

Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: KEN TO

Interviewer: Justin To

Date: May 31, 2015

Location: Orange, CA

Sub-Collection: Vietnamese American Experience Course, Spring 2015

Length of Interview: 01:44:58

Narrator Life Map

- 1962 - Born in Phan Thiet on July 9th.
 - Moved to Saigon and grew up there

- 1964 - Grandparents on father's side passed away

- 1966 - Learned Chinese in school; Cantonese and Mandarin

- 1970 - Father passes away in a plane accident

- 1975 - Unsuccessfully tried to escape Vietnam by going to Korean Embassy
 - Schools no longer allowed to teach Chinese and English; only Vietnamese is allowed

- 1977 - Cousin managed to escape Vietnam and settle in California, USA

- 1978 - October; Grandpa on mother's side advises family to leave Vietnam
 - Mom only carried about \$100 US dollars
 - Stayed about a week behind due to boat malfunctions
 - Left for about a week after boat was fixed; famine was happening on boat
 - Malaysian battle ship helps bring boat to island of Pulau Bidong

- 1979 - Managed to get sponsored to the United States in California by cousin who escaped earlier
 - Flew by plane from Kulau Lumpur to family in California in September

- 1980 - Attended high school in America in the morning and night school for ESL classes
 - Mom bought house in Costa Mesa to live in with money from settlement case
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- 1982 - Had to sell Costa Mesa house because they could not afford it

- Met future wife and started dating
- 1983 - Purchase a mini-market called Palm Market in Orange County with left over money from previous house
- 1986 - Got naturalized as United States Citizen
- 1987 - Got married to current wife
- 1990 - First son is born (Sean Vinh To)
- 1992 - Second son is born (Justin To)
- 1995 - Revisited Vietnam after borders reopened via job at travel agency
- Old home no longer in Vietnam
- 1997 - Second son is diagnosed with cancer
- Had to sell Palm Market due to medical bills
- 1998 - Wife helped find job in mortgage industry
- 1998 - 2015 - Working as Account Executive at a Mortgage Company
- Moved into new home in city of Orange