach and expresses contentment in her life overall.