Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: PHUOC DUC NGUYEN
Interviewer: Theresa Van Ngoc Do
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Location: Westminster, California
Length of interview: 01:08:39

TD: This is Theresa Do with Viet Stories: Vietnamese American Oral History Project at UC Irvine. Today is Wednesday, February 13, 2019. I will be interviewing Mr. Phuoc Nguyen at his home in Westminster, California.

TD: I’d like to ask if you can state your name, age, and the city you live in currently.
PN: Yes, my name is Phuoc Nguyen. I’m about 49 years old, almost 50 and I live in Westminster, California.

TD: Where were you born?

TD: Can you describe your hometown, what was it like?
PN: I live in the city, so a little bit different from the countryside... So, I live in the city where there are more businesses, mostly people living in two- or three-story houses.

TD: How long did you live in that home?
PN: I was born and live in the same home until I tried to get out of Vietnam in 1980.

TD: Who did you live with as a child?
PN: I lived with my grandma, my paternal grandmother, my father, my mom, sister and brother. [For clarification] my younger sister and my younger brother.
TD: Could you describe your parents for me?

PN: My parents are typical [business people] before 1975. We have a business in the middle of the city where we sell shoes and that’s the way we made our living.

TD: Did you help your parents with the business?

PN: No, I’m too young by then. At that time, I was only like 4 or 5 years old so I did not do anything.. just running around the house.

TD: What was your childhood like?

PN: Uh, before 1975 or after 1975?

TD: Before.

PN: As I remember, we were kinda upper middle-class family. I went to the private school for kindergarten and for first grade, I also went to almost like a private school but with people with middle-class and upper..

TD: Background?

PN: Background. I think we get a house, a business—. My family got a house and business.. I would say we were upper middle class.

TD: Do you have any favorite childhood memories?

PN: Living in the city, there’s a lot of good memories than if you live in countryside, you know. But the only thing I remember when I was young was when we go outside and take shower in the rain. Some stuff like that like during the summertime, we try to catch crickets. Mostly that stuff for the city boy.

TD: What level of education do you have?
PN: Uh, now?

TD: Yes.

PN: I get my Bachelor’s degree in Engineering.

TD: Did you get that degree in the U.S.?

PN: Yes, I graduated from San Diego State University.

TD: Okay. Do you have any memories of or experiences of the war?

PN: Uh, a little bit. Like, I believe during April 29, the streets was like empty. I noticed that a couple of my relatives tried to get out by go to the boat, go to the harbor, so they could get out by boat. Some of the relatives wanted to go to the airport so they able to fly out. I remember during that time, as the streets is empty, and I saw a couple of the militia try to like.. guarding or fighting, you know. They were hiding in front of my house. So, of course you know, we hear a lot of gunshots during the night. Then we, hear a couple of loud bangs—I don’t know if it was like a bomb or something but probably a loud noise couple of times. That’s what I remember. At that time, I was only like five and a half years old, almost six.

TD: What hardships did you face during the war?

PN: I think the memory of the war—the people running around with guns. As a five-and-a-half-year-old boy you know, it’s hard to forget. People running around, people getting hurt. It’s hard to forget.

TD: Did anyone in your family get hurt?

PN: Uh, nope. Because since my dad is like the only man in the family, he didn’t have to go to the military so I guess uh.. But I know a couple of my longtime relatives died in the war as soldiers of the South Vietnamese army.
TD: Did anyone you know become imprisoned during the war?

PN: Yes, my uncle—the husband of my aunt, my aunt is uh, my father’s sister. He is a soldier but in the medical field so after 1975, he was a lieutenant junior in the army for medical field. So after 1975, he had to go to the camp for two years and he get out. Since he’s not like Intelligence or military, just like medical doctor in medical field, he was able to get out early. Like two years or less than two years.

TD: How did that affect your family?

PN: I remember we visited him a couple of times—twice. So every time.. I remember one time we visited him we were like three hours.. the bus took three hours and we had to wait for like an hour or two until we were able to see him. It didn’t affect me but it affected my aunt and my family because when we go see him, almost my whole family had to go. My father, my aunt.. so I was able to tag along with.

TD: Did you live in Saigon the whole time?

PN: Yes, I lived in Saigon the whole time.

TD: So, you were a child during the war, for the entirety of the war?

PN: Yes, so say I was born ’69 and the war in ’75 so by the time, I knew something.

TD: So what was your childhood like after the war ended?

PN: It kinda sucked, you know. Because we were the business at the time of communism. So everything belong to government, and we were a private business. So, to them, we were just like the high-end people. So we got business, we not anyone in the Communist Party-- we not members of the Communist Party. So, I remember when I attended school, you know, most of the people, if their family is member of Communist Party, their lives are better and for us, they
kinda looked down. Even the teachers too. But some of the teachers are South Vietnam, they
treat us a little bit better. But if the teachers, their background is from North, they treat us
differently.

TD: Did you still go to the private school after the war?
PN: No. Not private school but one of the better known schools in Saigon. It’s not like the
private school but it’s not the city school, or public school in Saigon. [10:05]

TD: What was school like? What kind of teachers did you have?
PN: Uh, I remember, a female teacher. One of my teachers, I believe she was from the South—
originally from the South—and she treat students a little bit better. Because, during that time—
during the 80s, we try to get out of the Vietnam as the boat people. So we try to get out, usually
you miss the class for 1 week or 10 days or 2 weeks. Sometimes we come back and the teachers,
they look at us and understand that OK. We tried to move, that our families tried to get out,
they’re boat people. They treat us… they understand, you know? They understand that people
are trying to get out during that time. So, if they could give you a hard time, they can suspend us
or something like that during that time. Maybe I was only 5th or 6th grade so they don’t care about
it. I don’t know if the people in 11th or 10th grade—maybe they treat the people, 11th, 10th, or senior
in high school differently. For me, at that time, I was only in 5th grade.

TD: How long did you stay in Vietnam before you resettled?
PN: So, my mom and my sister and brother left Vietnam in 1978. They were able to get out of
Vietnam in 1978, and my dad and I were out in the 80s. I remember the day was Christmas Day,
and in the morning of Christmas—no, the morning of Christmas Eve, we wake up early in the
morning and we tried to take the bus to go to the city side that’s near the ocean. So we left early
on Christmas eve and we get there around Christmas evening and then Christmas night, we stay outside a little bit on the harbor of the city. And the next day, Christmas day, we get to the big boat and we tried to escape Vietnam. And that’s the one I got so upset, I—me and my dad—we tried to escape Vietnam many times. At least, at least eight times. That’s including every time we left the house and we go to countryside, then something wrong and we come back. Then one time, we able to get out to the boat, we able to get out of the Gulf of Thailand. But, the boat got a problem with the engine and we had to go back to Vietnam.

TD: So, it took you eight tries?
PN: Eight tries, yes. Many, many tries. But I think that’s eight.

TD: What was that experience like? For the last try?
PN: The one that I make it? Or the one I don’t make it?

TD: Which ones were the most impactful to you?
PN: Still got the nightmare or what? The one that’s doing like.. I think in 1979, like I said, we make it. The boat make it to the Gulf of Thailand, but the engine broke down. So, we got no engine, and during that time there’s a storm. In the South East, you know, they don’t name the storm. Like during the year, they name it like ‘storm number one’, ‘storm number two’, ‘storm number three’. Not like the US, we name ‘hurricane something’, ‘hurricane something’. For the first storm in 1979, so that time we get our boat—there’s no engine in our boat—the boat floats in the Gulf of Thailand for one day. And the storm, and the boat got caught in the storm. The wind of the storm pushed the boat back to Vietnam. And, I still get the nightmare for that because like—as I remember, we can see the wave at that time, every people in the boat, all we could do was pray. If you Buddhist, you pray Buddhist. If you Catholic, you pray to Jesus Christ. There’s nothing we can do and we just waited for a day. But luckily like, I still remember the
waves were like two or three stories high. You know when I watch the movie, The Perfect Storm, did you watch it? The Perfect Storm talks about the fisherman in the North East, something like that. The waves are so high and people got scared. Yeah, that I think is the worst nightmare for me. Once a while, I still like dream about it.

TD: Did you ever go to a refugee camp?

PN: Yes, so when we make it in the 80s, in like December ’80, so we make it to Thailand. And we stay in Thailand for—we were in the Thailand camp called Songkhla. Songkhla, Thailand—its one popular camp in Thailand during the 80s. So, we make it to that camp.

TD: What was that experience like, as a child?

PN: As a child, huh? [laughing] Well, staying in the camp you know, because my mom already make it before. So, when we get there, our lives were already a bit better because my mom was already in the U.S. [United States] so, she was able to send money to us. So, our lifestyle in the camp was a little bit better compared to people with no relatives in the U.S. or around the world. So, our lifestyle was better but, the only thing we do is like wake up in the morning, eat, swim in the ocean, eat, maybe go to the school or go to the temple, learn some English, and come back and eat. I was able to—. We stay there for six months and after that, then we come to the United States because since my mom sponsored us for like—. My mom sponsored (unintelligible – 00:17:47) we were able to come to camp quickly compared to like some of the people that got no relatives in the U.S or somewhere else, it takes more like a year or more than a year to get out of camp. But we stayed there only six months and then we were able to get out of the camp and come to the United States.
TD: How did you keep in contact with her?

PN: Because—like I said she make it in 1978 so, we were able to contact by mail. So when we got to the camp, we wrote her a letter and said we make it, we at the camp right now. So probably the mail take about a week during that time. So I remember like, I get out, I come to the camp around January and then like after the Lunar New Year—the 3rd or the 4th—then we got money right away. So I say we got money after three weeks. So we got the money from our family right away.

TD: Did you first learn English in the camps or did you learn it in the private schools before you left?

PN: I learn English when I come to the U.S. because, in the class, when I was in Vietnam, I was only in fourth or fifth grade, you know. Eight or nine years old. So, during my time, most people they learn French in Vietnam. Some people I knew, they learned English but French—. When I went to kindergarten, we learned a couple of phrases in French but not in English.

TD: So they didn’t start you—.

PN: No.

TD: Okay. What was it like leaving your home and country? How did you feel?

PN: You mean, getting out of Vietnam?

TD: Yes.

PN: Well, so during the 80s, after the War, if you’re not—. If your family is not a member of the Communist Party, I don’t think you can get anywhere there. So, for the people that got the opportunity to leave Vietnam and try to make a better life, they were happy about it. As long as
they were able to get out and have a happy life for themselves or for their family, for the younger generation too.

TD: Where did you first settle when you came to the U.S.?
PN: When?
TD: Uh, where?
PN: San Diego.
TD: Was that where your mom was?
PN: No. Actually, my mom was in Orange County. My relatives sponsored—helped my mom to sponsor me because there was a very complicated relationship between my mom and my dad at that time. At that time, when we come, my mom—as the day we come to the U.S., my mm wanted to separate from my dad. She got a divorce from my dad. [chuckles] That’s very complicated.

TD: The day that you arrived?
PN: Yes.
TD: Did you get in contact with her the day that you arrived as well?
PN: Yes, because my relatives let her know that, “Ok this is the day that we arrive.” So, yes.
TD: How long did you stay in San Diego for?
PN: So, I arrived in San Diego in 1981, I stayed there until 1984, when my dad remarried again. So, then I stay there in 1984 and then move up to Orange County during—19, no I mean 1984. Yes, I stay there from 1981 to—I stay there from 1981 until 1986 when my dad remarried. Then I moved back to my mom.
TD: So, you were living with your dad during that time?

PN: Because I get out, like I said before, my mom, my younger brother, my younger sister, they get out—escaped Vietnam with my mom and I escaped Vietnam with my dad. So I stay with my dad before that.

TD: But everyone in your immediate family was able to leave?

PN: Yes.

TD: So where did you go after the six years in San Diego?

PN: So I moved to Orange County with my mom.

TD: How long did you stay in Orange County with your mom?

PN: I stay there until 1989 at that time, after high school, I enlisted to the U.S. Navy.

TD: What was that experience like?

PN: It’s good! You know, as an immigrant kid, when you grow up, you feel like you want to give back to the country you live in. What’s a better way than to join the military?

TD: How long were you in the military for?

PN: For four years.

TD: What was your reason for enlisting?

PN: There’s many reasons. The main reason during that time, we wanted to give back to the U.S. something. As a new immigrant, we wanted to do something for this country. What’s a better way than joining the military? Of course, there’s many reasons that pushed me to that decision. Like, as a kid raised in a big (unintelligible –00:24:34) family, like sometimes I feel kind of left out. You know, rebel? Don’t want to go to school. Of course, you know, as any kid, 18 years old,
don’t know what to do, should I continue school? What do I do? So I just—what’s the best thing? Just join the military for four years. See what’s happening.

TD: What did you do in the military?
PN: I was the electrician.

TD: Did you choose that occupation?
PN: Uh [chuckles] kind of? You know, because like, when I joined, my test scores were not that high. So, they did not give me any job. So, when I was able to go to the ship, then I was lucky to like beat out somebody—like some senior members in the ship to go to become the electrician. They saw me, probably they like me or “pick out first there right away.” So, they pick out the division of their branch and I become an electrician in the navy. (unintelligible – 00:59:31).

TD: So do you still keep in contact with people that you met in the navy?
PN: Actually, I still only—only one. But that guy is Vietnamese American. [laughs] Yes, he’s Vietnamese too. I still contact with them. I just recently contact with him about three or four years ago, to FaceBook. [laughs] So yes.

TD: What was the bond between you two? Was it because of identity?
PN: I guess so because like, at that time, us Asians—not a lot of Vietnamese Americans. Of course, at the end of the day, we both joined the military, we both joined the navy. Just something the same. We understand what we do, why we join the military. Just something in common. I still got a couple of people that I knew during the military too. I still become friends with them, we have a common bond. Not like most of the people right now, like yourself. You raised, and you go to school full-time, and you got support from your mom, your friends, your
family a lot. During my time, during the 80s, most of us—most of my friends had to support themselves. Some of us started working when they were only 13 or 14 years old. It’s different from—not for you, but like for my daughter—probably not going to work until she graduates from college. For us, you know during the 80s, we had like to find something to do so we have money to go buy ice cream, we got money to buy, or buy to buy. Our parents can not afford money to do that. We had to earn money to help ourselves, you know. That’s like most of my friends during the 80s and myself.

TD: Did you ever experience any racism while you were in the navy?
PN: No, I don’t think so. I believe people judge you [because of] how you do your job not because of the color of your skin. Maybe because you do not speak like they do? But same time, because in the navy, there were Filipinos too. Is there racism? Yes, but I do not think I experienced that. During my time in the navy, most of my senior supervisors, they like me a lot. Even the officers, they like me a lot because people judge you on how you do your job, not the color of your skin, not how you speak.

TD: What was your biggest accomplishment in the navy?
PN: [laughs] That’s a good question. I was the seller of the month of the ship, junior seller of the month, junior seller of the quarter, junior seller of the year for our ship of about 300-400 people.

TD: What year did you get those awards?
PN: So let’s say I enlist in January ‘89. So, I enlist and go to the bootcamp. Then, late ’89 or during the 1990s.
TD: So, what did you do after the navy?

PN: So, I enlisted in 1989 and I get out of the navy in 1993, that’s four years. So after I get out, I try to—I’m working outside as an electrician for two years. Then, after that, I decide I want to get a degree so I went back to school as a part-time in 1994. Then I worked one year full-time, but, I went back to school in 1994 as a part-time. Then I start full-time in school in 1996. It took me five years to get my Bachelor’s.

TD: Was being an electrician always your passion or once you started working as one in the navy?

PN: It’s not my passion but it was something I was able to do and get the job done. Do I like it? Yes. But passion? No [laughs].

TD: Do you think you take another job if you had a chance?

PN: During that time?

TD: Yes.

PN: No, no. Because at that time, most people were limited in education or English, you know. I think that was the best job during that time in the navy, was an electrician. Of course, you know, because I’m not a U.S. citizen at that time, there were many jobs in the navy that if you were—if you were not a U.S. citizen, you cannot do it.

TD: When did you gain your U.S. citizenship?

PN: So I gained it in 1993, before I get out of the navy.

TD: Did you do that by yourself or with your parents?
PN: Actually, I did it by myself. I just fill out—at that time, my mom was already a U.S. citizen already. Technically, I could—. Technically, because, I believe my mom was U.S. citizen like 1988, I could become a citizen through my mom. But, you know, the relationship between me and my mom was not that great so I did not like add my name onto the paperwork. I don’t care, you know. But later on, before I get out of the navy I apply for the application to be a U.S. citizen.

TD: How long did that process take?

PN: I guess when you’re in the service, it’s quicker [laughs]. So, I think.. I don’t remember, I think like a couple of months, maybe two months. It felt very quick, you know. They don’t ask me any questions. I remember, I go to the church and he took me back to his chapel, and we chit chat and he told me, “Raise your right hand,” and that’s it. [laughs] I don’t need to answer, “Who’s the first president of the United States?”, “What’s the Bill of Rights?”—I didn’t need to answer that, you know.

TD: Did you live anywhere else afterwards?

PN: No, but I mentioned on my application, I was living in Chicago for a couple of months when I went to school for electrician in the navy. So I go from January 1990 to ’91—to July of 1991. I think, yes. January 1991 to July 1991.

TD: What was the environment like there?

PN: It was totally different than California. As an Asian kid, you don’t know what snow’s like. You don’t know what the temperature below freezing point [is like], you know. So, it’s different, you know, a little bit—the weather is a little bit colder than in California.
TD: Did you find any similarities between there and California, that you can think of?

PN: Uh.

TD: Or, would you ever go back and live there or stay there?

PN: No, no. I don’t want to dig up the snow every morning during the winter time. Actually, I met a couple of Vietnamese people during that time. I still contact them now. That’s almost like from ’91 to now, almost like 20—25 or almost 30 years.

TD: When did you decide to move to Westminster?

PN: Like I said before right, after my mom—after my dad remarried, I moved back to my mom and lived in Westminster, Orange County. So after like my dad remarried, I lived with my mom.

TD: Oh, okay so, is this your mom’s home from before?

PN: Yes.

TD: Oh okay. Do you still keep in touch with your relatives in Vietnam?

PN: Yes, my aunt still like—my dad’s sister, younger sister, still in Vietnam. When my paternal grandmother was still alive, I contacted her, once in a while to phone. Not to phone, like 10 years the only thing that was write letter. Like 20, 30 years ago, we write letters.

TD: What do you use now?


TD: So do you have any songs, images, or artifacts that remind you of Vietnam?

PN: Any songs.. Most of the stuff you know, the stuff on the altar, I get it when I go back. Like the first time, I go back to Vietnam, I get it. These are our own—original stuff when I was in
When the first time I went back to Vietnam, then I ask my aunt, “Can we get something that belongs to the household?” And I was able to carry it back to the U.S.

TD: When was the first time you went back to Vietnam?
TD: What was that like?
PN: Different. Unlike I said, I left during the 80s, 1980, and I went back 1998. So, 15 years later, it’s different. Some places I can’t recognize—of course, I still recognize my house, you know but like some of the streets I cannot recognize.

TD: Is there anyone still living in your old home?
PN: No because my home, my aunt--. We had to move out of my home. Because my home during like--. My home actually is under the big hotel. So, when they tried to convert everything on that block into a big hotel, then we had to move out. People in Vietnam—the houses in Vietnam are different from the U.S., you know. The houses in Vietnam, you live in the house, you work in the house, you live in the house. The house can be your business too. So, my home—the home that I was raised in now become Starbucks. [laughs]

TD: Where did you stay when you went back?
PN: Hotel and of course, my aunt is still there, you know. Both my aunts on my mom’s side and my father’s side is still in Vietnam, and they got houses so we lived in their house.

TD: What do you usually like to do when you go back?
PN: There’s nothing like —. Nothing I want to do in Vietnam. The reason I go back there is to visit my aunt, and when my grandmother was still alive, [the reason was] to visit my grandmother. If I want to go somewhere, I can go to beach, tropical place, I could go to Hawaii or someplace [laughs]. Not in Vietnam though.

TD: Would you ever move back to Vietnam?
PN: I was thinking about it when I retire. Just when I retire, I want to find someplace cheaper but not really.

TD: Also, I had a question in mind, when you were in the navy did you have any jody calls that were your favorite? Kind of like a roll call or chants that navy members would do?

PN: Not really, because when we were in boot camp, we had to march you know. We had to sing, we had to repeat something. But, during my time in navy, like I said, I was able to travel around the world. As a young man, when you go to different places, it was a little bit different.

TD: Where did you travel to while you were in the navy?
PN: We travelled like —. So we’re in the West, our home port is in West, so we go to the West Coast. Of course, we go to Japan, Okinawa, Philippines, Thailand, Korea, of course Hawaii too [laughs].

TD: Did you have a favorite place?
PN: As to what, as to sight-seeing or partying? [laughs]

TD: Anything.
PN: I think the best place to party, as a young man, you know. as a young man, when you stay out on the sea for one month—the best place was Philippines or Thailand.

TD: Do you have any favorite memories there?

PN: Get drunk [laughs].

TD: Did you make friends from the countries themselves?

PN: No, no, okay. So, during the 80s right, the late 80s like early 90s. We still got—we call it the third wave of Vietnamese people trying to get out of Vietnam. So usually, when they get out they have to stay somewhere, like some center because like—I forgot the name of it but some center for six months or a year to learn English and American culture. So when I went to the Philippines, then I try to get into the refugee camp and play around with them, talk to them. Most of the Filipino teachers, you know, ask me to go to the class and try to answer the questions because at that time, most people in the camps they’re preparing to go to the U.S. So the only thing—. What’s the good person to answer those people about the U.S. like myself?

TD: Right. So, what do you think of Little Saigon here?

PN: What do you mean by that, ‘what do you think’? You mean as a community, as a business, as a place to live, or as a place to raise to children?

TD: All of those are good questions. [laughs] I guess, first, the community here. How is different from the Vietnamese community from you were growing up in Vietnam?

PN: Well, I’m too young in Vietnam, but I live in the communist country so you cannot compare with that. But living in little Saigon, during like—from 1986 until now, I think a lot has changed, better and worse. Of course, as Vietnamese we grow a lot. I still remember like before the 80s,
Little Saigon was not here. Westminster, Garden Grove was in Santa Ana, in the poor area. Then people make it and we stumble out Santa Ana (unintelligible—00:45:31). Then we move to Westminster and garden grove. Little Saigon, during the 80s, is not in Garden Grove and Westminster, it was down in Santa Ana.

TD: Are there any traditions and customs that you’ve made an effort to preserve here?

PN: I try to speak to my kids in Vietnamese. I try to teach them the Asian culture, like respect their elders. Of course, right here, Tết, New Year, Tết Trung Thu, something like that you know.

TD: What traditions do you have for Tết?

PN: For me? Just like, on the New Year Eve, usually we have to pay respect for the—those who, for the grandparents that have passed away. Then, the first of the New Year, go to the temple, go to the fair, the festival.

TD: Do you remember Tết in Vietnam?

PN: Yes, I still remember Tết in Vietnam. Totally different than—well, Tết in Vietnam, we usually celebrate for more than three days. Not right here, usually right here, we wait until the end of the weekend so we can go to the festival. Of course, nowadays, most people they stay home on the first evening, go to work—people go to work on the first day of the new year.

TD: Can you describe Tết in Vietnam?

PN: Sure, you know. Tết in Vietnam, from my house, there’s a sequence of steps, you know. Most people, they do on the 23rd, usually people like, they đưa ông Táo vê troi [check translation—00:47:40] you know. The Buddhist sitting on the kitchen, [laughs] you let him go
home to the heaven. So usually the 23rd, most of the Buddhist religion, they doing that, đưa ông Táo về trước. Then, usually on the 24th, 25th we start cleaning the house, upside down. We clean the altar, we scrub to the floor, we clean everything. If your house is a business, you have to clean it. You have to scrub to the floor. Then, 28th, 29th, you go to the—28th, 29th. It’s talking about during the 80s, before 1975. Now it’s totally different. Like the 28th, 29th, we go to the flower festival and of course, the 30th, the New Year Eve, we stay home and pay respect for the person—for all the people that passed away. Usually, on the first, for my house, we have a family dinner. So, we have like—. It’s not dinner, but first meal is brunch. Brunch, first meal in the morning is the family brunch together. That’s including my grandmother, my family, and my aunt’s family because my father has only one sister. So, we eat brunch together on the first day of Tết. Then, after the brunch, we went to the neighbor or the relatives on my dad’s side to wish them “Merry Christmas” [Tết]. As a little person, we get lì xì, you get red envelope. So usually, they say the first day you stay on the male side, on the father’s side and the second day, you go to your mom’s side. So you go to my mom’s side. So second day, we go to my mom’s side, eat, red envelope, you know. The third day, we go visit the cemetery. We visit the cemetery and pay respect to those that passed away, for our relatives that passed away. I don’t remember the fourth or fifth day, just hang around. That’s during like late 1975, or before 1975, you know late 1970s, like 1977, 1978, 1979. But now it’s totally different.

TD: In Vietnam?

PN: Yes, now totally different. Now, they only celebrate the first day only. Now in Vietnam, they only celebrate the first day. The second day and the third day is just like Christmas, they want to vacation. Because they still got like ten day off, like a week holiday or ten day holiday.
And usually now in Vietnam, for my cousin, the first or second day [they] stay home but the third day, they went to vacation somewhere. There’s opportunities to go to vacation.

TD: Did you have a favorite food that you would eat during Tết?
PN: Of course, bánh chưng, you know, typical square cake. Yea, that typical square cake and candy too. Candy, the new year candy.

TD: What is your favorite food related memory? Are there any recipes that were passed down in your family?
PN: I remember my grandma, every—. For Tết, she would make a special radish [needs translation—00:52:03], that’s the only thing I remember. Like, we make it first in the morning thịt kho tàu or something or no, cá kho, cá thu kho like grilled fish.

TD: Are there any recipes that were passed down?
PN: No, no recipes. I think recipes right now you can go to the internet and try to get any recipes you like, right now.

TD: When you were a child, who would cook food for you?
PN: My grandma. My grandma usually cooks food because my mom and my dad, they usually take care of the business. Of course we have a living mate too so the living mate would try to help out, cook food too.

TD: Is there any meal that you remember fondly that she would cook?
PN: Man, that’s a long time ago [laughs].
TD: Or do you have a favorite Vietnamese food?

PN: Favorite, noodle? Favorite food right now is like phở [laughs] like typical phở, you know. But like, because, the food that tastes — . To me the food that tastes like Vietnam, during my time in the first grade is totally different. Of course the food right now is more quality. It tastes a little bit better.

TD: In Vietnam?

PN: No, right here. The food in Vietnam, I don’t think the quality is that great.

TD: So you prefer the food here?

PN: Yes, I prefer the food that I’m eating right now compared to that I’m eating when I was young.

TD: So when you go back to Vietnam, do you think the food tastes different?

PN: Yes, totally. The quality is not the same as the U.S. Some of the quality of the food is not the same — beef, beef is not the same. Maybe chicken. But like beef is not the same. Beef in the U.S. is much better than Vietnam. I don’t think Vietnam gets beef, I think mostly buffalo or something [chuckles].

TD: What do you do for entertainment here?

PN: Entertainment?

TD: Do you have any hobbies?

PN: For myself, for now like — . During the weekend, I ride my bike — for entertainment, I ride my bike. Often ride my road bike or (unintelligible—00:55:10) or I can ride with my friend. For entertainment, if you ask me, do I go to Vietnamese concerts, then no, I don’t go to Vietnamese
concerts. If you want to ask that question, then no I don’t do that, you know. Do I listen to Vietnamese music? Yes. But do I go to the Vietnamese concerts? No.

TD: Would that be like Paris by Night?
PN: Yea. If somebody gave me tickets, then I go, you know. But like, if—you only spend only one time you know just like, I want to know what’s going on or how they lip sync [laughs]. But like, do I buy the tapes? Nope. But, do I listen to YouTube? Yes. Do I buy the CDs? Nope. Do I buy tickets? Nope. But do I go to YouTube and listen to them? Some—if I got free time, then I do. But like, I’m not typical go out of my way to the concert and listen—nope.

TD: How often do you go biking?
PN: Once a week, twice a week, three times a week. Depends.

TD: Do you—what do you go biking for? For entertainment, for fun, or—?
PN: Relieve stress, you know. I guess I’m different like compared to most of the typical Vietnamese people around right here. Weekend, I might go to coffee shop or I just go biking, exercise. A little bit different, you know, from most Vietnamese guys around here.

TD: Do you think the Vietnamese community values physical activity?
PN: Not really. Some of them, because like, but—. There’s a lot of people, what they value like physical, healthy a lot. But some people, I think in their minds, “OK, we’re Asian, we don’t eat a lot of meat.” You know “everything’s going to be OK.” (unintelligible—00:57:30) Then, some of them think they’re OK you know. Like we compare to like Americans, they eat a lot of cheese, meat everything. They might have (unintelligible—00:57:47) blood cancer, high cholesterol. But, we Asians we don’t eat a lot [of those foods]. Some people they think that way, so they don’t value their physical activity.
TD: Do you mostly just go biking? Do you do anything else for physical activity?

PN: No, usually biking, running. Usually, for physical activity, I do a lot. But like, like I said, I’m not a typical guy, you know. Go to coffee shop, talking and B.S. around, or go to somewhere.

TD: Do you like sports?

PN: Yes, I like sports.

TD: Do you play sports too?

PN: Not really, I can exercise but I not—. Yea I play but—yea I played once when I was young.

TD: Do you watch sports?

PN: Yes, I watch sports when I have time. I follow sports, I follow the team that I like.

TD: I know soccer is really big in Vietnam, do you like soccer?

PN: Nah, too boring. Because I’m raised in the U.S. more than the time I was raised in Vietnam. Of course, when I was raised in Vietnam, I love soccer. But I come to U.S., and raised in U.S., soccer is too boring. I like something like football, people trying to hurt each other [laughs]. Like something like baseball, I don’t like it but like basketball, running up and down. I like something like high intensity. Tennis, I don’t like it. People playing golf is kind of boring.

TD: How often do you exercise with your friends?

PN: Once a week. You mean friend or coworkers too?

TD: Anyone.

PN: Usually, at work, I exercise with my coworkers. I try to exercise like 5-6 days a week. I try to keep myself active, 5-6 days a week.
TD: Are you involved with any Vietnamese American organizations here?
PN: No. No because I don’t have time, I have kids. Then sometimes, I’m busy at my work. So I don’t have time to get involved.

TD: Do you have any thoughts about the current political climate here in the U.S.?
PN: U.S., you mean in the Vietnamese community or U.S.?
TD: I guess in the Vietnamese community here, local politics?
PN: I think it’s better. Better, you know. It’s changed a lot because, as I remember, for the older generation like—most of them are Republican because usually, the Republicans, they fight the communists. But now as Orange County, I think between the younger generation and older generation, they rest between the republican-democrat, almost like 55-45. Something like that. I think the change is different compared to during the 90s. Actually, I know during the 90s, most of the Vietnamese Americans were Republicans. But now, I think the change is 55-45.

TD: Do you vote in the elections?
PN: Yes.

TD: Why do you vote?
PN: it’s my right, you know. I vote because I believe in something, I believe in certain ways, because I vote with my own philosophy. I believe in somebody with my same philosophy.

TD: Do you have any strong opinions about the political parties, like Republicans and Democrats?
PN: You ask me good—I rest with the Democrats. I rest with Democrats, and I vote mostly Democrat.

TD: What do you think of the Vietnamese Americans that are in office right now, in Westminster and Orange County?

PN: I don’t know, you know. When they—in my opinion, when they try to get elect. They said they work for the community but after, they get elected, I think they’re more corrupt. That’s my opinion [laughs].

TD: Why do you think that?

PN: Why do I think that? Because the way they act. They depend on the—when they elected they depend on that a lot. I know a couple of people, in my opinion. I think they depend on the government officials or something. Corruption, maybe.. I don’t know.

TD: What do you think are the most important issues in the Vietnamese community?

PN: Right now?

TD: Yes.

PN: In my opinion, healthcare. Actually [I] know in our Vietnamese community, we have a lot of private businesses. People owning small shops, you know, small places. I think healthcare—some of the private businesses, they don’t have health insurance. I think health care is the most important.

TD: So, access to healthcare?
PN: Yes. Because when you own private business, you have to spend your own money. It’s not like when you work for a company, the company provides you healthcare.

TD: Do you believe in universal healthcare?

PN: Do I believe in universal healthcare? Uh, partial, yes. Yes, I believe it doesn’t matter how old or rich you are, if you get sick, you’re supposed to be—you can get help. You’re able—like you go to the doctor, if you get cancer, you don’t need to lose your house because of the medical treatment, something like that you know.

TD: Do you have any other memories that you would like to share that might give more light to the Vietnamese experience, or your own Vietnamese experience?

PN: [laughs] Do I have any memories?..

TD: Yes.

PN: Like I mentioned before, our lives when we grow up in the 80s is much different for the younger generation right now. Everything we do, we had to earn it. You know, we had to earn it, for everything. It’s not like right now, for the younger generation right now, they depend on their parents a lot. Some of them depend on them from A to Z. For us, we had to work our time, we had to earn it. It’s different. I don’t know why, it’s hard to say but, it’s totally different. Maybe it’s right because, we make it out, our kids are better now compared to us during the 80s. So, hopefully they can learn it from us, working hard, study hard, discipline themselves. So, they can be better, be better and not slack. Like a tiger mom or something. Be better for their kids and their future.

TD: What advice would you give to younger generations of Vietnamese?
PN: What advice.. Well, try to be the best that you can be. Of course, you know, listen to your parents, but you don’t have to follow them. You have to follow your instinct. Of course, typical Vietnamese parents, they want to get their kids to become doctors or engineers, you know, all the common fields. You don’t need to be that. The only thing you need to be is, you are able to make money and provide for your family. That’s it. Follow your instinct and of course, you have to be very disciplined for that. Nothing is given up for free—you have to earn it. In able to success, you have to earn it.

TD: Well, thank you so much for taking the time to interview with me.

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