Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: NGUYEN KHAI LY
Interviewer: Alex Nguyen
Date: May 16, 2015
Location: Irvine, California
Length of interview: 1:26:03

Time Log

00:00:42 Nguyen Ly talks about his parents and life growing up in Vietnam.
00:02:11 He talks about his siblings and the birth order in his family.
00:03:38 Nguyen Ly discusses his family’s origin from China and his father’s beginnings as an apprentice to a tailor.
00:05:37 Nguyen talks about languages spoke at home and learned as an Ethnic Chinese child.
00:06:47 Nguyen details the beginnings of his journey from Vietnam to the US. First by escaping on a boat.
00:09:06 Nguyen discusses who he lived with in his crowded house in Vietnam.
00:10:15 Nguyen picks up the journey of escaping from Vietnam by boat and landing in Malaysia.
00:12:51 Nguyen talks about his and his family’s stay at the refugee camp in Malaysia.
00:17:17 Nguyen speaks about the aftermath of the Fall of Saigon.
00:18:48 Nguyen discusses his parents’ opinions about the communists in Vietnam and the new regime.
00:20:12 Nguyen talks about how he was sponsored to the U.S.
00:21:15 Nguyen details the journey from the refugee camp to America.
00:22:58 Nguyen talks about the plane ride from Malaysia to San Francisco.
00:24:00 Nguyen speaks to settling down in Southern California.
00:24:50 After settling in Southern California, Nguyen talks about the early days where he lived with his uncle and his parents worked just to get by.
Nguyen talks about starting school in America and his shyness in a new environment.

Nguyen talks about taking ESL classes and being held back in the 4th grade.

Nguyen speaks about moving around, seeing more Asians in school, and then starting high school.

Nguyen discusses his after school activities, like basketball, and the small role art played in his life at that time.

During his high school years, Nguyen talks about his parents, along with some relatives, opening up a jewelry store.

Nguyen talks about working at the school during the summer to earn money through a government program.

Nguyen talks about celebrating holidays and birthdays in the U.S. and Vietnam.

Nguyen talks about his family’s religion, especially his mother’s.

Nguyen talks about the little amount of items he and his family brought from Vietnam.

Nguyen discusses college and what he did after high school.

Nguyen talks about his switch from Civil Engineering to Graphic Design to Fine Arts and what sparked the change.

Nguyen tells about his trip to Rome to paint a fresco with a collective of other painters.

Nguyen talks about his family’s reaction to his trip to Italy and his being an artist.

Nguyen talks about his life after his trip to Europe. He worked in his parents’ restaurant and discusses that work along with details about the restaurant in general.

Nguyen talks about going to graduate school at Cal State Fullerton.

Nguyen talks about work and art during and after graduate school.

Nguyen talks about how the memory of childhood influences his art.

Nguyen discusses his printmaking, the traditional methods of printmaking, and how he creates pieces of art.
Nguyen discusses his uniqueness as being the only artistic member of the family.

Nguyen talks about the racism he faced as a child.

Nguyen describes his self-identity being Ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese, and American all at the same time.

Nguyen gives his opinions on the Vietnam War, the communists, and the state of Vietnam today.

Nguyen talks about citizenship and the importance of name.

Nguyen talks about meeting his wife and how they got married. He also talks about his parents’ reaction to his wife.

Nguyen discusses his involvement in VAALA along with his introduction to Ann Phong.

Nguyen talks about how often he sees his family and his relationship with all of them now.

Nguyen discusses the cultural shock when first arriving to the U.S.

Nguyen discusses his assimilation into different cultures and different perspectives.

Nguyen tells about his involvement with the printmaking collective, Los de Abajo.

Nguyen gives advice to an Ethnic Chinese child growing up in the present.

Nguyen tells what he would do if he went back to Vietnam and the trouble he has remembering the past.

Nguyen gives one last story of him as a child back in Vietnam.