Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: JOE DO
Interviewer: Paul Do
Date: May 9, 2015
Location: Fountain Valley, California
Sub-collection: Vietnamese American Experience Course, Spring 2015
Length of Interview: 01:30:09

Time Log

00:00:55 Joe Do talks about his parents and how his childhood was like growing up in Saigon.

00:02:10 He talks about his siblings. Joe goes into detail about how kids wore uniforms going to school in Vietnam.

00:05:35 Joe talks about how his father would find and repair old electronics for a living.

00:06:20 The family middle name, Xuan, is discussed as being passed down through multiple generations. It stopped after the family made their way to America.

00:10:03 He talks about family traditions during the holidays.

00:14:45 He talks about the origins and roots of his father and mother.

00:18:30 The war did not have much effect on his childhood as the war seemed like it was far away from Saigon.

00:19:32 His father tried to get a connection for his family to escape the day that Saigon fell.

00:20:29 He hid at his Uncle’s house when the Communists took over Saigon. A smoke grenade went off outside of the house.

00:22:44 His father made it back from re-education camp after a few months. He talks about how others were not so lucky.
The people in his neighborhood did not have enough to eat after the takeover. People were scared of the new government.

Many jobs were lost. His family had to find new ways to survive.

Joe talks about his family members who were Communist.

One of his neighbors’ houses was empty even after everything settled down.

His family did not agree with the Communist way.

Being part of the old government meant high school was the highest education level you could receive.

His older brother left the country before he did.

The fishermen only wants gold as payment.

His parents collected enough for Joe to escape Vietnam at a young age.

The plan was set. A couple would take Joe to another village near the ocean for the escape.

Midnight came and he left to move towards the ocean to escape.

The big boat comes for the people escaping the country.

The people were floating on the boat for five days and five nights.

The refugees were rescued by an American boat after about a week floating on the ocean.

Joe was taken to a refugee camp in Singapore for 6 months.

He was transferred to another refugee camp, Galang 2, in Indonesia. He stayed there for about a year before coming to America.

Joe discusses how he dealt with the drastic changes that occurred so fast in his life.
The camp in Indonesia was in way poorer conditions than the refugee camp in Singapore.

To get basic necessities for survival in Galang 2 required dealing with a level of danger.

Joe forms a group with others in the camp around his age. The other boys also escaped with no family.

To get drinking water, one must get to the middle of the jungle where there is the possibility of animal attacks.

Joe talks about how the group got attacked by a wild boar while in the jungle. They ended up killing the animal in self defense.

He first lived in Westminster, California upon coming to America in 1984. It was with his brother and Uncle’s family.

His first job in America was setting up tents for people working at the Costa Mesa swap meet.

Joe talks about the impressions he had of the United States before coming to America and how those impressions compared to reality of how things were.

He starts working for Toshiba where his work ethic is recognized. He rises through the ranks.

Joe meets his wife and fall in love. They get married in 1993.

He experiences racism in the States for the first time and discusses his thoughts on racism in general.

His two youngest sisters had escaped Vietnam and he provided for them.
01:12:10  The family moved to Seattle, Washington to seek a job. His wife did not enjoy Seattle.

01:13:30  Joe moves to Texas for better job opportunities. He went back to school for a real estate license.

01:15:10  Once more, he went back to school to receive a medical coding license. He was a medical coder for a few years.

01:17:02  The family moved back to Southern California to pursue a different career.

01:17:20  Joe talks about his sons being born.

01:18:02  Most of his family has moved to America.

01:19:50  He ponders on how Vietnamese culture will be experienced the newer generation of Vietnamese Americans.

01:22:00  Joe is appreciative of the Vietnamese communities that have been built throughout parts of America.

01:22:57  He talks about how he values family over everything. He hopes that future generations will keep family in high regard.

01:23:30  Joe wishes that the Vietnamese language stays alive.

01:24:04  He wants to bring his sons to Vietnam with him one day to show them his roots.


01:25:50  He has started raising birds as a way to pass the time and keep stress down.

01:27:15  Joe talks about how proud he is of his family and being able to marry his wife.

01:28:30  He is happy with his life. Joe wants to continue to travel in the future. Peru is at the top of the list.

01:30:08  Joe is thanked for participating in the interview.