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 place 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

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