Narrator: TRAN NGOC TU
Interviewer: Hanh Truong
Date: February 08, 2019
Location: Garden Grove, California
Sub-Collection: Vietnamese American Experience Course, Winter 2019
Length of Interview: 01:17:14

Time Log

00:00:00 Interview begins and Tran Ngoc Tu describes her life with her family in Vietnam
00:01:11 She talks about her graduating high school and her favorite hobbies
00:02:00 She recalls when the North won the Vietnam War, the difficulty of life afterwards, and hearing about people escaping by boat to Australia
00:04:07 She explains how expensive it was to leave Vietnam by boat and why she was able to escape and not the rest of her family
00:07:20 She remembers the day leading up to her escape
00:08:23 She describes the night of her escape, waiting for and getting onto the boat
00:12:22 She recalls when the captain tells everyone to get down to hide from border police
00:14:00 The captain loses his compass while Thai pirates chase after their boat. After four days at sea, the boat people meet Panama oil miners who fed them cookies and water
00:15:30 She describes how everyone can only have one teaspoon of water for five days.
00:17:09 Their boat reaches Indonesia but they must wait till morning to get to shore
00:17:09 She retraces and talks about how the Thai Pirates got onto her boat, days before they reached the camp. She describes how the women in the boat used dirt to force the pirates to leave
00:18:39 She describes her feelings on the boat and what she dreamt. She says only three
people died on her boat

00:19:50 She talks about food and water in the Pulau Cucu refugee camp

00:21:37 She described the drinking water on the boat, when a mother had to feed her children urine, and how she found a “miracle” lemon

00:23:30 She described cooking and eating at the refugee camp

00:25:43 She described how she was able to contact her family back in Vietnam

00:27:00 She talks about how she relocated from Pulau Cucu to Pulau Galang, another refugee camp in Indonesia

00:28:24 She remembers seeing certain boat people, like cannibals, arrive to the camp and hearing stories about boat people dying in the sea

00:29:41 She describes how badly she felt for the unfortunate boat people

00:29:58 She describes how the cannibals were treated in the camp

00:30:45 She talks about people leaving the camp after being assigned a country and how they would leave their belongings back at the camp

00:31:18 She talks about how she wanted to go to the United States to reunite with her siblings who had escaped years before

00:31:51 She explains that her siblings left earlier because her sister’s husband’s family was rich

00:32:36 She talks about how bad the economy and the way of living was after the North won

00:34:20 She details how, on her first vacation trip back to Vietnam, she had trouble with documenting her money and had to surrender about $1,000 to Vietnamese officials
She describes how she rejected the countries that had called for her to relocate as
she waited for the U.S.

She talks about how other people would leave a few months after arriving to the
camp

She recalls the friends that she had escaped with and how they left for Canada

She remembers how she made a friend named Helen at the refugee camp

She talks about the amount of water you are given at the camp

She describes how the second refugee camp had to ration food and water, and
police the people to avoid fights and theft

She talks about how everyone at the camp was Vietnamese and how impatient she
was because the relocation was taking too long

She remembers how her brother in the U.S. had difficulty with her initial
sponsorship papers

She talks about how a church in San Francisco eventually sponsored her

She described how the church found her brother in Santa Ana and how they set up
her travels to reunite with him

She talks about why her brother and sister decided to move from Mississippi to
Santa Ana, CA

She says that she only lived in San Francisco for about a month

She goes back to when she was in the camp and when they finally called her and
Helen’s name. She recalls how they had to go to Singapore first, then to the
airport, then to San Francisco

She talks about the culture in Singapore
00:45:47 She talks about she and Helen had to part ways after arriving to California
00:46:11 She talks about the food at the Navy camp in San Francisco, where she was staying after she arrived, and her weight fluctuations after escaping Vietnam
00:48:07 She recalls her reunion with her brother
00:48:53 She talks about how Helen called her about a job for a paper factory in Connecticut
00:49:18 She talks about how she had to explain to her siblings that she had to leave to find a job so that she can live without assistance
00:49:57 She compares the wages and rent in Connecticut to California and how it was better
00:51:47 She talks about the great diversity in the city was living in, in Connecticut, and how everyone was polite
00:52:42 She describes how she did not experience a “culture shock” because she was young
00:54:03 She describes how grateful she is to be in the U.S. and would only go back to Vietnam to visit old friends and family
00:54:36 She talks about how she tried to sponsor the rest of her family to the U.S. and describes how long the process would take. She describes how she would contact immigration officials to see the status of the sponsorship.
00:57:21 She describes how long it took to sponsor the rest of her family to the U.S. after her parents had passed away and her sister had gotten pregnant. She talks about when her family’s sponsorship was finally finished, when her family arrived, and how they built their own lives in the U.S.
She talks about the working conditions at the paper company in Connecticut and why she came back to California.

She talks about why she did not like her new job as a grocery stocker at a supermarket and how she quit to work as a seamstress at a sewing company.

She talks about how she found the sewing job and how she was one of the few Asian workers.

She describes how Helen initially worked with her at the sewing company but later became a bank teller.

She describes how she went from a worker to the supervisor of the sewing company.

She describes how she prefers working over going to school to learn English.

She talks about the changes she sees in Vietnam now, compared to when she escaped in 1980.

She talks about what she thinks about Little Saigon.

She talks about when she got married, had children, bought a house, and made a life in Orange County.

She describes how she does not continue certain traditions.

She talks about how she prefers to make new traditions to make life easier.

She talks about how lucky she is to be in the U.S. and how there is so much opportunity for her and her family. She is grateful that she was able to help her family achieve their own American Dreams.