NTTN: After I diligently tried cross the sea about 10 times— during that time, I was arrested and put into prison twice. The time I spent in prison was quite long, one time was about 10 days. However, the second time I was arrested, I was in prison for 18 months. After I diligently tried cross the sea about 10 times, during the very last attempt, I was able to make it to Đại Lãnh. The boat was very small and there was 105 people on the boat. At that time, I was unable to count how many people were on board because the boat was small. So then when I went down there, I was only allowed to sit in the basement and sit there. I was not allowed to move around because it was extremely crowded. At that time, the sky was dark so I did not know many people was on board. When I went like this, I did not have to pay. A person I knew let me go. When I would come over here [America], if I made money then I would pay them back because they knew me and trusted me. The ship had 105 people on board, but there was not enough rice. There was no water. We had to go for 5 days and 4 nights. There was not much to eat. I had to focus on eating a little bit so that I could survive. Then, about 2 hours into our journey, there was a storm but luckily our boat was able to reach the island shore near— what island was it again? I forgot the island. At the same time, there was another boat that took a different route and encountered a storm that hit the boat and killed everyone on board with only 5 survivors. We were grateful that
God allowed us to reach the shore in peace. I stayed on the island for a few days before they transferred me to Palawan to wait for an interview to move to the next camp.

NTA: Which family members came along or stayed behind? Did you lose anyone in your family during when you went across the sea? Was anyone injured?

NTTN: My boat was very fortunate. No one was sick or anything. My little sister came along with me.

NTA: When you stayed at the refugee camp, your little sister, Ma Ngọc lived with you right?

NTTN: Yes.

NTA: What is the name of the camp? How long were you there? What was that experience like (conditions of the camp, meals, entertainment, educational opportunities, fellow refugees, those in charge of camps, etc.)?

NTTN: When I was at the Palawan refugee camp, I was there with my little sister. While I was at the Palawan refugee camp, the living conditions was not relatively difficult or anything. So, I was able to live in a house with about 20 something people. There was four of us that shared a room, ate together, and did everything together. We received food from the refugee camp. The Palawan refugee was tolerable to live in. It was not exceptional but compared to other refugee camps we had more autonomy. We were able to attend school and go to church. Depending on the individual, you were able to spend your time doing whatever you wanted. The physical aspect of living, there was not much. However, there was much relief and assurance within our mental and spiritual state. I was grateful that God was there to help me, that there was an organization to follow and assist me. I was able to take English classes so I worked hard to obtain skills to succeed and do anything to pass by the time. Within the time I came to the refugee camp, it was about to close, so I had to wait for an interview to transfer to the next
refugee camp. In the free time, I used it to learn more, to engage in the community, and do anything so that my life would not feel lost. There was a lot of other temptations as well. However, I relied on my beliefs to push through the circumstances and eventually make it.

NTA: You were just at the Philippines right and then you came to America?

NTTN: No, I was transferred again. After my interview, I was able to come to America.

NTA: Okay, describe to me the places you went to before coming to America.

NTTN: After that, I had to go to a processing center called Thanh Lộc and waited there about 2—the time we spent there was quite long. After, the UNHCR notified us that we would be moved to Bataan to wait for an interview and to immigrate to another country. When I was at the Bataan refugee camp, I was able to get interview to America. Within 6 months, I was able to do the interview and after that I was able to go to America to be reunited with my family members.

NTA: What was an unforgettable experience you had when you left Vietnam to come to the U.S.?

NTTN: When I was at the Bataan refugee camp, I lived near a family with a man, who was not very young, he was about 40 years old. He was very happy and peaceful. When he was about to go, after he completed his interview, for some reason he died at the refugee camp. That was the most unforgettable experience I had while I was living at the refugee camp. Because I saw how everyone’s lives was fleeting and we have endured so much to cross the sea and overcame significant suffering. After that suffering, I wondered if I would able to be comfortable or more happy. At that moment, I questioned if I would ever reach those moments in my life.

NTA: How were you able to come to America? Would you have wanted to go to another country? If so, which country?

NTTN: I went to the Philippines.
NTA: No. How were you able to come to America? If you were not able to come to America, were you thinking of going to a different country?

NTTN: I had a brother who sponsored me to go to America. At that time, the interview process to the U.S. was very difficult. So I had other plans, a second opinion. I had another plan for if I was not accepted into America, then I planned to go to Australia or Canada. Fortunately I was able to go to America because my brother sponsored me, the UNCHR, and America accepted my request to immigrate.

NTA: Okay so, when you came over here, you first arrived at Dublin?

NTTN: Yes.

NTA: What was your feelings about America when you came from Vietnam? Has your feelings changed? Who greeted you when you first came to America?

NTTN: Who?

NTA: Who was the first person you came into contact with when you came to America?

NTTN: When I first came to America, I arrived at the San Francisco airport. The very first person I met was my brother. He was the one who sponsored my sister and I to America. When I first arrived to the U.S., I saw the never ending roads and everything around me seemed foreign. I could not imagine how different and civilized America was in comparison to Vietnam. I felt that I was in heaven. But when I was here in America—those were my thoughts and assumptions about America. But when I was here in America and I went to school, everything was new and different. I felt that I needed to change myself to adapt into life in America. It was very difficult but I tried really hard to adapt to my new life here.

NTA: Did you already know English? If not, how did you learn English and adjust to the new language?
NTTN: When I was in high school, I learned English as a second language. But after that, all of the words and lessons I learned in Vietnam, I had forgotten. Then when I went to the island, I also went back to school but the classes were limited. But going to the U.S., I had to start over from the very beginning by going to ESL classes. But thanks to my prior study, it was not as difficult and I was determined to learn. and it was difficult but I was not surprised from learning English.

NTA: So when you came to America, how much money did you have? Did you receive financial support from a family, church, or organization?

NTTN: When I came here from the Philippines, I didn't have any money. I do not have any money or any finances. At first I got granted money by the state for 8 months time. I used that money to survive. In addition, my siblings gave me a little bit of money to help me, so I did not find it difficult to do anything. Then, I kept going to school to get more jobs to earn more money.

NTA: What city and state did you first come to here? Why? Did your family settle in the same place or move around? Why are you residing in Southern California?

NTTN: When I went to the US, I stayed with my brother in Dublin. There— I just passed there but I was not used to the climate at that time, I felt it was cold. Then after another week, my sister came, since there was a holiday on September 2, to play. My sister said that, I should go to Los Angeles to be with her as sisters since my sister was single at the time and my younger sister who came with me was also single. So, I moved from San Francisco to LA [Los Angeles].

NTA: After living in LA [Los Angeles], you moved to Riverside? How did you find housing? Who helped you? Did you separate from your family? After moving, did you go to work? How did you make money? Did anyone help you find a job?
NTTN: When I went to Los [Los Angeles], I signed up for ESL classes for newcomers to the United States. I went to school there. During the time I went to school, there was a job introduction for me to go to interview for work. I went to an interview at the Broadway. I worked at the warehouse. That is how I made money. I went to school and work at the same time.

NTA: What changes in lifestyle did you make once you were in the U.S.? When you came to America did you change anything about your lifestyle?

NTTN: Of course. When I came to the U.S., everything is different from my previous country so I worked tirelessly to adapt. After I was able to adapt, I finally turned out okay.

NTA: What were some— of the dreams or hopes you had for yourself or your family when you first arrived here?

NTTN: Everyone has a dream, everyone has wishes that they could do this and that. However, it depends. Back then, I dreamed that if I studied more and went to school then I would be able to pursue anything I wanted. However, when I finally came to America because I had to work to provide for myself and have rice to eat— since I was older, school was difficult for me— so my dreams of wanting to do this and that was not obtainable— I could not do it.

NTA: Mom, what was your dream?

NTTN: My dream was to go to school to become a teacher to teach. However, I was not able to enter the profession.

NTA: What was some challenges when you started a new life in America?

NTTN: What are challenges?

NTA: Challenges are like difficult moments you faced. For instance—

NTTN: [needs translation - 00:20:09]

NTA: For instance, you are not able to speak English.
NTTN: [needs translation - 00:20:14] I did not know how to speak English. In addition, I did not have confidence because my English was subpar. Since I did not have the confidence to speak, then I did not dare to go after anything I wanted.

NTA: How do me feel about your decision to come over to America today? How do you feel? Do you understand what I am asking? Do you miss anything about your life in Vietnam?

NTTN: When I first came here, I really missed Vietnam. I would imagine many things but—I knew that I would never be able to return to Vietnam since there was no freedom there. That is the first aspect. The [needs translation - 00:21:15] now that I am older I occasionally remember Vietnam but I still have other things in my life that I need to do instead. [needs translation - 00:21:26] I do not miss—since I have been live here already it is like I am a [needs translation - 00:21:35] of America. Therefore, I do not remember Vietnam as much like the old days but sometimes there are days when it rains or something triggers my disturbing emotions and I end up missing Vietnam so much. Then, I was [needs translation - 00:21:55] I do not think much about Vietnam anymore.

NTA: How do you feel about your decision to move to America? Do you feel happy, sad, or anything other emotions?

NTTN: No, when I chose to go to the America I was very happy. The opportunity to live in America is happy and fun, there is nothing to be sad about.

NTA: Is there anything else you want to talk about or share?

NTTN: Share what?

NTA: Now, I am done with the formal questions. Since we are almost done, is there anything else you want to share or talk about?
NTTN: Yeah. When I went to America, I was 32 years old. Then I went to school and went to work then I got married. At that time, I was sad but I never knew that I was going to get married. I did not think that I would have children either. But when I was married, at 41, 42, I had my first child. Then the following year I had another child and in the following year I had a third child. I am very thankful to God for giving me very good, gentle, and intelligent children. And it was like— with my age, when my children were born, I thought they wouldn't be like other normal children because I'm older. But I have very good children and I also thankful to God. This is because I am this Catholic so it is thanks to God for giving me good things. In return, I also work to help the church. This debt is my pleasure. My pleasure is to see my child grow up and live well. Then my joy is that I want to help volunteer for the church. It's a sign that is like a—I think I can [needs translation - 00:24:40] when I give to God, what should I do to repay my thanks. That is all.

NTA: Is that everything, mom?

NTTN: Yes.

NTA: What are your final words or advice to future generation? Because I know when you came here before, your life is completely different from mine. But now for the future Vietnamese generation - how we grow up is a different experience from you. Our experience is different, we don't know about it in the past, we don't know where my family comes from, so do have any advice or what kind of word do you want to tell?

NTTN: For those who come after me? No one comes after me. (laughter)

NTA: (laughter) What do you mean?

NTTN: I belong to the same generation as the previous generation, first generation, the previous ones who lived in Vietnam more meaning that my thoughts are more like Vietnam. But when I
went to the United States, I felt like I had to adapt to the new situation I had to open up, like I had an older child. I can't force my child to be like me back then. But now following the way of Vietnamese education then I have to follow this side as well. But while I follow this side, I also have to teach them how to know their tradition. Although there are two [needs translation - 00:26:49] like my child is now older, but considering it as a calculation, I am considered her grandparent not her mother. But I have to try to adapt to everything that my child wants, I have to let my child feel that she should not afraid of her parents, that she also feels that her parents are very sympathetic towards her. For those who come later, I also think that - if there are any people coming from my family later, I also think that I will give them advice that I should never have to force my child to be like my generation. We have to be open to consider their interests—they can have interests but I am not saying they are allowed to like whatever they want to like. But I have to be a guide to let them know the right things to do in life from the wrong things in order to live a fruitful life.

NTA: Thank you, mom.

NTTN: Are we done yet?

--End of Interview—