

Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: TUAN NGUYEN

Interviewer: Camille Garcia

Also present: Linda Nguyen

Date: February 20, 2012

Location: Orange, California

Sub-Collection: Vietnamese American Experience Winter 2012

Length of Interview: 01:47:29

CG: Today is Monday, February 20, 2012. It is 7:17PM. This is Camille Garcia with the Vietnamese American Oral History Project and I am interviewing Tuan Nguyen. And we are at his house in Orange, California. Um. Can you please state your name?

TN: My name is Tuan Nguyen. Um. I am 53 years old. Um I am a Vietnamese American. Uh. I've been here in the United States since 1982.

CG: When and where were you born?

TN: I was born on June 2nd, 1958, uh in Vietnam, city uh called Da Nang, which is a central part of uh Vietnam.

CG: Can you describe your hometown where you grew up?

TN: Um. Yes. Um I was born in Da Nang, but um my family moved uh to the south to Saigon about uh when I was like a years old. So I actually grew up in Saigon since 1959. And uh I spent almost entire of my childhood uh in Saigon.

CG: Can you tell me about some of your childhood memories?

TN: Uh. Yes. Um. I was uh home schooled. Uh. Until I was 6. And uh I uh attended uh elementary school at one of the most famous um schools in Saigon at that time. Um. It was uh Lasalle Taberd. That's the name of the school. And I studied French since I was 5. And I spent uh roughly about 4 years, 5 years, and um my family sent me um to uh seminar uh what was built what was the estimate for a younger student who want to become a priest, a Catholic priest. Because my parents think uh that's the best education for me. If I can't become a priest, I become a man. So at that time, the church reserve the best education for their people. I was 10 years old at that time, and I left home in 1969. Um I have no idea where I was going to because I was only 10. But um that school you know train us when we was very young 9 or 10 years old.

And that seminar intended for between 10 to 18. And we finished high school there, and then we go uh to the next part that will be uh prepare to become uh a Catholic priest. That... That will take another uh 10 more years or so, could be more. So. But uh I spent only 3 years uh in that seminar between 6, 7, and 8. Uh and I left for two reasons uh my family doesn't want me to go far away from home uh because the war at that time very intense. It had become uh became uh worse. I know that's the first reason. The second reason uh I was 14 at that time and I know that priesthood was not for me. So I left in 1972. And I went back home. And I uh attended high school in Saigon. Another private school. Um, back in my younger years at that time, I use to debate um with my coworkers now is that public school or private school which one is better. Back in my time, I would say without hesitation is that public school is much better than private school. Why? Because public school is for free. You got education for free. So they select the best of the best for um public school. Private school takes the rest. Well there is a good school and a best school. But however, the point is that when you value education and when you get it for free. That become a luxury. I mean that become something that everybody dream for. Every family dream for. The program between the private school and public school is about the same. Because we have um tests uh nationwide. We have one uh uniform um testing, system of testing. So the program got to has to be the same. The curriculum and everything has to be the same. Um that narrow to the point is are you good enough to pass the test or are you good enough to, to be selected for public school. I don't blame for the teacher or something because the public school the teacher is very lousy. Why? Lower pay always, and the country was at war at that time so every man who can hold a gun he should be in a battle. So what the government did was they select some of their officer or soldier who have the degree you know especially in science, engineering or math or physic or chemistry so they can waive and become a high school teacher or a public school teacher. Well, some of them might hold very high degree very good background however the teacher is not just based on degree. The teacher got to be a good teacher, got to be a good teacher. Um so that's down to the student. And I know the public school better because I was not good enough to be in a public school and my family kind of disappointed about that but we got to live with that. Um I went to um private school from 9, 10, 11, and 12th. So that will be another 4 years or so. And I was able to pass the national test to get a high school diploma, which is um not too bad. But at that time the war is over now the country back then facing a huge problem um the government the new government doesn't know what to do with it and they are pretty good in fighting but um not pretty good in winning the country. And the country was um very bad at that time from 1975 to 1981. That when I left. So for 6 years, we have to face with uh economic downturn and that very bad for the country. And a lot of Vietnamese people decide to leave the country during those years. And myself I left uh in August 1981. And I came to um Indonesia in September 1981. And I have to live in a refugee camp for more than a year to um complete the resettlement process. Um finally um I was approved to come to the United States. And I came to Pittsburghs the day before Thanksgiving 1982. I remember it was Wednesday. It was cold. Snow. Icy.

LN: I came to the United States, it's a beautiful day. My birthday too.

TN: Uh. Because I came from Singapore. So um I arrived with only one blue jean and one tshirt and a few uh personal belonging.

CG: Um so what was life like after the war?

TN: Um. Several things. Um after the war, what um the government they don't know how to manage um the pool of labor. The unemployment rate, I would say, probably 80% because um now everything belongs to the government because it is a communist country. So no one interested to um to work for a factory, a business, or um company that they once owned. You know. Um factory they ran out of material. They don't have uh skillful labor. Um hospital lack of doctor, uh nursing. Um that felt a the main part is that the government at that time they did not trust the work for that they have um they look at everybody, everybody from the side is er spy or um as a um is the one who um want to destroy their uh business or their, their, their regime. So for the most part, I think it's the government fault. You know. They don't have the ability to run or to manage, um I mean in term of economic. They was pretty good at military. They pretty good at um political but uh not good in um running a country. I said that not because uh I don't like or there is a deep dividing between the north and the south. But um I say that because um I uh saw and I completely disagree with the government policy whatever policy at that time.

CG: Do you have specific memories of those final days around the Fall of Saigon?

TN: Yes. Um. That was April 30, uh 1975. Uh after probably about 3 or 4 days, um intensive um bombing and uh fighting, and I think that Saigon fell somewhere between 9 o'clock in the morning, and I'm lived uh only a few kilometers from the central part of Saigon. So let's say we live about 5 miles, 6 miles. And by 11 o'clock. By 10 o'clock in the morning, I saw the first uh soldier, uh northern soldier, they um enter in every street. And I know it's over. And I knew that it's over.

CG: How did the war in Vietnam affect your family and community?

TN: My family? Pretty much. Very much. Um my father was a um officer in the Southern army. So of course, you have to pay for it. I was his son, of course I have to pay for it. Um. Basically my father um in prison since 1975. So I mean cut completely tight. And myself, uh I was expelled from school. Um there is um no job for me just because um I just because um the family history. I mean my resume is pretty, pretty bad in front of uh government, government official. You can't do anything. There nothing you can do about it. You have no job offer. Um you have um no future. Not just me. Almost um everybody who have relative work for American or um in the army, you know, who against them, they have to pay the price. Directly or indirectly, either way. Same.

CG: How did you feel when you left Vietnam?

TN: Um. I got a mixed feeling about that. First, I'm glad that uh I have freedom. Um secondly, I also miss um the country that I was born in and grew up, that I'm, um and at that time I had no idea that someday I can come back. We'll leave, but I don't, I don't, I didn't think I can come back. So leave for good. Left for good, so that um that kind of mixed feeling. But I also freedom is more important.

CG: So you have not visited...

TN: I did.

CG: Oh.

TN: I did. Um. In 1998. Uh I did. But that's the only time.

CG: How was it when you went back?

TN: Uh change, change a lot. Uh now the government or I would the communist party, they know that they commit a lot of mistake. Okay. Plus uh the new leader, I mean, the younger leader they, they know that uh they have to um they know they have to contact to the outside world. Uh they highly value uh education, um people with skill um, and they allowed um for uh individual to do business, which is a key point, which is the um the key point to turn around in the economy because uh under the communist everything the government run from a to z. You are not allowed to have possession. Not allowed to have property, um you not allowed to even have religion. Um you're not allowed to have freedom of speech. You're the freedom to worship the party yeah. Let's look at North Korea, for example, same thing. So when I came home in 19, so when I came back from 1998, when I came back for visit, I seen um some big change. So that's why the country was, has been better, improve condition a lot.

CG: Why did you decide to come to the United States?

TN: I didn't decided to come to the United States. Back then, the United States was a country who um accept a large number of refugee I would say more than half of us uh came to the United States. As a refugee, I did not have any choice. I didn't have any choice. So it is tough for a country to accept you. So I apply for multiple, you know, countries. I left home, and I was happy to go anywhere in the world. And uh the United States was the big yes. Um a largest source to accept the refugee resettlement so um I, I, I came in. I, I didn't decide.

CG: Did you come here by boat?

TN: Yeah. Mmhmm.

CG: How was that?

TN: How was... How was the trip?

CG: How was the trip?

TN: Uh the trip compare to my other boat people my trip was quite smooth. Uh. It took us three days to sail from Vietnam to um along the South China Sea to we heading south so we hope that we can reach Malaysia or Indonesia pretty much. If you could look at the map, we heading south, we got to go somewhere. We going to hit some asylum somewhere. But we didn't hit any asylum. What... What we hit we was rescued by um an oil platform and uh I think that um Texaco, Texaco because I saw the name. I still remember the name. And the name of the platform was Hurricane... Hurricane Ashley. It was a ship. They anchored down to the ocean

floor to drill oil. Um at that, at the point that we was rescued is about 100 mile, 100 nautical mile um to Indonesia is the nearest, uh nearest uh asylum that was Indonesia. So the people from the platform they decided to take us to Indonesia. Actually the point belong is nowhere. It is still in the international waters. Um after uh I think 3 day and 3 night uh we get there. So we were rescued by Texaco. And uh oh I remember the ship had an American flag on it. So we know it is safe. So we know it is safe.

CG: Did you... from Indonesia to the United States did you travel by boat too?

TN: No, no, no, no. Uh we called... now we are called boat people because we left our country by boat. But uh when I get um to the rescue point or to Indonesia we no longer use boat. So they use the term boat people to separate us uh with number, number of refugee left the country when uh Saigon fall fell in 1975 um some of them fled the country uh by number of way. You know. Uh. Flying, boat, or whatever it is. But they don't call them is boat people. Boat people, they call them, for people who fled by boat after 75. And I think all the way to 85. Between those 10 years. Mmhmm. A lot of people who fled the country in 1975 they fled by boat too. My friend of mine they fled the country by boat but they don't call them the boat people you know they call them something else I don't know but after 75 to 85 most of us fled the country by boat. But you know what some of them really walked too. They walked across the border to Cambodia and to Thailand. So they have to walk across another country to get into Thailand. They have nothing to do with boat but they call them boat people too. So, so that's that the uh the point, that's the part you have to clarify uh why you call them boat people. Is that they all use boat? No, not all of them. You know. Most of us fled by boat but some of them walked too. So the term boat people use to uh use to um separate the group who fled right on before 75. And the boat people use for the group who fled after 75 to 85. Within, within those 10 years. Mmhmm.

CG: Which family members came along or stayed behind?

TN: The entire of my whole family stayed behind. Only me. I fled myself.

CG: Is your family still currently in Vietnam?

TN: No.

CG: No?

TN: No. Um. After my father was released in 1987, at that time I already here. Um they release him in 1987 after 13 years in prison he survived. And under the pressure I would say the United States under the pressure of the world especially from uh the United States and the Vietnamese government want to normalize uh the um they want to norm. They want to establish the relationship and with normalize the um um the relationship. So the first thing that the United States the first condition that the United States they put on the table and I think they put on every country is that you want to deal with us you have to have human right so that the human right issue was always in the front. And the Vietnamese government wanted to prove they have a good will so they have to show something uh so they have to show some uh show something by release all political prisoner you know the one who oppose him the one that lost the war. It has

been 13 years. There's no reason to hold them forever. And you look at um the history like World War II or World War I, I uh all the war criminal will either execute them, you either put them on trial or you either release them. You know? Um. And I don't think we commit any war criminal here because we just seemly you know uh have different idea. You know. And uh when the war ended, when you're the winner whatever you want. I mean. But put them in jail for so long without a trial, without a fair trial, it's uh completely um in the world opinion completely wrong. You know. So beginning 1985, beginning of 19, well actually it can be earlier than that. I think that uh, uh the pressure from the United States was always on Vietnam but become pretty tense in the 80. And the Vietnamese government want to normalize the relationship then they would have to show um something, they have to show um that they respect in human rights. Well it is not now, I mean, it is not, pretty much now, but it is still better. I mean so by releasing all the political prisoners the so the United States um their, their will, you know, their willing to normalize the relationship. And my father was released in 1987, and I believe the last political prison prisoner who was released in 1988 a year after.

CG: How was your experience in the refugee camps?

TN: I was 23 at that time. Um. I, I think, I, I'm happy. I love it to be there. In a refugee camp, we prepare for a new life. Now I only know the world through the pictures. Okay. We still in the camp. We have our freedom. You know. But we still in the camp which is an isolate asylum. Isolate asylum. So there was like at that time I believe there was about more than 10,000 refugee in my camp. Still in the camp, in the isolate asylum. So we did not know much about the outside world. Um we can see, we can watch TV, we can um read uh some material in English, in um other languages. Uh. We work with the uh we uh volunteer from um many uh non-profit um agency like save the children, save the world. Religion organization. Um. There's numerous of um volunteer uh from numerous uh non-profit organization to help the refugee prepare for new life. So I basically uh exciting and um but also uh concerned uh the difficulty that I am going to face with. So that kind of mixed feeling too. But, but I'm happy. And um I'm happy. But we just don't know what the future look like. Yeah.

CG: What were some of your first impressions and early experiences here in the United States?

TN: When I came to the United uh, when I came to the uh United States, um I arrived in San Francisco first. That was my first uh destination. Is was San Francisco. And I have the... We landed, we flew, and we landed uh in the uh air force base. It wasn't the San Francisco international airport. We landed in the air force base. I don't know cheaper or what. Probably safe some. Because the entire plane is was 185 of us fit on a DC 10. So they leased an aircraft. And we flew all together. Um. Made a fuel stop in Japan. In Alaska. And the final stop was San Francisco. So the bus took me to uh took me to uh took me to the base, the air force base. Uh. They drove past UC Berkeley. I still remember the University of Berkeley. And the Golden Gate. And I saw the Golden Gate for the first time. It was in red, and it was um cloudy day. So we only saw a part. It was exactly like a picture I had dreamed for. So um we um passed the Golden Gate Bridge uh I thought I passed through the gate of heaven. That's beautiful. Yeah. And a wonderful feeling. Everything was huge, big, red. The cloud was just over the bridge. And I said, "Oh man I have come to the United States, I have crossed the gate of heaven."

CG: When did you settle here in Southern California?

TN: Uh I think it about 1984. I came to visit my uncle. And, and here in Orange, uh California. And I decided to stay. And I... I never come back.

CG: When did you and your wife get married?

TN: Uh we married 1992. May 9, 1992. So.

LN: Coming 20 years.

TN: So this about 10 years after I came here. So yeah. Well we know her... We knew each other for year.

LN: He was my neighbor back in Vietnam, but I have never seen him.

TN: So um you know it was coincidence. And we married in 1992.

CG: How many children do you have?

TN: 3. Mhmm. My first child uh was born, we have my first child after more than a year after we marry. August, August.

LN: 93.

TN: August 1993. Mhmm. And our second child um was.

LN: 95. The end of the year 95. December...

TN: Who Ashley?

LN: Yeah, December 23rd.

TN: No.

LN: 95. Yeah.

TN: No Rachel, Ashley, Rachel was born in August...

LN: 93

TN: 93. Ashley was born December 94, December 94.

LN: Yeah December 94.

TN: And Ben was January 96.

LN: Yeah 96. Yeah.

TN: So they are thirteen months apart.

LN: No 16 months apart and they are...

TN: Yeah 16 months apart and 13 months apart.

LN: Yeah.

CG: What were some of the challenges you experienced in starting you new life here in the United States?

TN: What was the question again?

CG: What were some of the challenges you experienced?

TN: Uh. I would think the language barrier. Probably the first and the most challenging. And the language barriers um is um was I would say was um the, the most challenging yeah but we have to overcome that when we did.

CG: How did you find a job here?

TN: Uh. I've been through number of job. Um most of the time through friends or relatives. You know. Uh. My um my first job I got through a friends, and uh I uh doing that for two, three years. And then uh a friend of mine recommend me to uh um go through the um agency to find the job in manufacturing. At that time you know what in the 9, the 80s California experienced a booming in manufacturing. We have no problem at all. At that time you know the Southern in Southern California um I would think if you are willing to work then you do not have a problem to find a job in any in construction, in manufacturing, aerospace industry, everything's booming. I mean I would say 10 times, 20 times today.

LN: It's easy to get a job.

TN: Yeah it's very easy to get a job back. Yeah you know. And if you lose any job for any reason. You have no problem to find another one. You know there's a thousands, of millions of jobs.

LN: If you're not lazy.

TN: If you're not lazy, you want to do it. Actually I, I work two jobs one time. You know. I work, I have two jobs, in two full time jobs in at one time. I had two full time jobs. So the reason I work two jobs not because uh I want to do work but because uh I don't know which one to leave, which one to give. I don't know. Both of them are very interesting. So back in the 80s, uh Southern California was booming. Yeah. Yeah.

LN: Not right now. It is so hard.

TN: Uh huh it's compared with now for younger, for younger people now I think we got a problem. But um back then no problem at all. No problem not at all. Not just me. You know. Everybody. Everybody. Entire community, they fit right in. So for, for the individual or for is a part, for is a small part for the entire community as a whole adapting to a new culture a new um job is probably number one you know because if you find works you know then everything go along. Financially, um everything. You know. You think. I believe Vietnam our Vietnamese people, our community they adapt pretty quick and fast, smooth um to especially in Southern California very smooth and easy.

CG: What is your current job?

TN: Um I am a radiology technologist. Everything I do um x-rays um in the health care industry.

CG: Have you ever encountered racism?

TN: Yeah. Um. But is but I think it was much better than I expected. There's only small, very small number of individual that have nothing to do like um not remarkable but always yes. Some not a, not a big mark, very small number of people.

CG: What are some similarities and differences between your old community in Vietnam and your new one here?

TN: They... similarity um similar um that equal. I think it's a different. Because why? Back home we was um very uh we live in a very uh tight neighborhood. You know think about 8 million people have to live in small strip of land um smaller than Orange County. So how tight we were. Um. Here we um have space uh however the community is still uh pretty tight compared to with um compared to the other uh. The Vietnamese community is small okay. And uh we pretty know, pretty much uh each other you know the small group to a small group um Vietnamese community in Southern California as a whole I would say we are a couple hundred thousand um people um our friends, our relatives, it is a small number uh we still pretty much um.

LN: The... is small

TN: Meet... Yeah meet to each other. And uh support each other you know. Um. But overall our community here is not really tight as it was back home. Yeah. Back then we pretty much uh tight just because of space we don't, we didn't have space you know. Um plus...

LN: Everything is small.

TN: Plus. Yeah.

LN: Everything is small.

TN: Plus um most of us is younger now and they most them is educated here most of them you know. Like your age, my daughter's, myself have some education here. So things change a little bit. Things change a little bit. Not a whole lot but change. We respect each other. We respect our, you know, our freedom. Um. You can say whatever you want, and for your own opinion. Uh. We don't criticize like before you know. Um back home when you, when you said something.

LN: You have to be careful.

TN: And you have somebody.

LN: No freedom for speech.

TN: Yeah no, I mean. There is, there is a fine line between uh freedom of speech and um and um insulting someone, but um I think our community now they accepted the, you know, freedom of speech. And they respect people. They respect the um.

LN: How come they say is the peoples things like they talk bad of the government there so they put you in jail? It's still not for freedom of speech.

TN: Uh. No, no, no. I think the hatred is still there. Some people they have some deep wound deep inside them they still have some bitterness about um the wound that they have. But um for me. You know what. My... I have a different opinion. You know. No one, no one hurt because of the war more than my family but I see them as a different, you know, I see them as a uh the country if you ask me did you leave everything behind, no probably not but for certainly I don't hate them the way they hate me. You know, I do not hate the communists the way they hate me. I'm different.

LN: Because you were young when you there.

TN: No. Well no. Well young is one thing. Young is meaning you don't know what to think. Um. You do not know what.

LN: Only the old people they hate.

TN: Don't know right and wrong. Yeah. But I think that um there is, there is a deep wound and you need time to heal. You need time to heal and in some people probably it never heal you know never heal.

LN: Like your dad's generation. Yeah.

TN: But the healing process got to be must start somewhere somehow. And I think for the younger generation uh I think they, they...

LN: They change.

TN: Yeah I think they change.

LN: Yeah.

CG: How do you identify yourself in American society? Do you identify yourself as Asian, Asian American, Vietnamese...?

TN: I am a Vietnamese American. And um my, my uh political view is I am independent. I am not democrat, nor Republican. I uh my point, my political point of view is independent meaning the policies if I agree uh with uh my representative I vote for him or I vote for her. Uh. I agree with the um proposition. I will vote for or against it. Not because it was well written by the democrat or because it was written by republican. I don't vote for republican nor democrat. You know. I vote for... I vote for whatever makes sense to me.

CG: Are you a citizen?

TN: Yes I am.

CG: How... How was the um process to become a citizen here?

TN: Uh I became a citizen in 1987. Uh after 5 years um resident um permanent resident then I'm, I'm eligible for uh US citizen uh back then. Um. I would say the most, the number one most to become a US citizen is like I said earlier at, at that times California, Southern California experienced a booming in uh economic job, everything. So it is as a US citizen you are easy to get a good job with well paying. So number one reason for me to become a US citizen probably because of a job. Other than any uh political things but um, you know, as a permanent resident um I am paying taxes just like everybody else. Mmhmm.

CG: Are there any songs, images, or artifacts that remind you of Vietnam?

TN: The war. The war. I grew up during the war. And uh actually, I actually I lost some classmates um because the war. As I look back when I was 17, it was in 1974, the war, the war getting worse and worse uh I was 17 and some of my classmates was 18 you know or even older. Um. They have to join the armed force. They can't be waived because they are old. You know. Because they are 18. Oh I forgot to tell you about this. Uh. How they draft uh for the military at that time. You know. Every man. There's actually no draft, you have to, every man if you are 17 and you are attending uh senior year 12th grade, then you get waived. Right? But if you're 18 and you are seniors no you are not. So I was a year um younger. Um I was lucky. That was it. I was lucky I was a year younger and uh my classmates. So I got a waiver uh to finish my school. Now if I um get my diploma. If I pass the test, I got my diploma and very likely I am qualified for college. Now if I fail college uh entrance exam, I still have another year to work for, uh I still have another year to wait for the next entrance exam. If I fail again and I was 19, then um I have to join the arm force. So there is no more waive. Back then the law saying if I'm get into the college okay and if I pass two semester okay then I will qualify for the next years the sophomore years. Now in the sophomore years I passed two semesters, then I am qualified for the junior years. Now the junior years have two small semesters and I pass all of them and I am qualify for

the senior years and I become a graduate whether as an engineer or a teacher or whatever in four year college just like everybody else. Now if I fail one of those years, I am out. So college was tough back then. It was tough.

CG: What are some of the traditions or customs of your culture?

TN: Um some of we, we Vietnamese people we um we highly value the, we highly value the family value if you can see our ancestor. You know. Uh. We want them, we always want them with us. You know, my in-laws you can see picture on uh in the front in the focus of the room or whatever the house or the best place in the house we want to put our parents or grandparent or whoever passed away you know we place them in there and because we always believe that they blessing us and then we always want them to stay with us. Uh. That was Linda's parents because they both passed away. My parents are not there yet because they still alive. So but someday, you know, someday yeah when they, when they will leave us. Um. We, we, we want them the spirit whatever to stay with us by blessing their picture or something in the family. That is one thing. Um. The second thing is that um we uh have a family reunion. Um. Like, you know, I have my brother and my sister. Uh Linda is holding a family reunion next month. Um for the day that uh her dad passed away um well they both passed away in March so we using, you know, we usually use the second weekend um of March uh to set up the day to remember him to remember them both of them. Maybe they passed away about 5 years apart. Right? 5 years apart. Your mom and your dad passed away...

LN: 4 years.

TN: 4 years apart but they all in March. And only 10 days, you know, or 5 days.

LN: They almost come the same time, same month and same day too.

TN: Almost.

LN: Almost.

TN: So um we using that day...

LN: Can you believe that?

TN: As a remembrance, you know, to remember um the parents. Uh. They also um the New Year's Day, as you may know, it's the Lunar Year we celebrate um our New Year's with the family. We gather, you know, we gather during um for the, for the New Year's.

LN: Or the New Year's back in my country's all my family they.

TN: Big...

LN: They...

TN: They we celebrate big time.

LN: Yeah. And they celebrate and then they, they go to the um cemetery and they wash all the...

TN: Tombstones.

LN: Tombstones.

TN: And headstones.

LN: Yeah.

TN: We clean and wash.

LN: Put the flowers just like for them to celebrate uh New Year's too.

TN: For the one who live and also for the one who dead.

LN: Yeah. It is still celebrate...

TN: Yeah the one who die. So we, we use that day to remember all of them.

CG: Are there any traditions that you pass down to your children?

TN: Yeah probably remain the same. Yeah. Yeah probably we pass out to our uh children um probably the same. Yeah. You know. And there is um um in August there is um the day for the children you know like for the Full Moon or May Autumn, Full Moon. Uh. But actually that is the day for the children. Uh New Year's is basically for everybody, you know, the children too. So the children too. So they will remember the parent or our grandparent who passed away you know. Some family they have more than one. They have like, I don't know, five or ten of them. That they remember grandpa, that they remember great-grandpa. They remember grandma. They remember great-grandma. And great aunt, number of things. Some families they have more than 10 but who cares. That's a day for family reunion. You know. We gather together, we pray according to their religion. Some of them Buddhists. Some of them Catholic. Whatever it is. You know. They just remember. In our family, maybe we have two or three days um a year, um but some families they have a lot, maybe they have more than 10.

CG: Did you pass down the language to your... your kids?

LN: Yeah.

TN: Yeah we passed down the language to the kids. Um not is a must. Not is the um mandatory or something. But um yes we pass down um pass, you know. We spoke, speak our language sometimes.

LN: At home.

TN: At home. Mmhmm.

CG: In your opinion, what will become of the Vietnamese culture in America?

TN: Um. I think uh the, the question uh I think a friend of mine also have that question. Um they like our culture. They liked um our family value. Mmkay. They like um immigrant value. They interest in them because uh our first year generation we pave way for the second move on. Um. Your parents as well. I would say they work so hard to, to get you to where you are right now.

LN: Mmhmm.

TN: And, and they happy about it you know. Um. Same as I do. You know I um we just wish that our um children you know that they are able to achieve higher education and you know today we pay yearly for that right so it is not, not for free or something we work hard to get them for, for what they are and um you know to give them a good future. Um. And I think all immigrant not just Vietnamese community I think Filipino community too you know especially immigrant, you know, that all the parent we pave way, you know, for the second generation move on. And I think that beautiful. And I hope, you know what, I hope my children they will pave way for my grandchildren to move forward. I mean.

LN: They better.

TN: But you know what, ask your parents about it. They are very hap... if you achieve you know your achievement, you know, they are very happy for your achievement and they usually don't want you to pay back. We don't looking for that. We don't expect you to do that. To pay back or to do something for them later on, no. We don't expect that.

LN: Just expect them to have a good life for themselves.

TN: A good life for themselves that's it.

LN: And for their kids in the future.

TN: Mmhmm. Mmhmm. Now back to the question my children sometimes they have a feeling that I expect them to, you know, to get there. Um. Well, actually if I pave way for them there is no reason for them to get there. I don't see why you can't get there, you know, so yeah. Um so with our culture, so basically in our culture, the first generation are the, you know, the one who basically pave way for the next generation. And we are happy for them. Mmhmm.

CG: Are you involved with the Vietnamese community here in the US?

TN: No. No. Um I don't um really um join or actively in a, in the...

LN: In Vietnamese...

TN: In Vietnamese, in our community. No.

LN: We live far, a little bit far away from them.

TN: No we're, no for one things that I don't want to be involved with any political um agreement or whatever it is. Um.

CG: Do you ever visit Little Saigon in Westminster or Garden Grove?

TN: Oh yeah. Every week. Could be more than once a week. Right?

LN: No once a week.

TN: Maybe more. You know. Could be more. Who knows? You know because uh Little Saigon is just not a place to visit but also um have number of businesses.

LN: Yeah.

TN: You know, you know. Like you go there for your beauty supplies. You know. And I went there for a number of things, you know, market, uh food, um tax.

LN: Vietnamese market.

TN: They have a, you know, number of connections. We have to contact there.

CG: Are there any special songs or foods in your culture?

TN: Yes. Um um.

LN: We eat Vietnamese food everyday.

TN: Yeah. We, we still eat. Well actually some days we have spaghetti, steak, we just there's just a mix there and here. We have Vietnamese food too. Uh. Yes we do have some pops song, some favorite food just like uh, just like uh Americans have hamburger or something. I mean we do have some yeah we do have some.

CG: What are fave... some of your favorite foods?

TN: Um I would like the beef noodle. Okay beef noodle is probably the most common in uh our Vietnamese uh culture. You can have it for breakfast, you can have it for lunch, even, even you can have it for dinner.

LN: Yeah.

TN: Yeah we don't have any formal thing, but uh those beef noodle or chicken noodle you know they are, they good for, for any occasion, they good for I would say for any breakfast or lunch or

dinner. Of course during for like formal banquets, you know, like weddings or something we don't serve that in the formal banquet uh however beef noodle is probably the most common. Uh.

LN: Food.

TN: Yeah food for us. Yeah.

CG: What are the most common dishes during like family gatherings?

TN: Egg rolls. Okay. Uh. Sweet rice, right?

LN: Yeah sweet rice.

TN: Rice cake.

LN: Or fried rice.

TN: Fried rice. Um.

LN: Noodles.

TN: Fried noodles.

LN: Yeah fried.

TN: Yeah.

LN: Yeah.

TN: Yeah fried noodle. Um. How about stir fry? Do we have anything stir fry? Hot pot.

LN: Or how uh what do we call is a...

TN: Oh beef, seven courses of beef.

LN: Yeah seven courses.

TN: Seven courses of beef. Yeah.

LN: Yeah that's uh.

TN: Yeah that's our favorite. Well we don't serve all together but um we serve maybe like 3 or 4, 3 or 4 dishes you know during the uh family reunion or an occasion something like that.

CG: What religion does your family practice?

TN: Roman Catholic is our uh family practice. Uh probably about 10% of our population is Roman Catholic. Um Buddhism probably about 30%. And more than half of our country, um we more than half of the country um is um they believe in um not worship ancestors it is just um.

LN: Like um grandparent they...

TN: Yeah.

LN: The people pass away

TN: Yeah.

LN: So they uh...

TN: Actually there is no religion, but actually they um they, they don't worship them, you know, they remember their ancestors but they don't worship them. You know they just practice their belief that if you do something good, something, you will have something good in return or something better in return, something like that. Um. Basically it is like um a philosophy or something you know. Philosophy uh believe in ancestor and I think more than half the country. Roman Catholic is only um 10%. And we was one of them. We, we are one of them.

CG: What family heirlooms or momentos do you possess? Like pictures...

TN: What? What was the question again?

CG: What family heirlooms and momentos do you possess? Like pictures, maybe rings, pictures...

TN: Pictures yeah. Pictures I would think because uh we left them at home, we left everything. we don't have anything, we not inherit anything, we not, we don't have anything with us so um we are the first generation so I have to just maybe some memory from our parents, you know, maybe we can get some um picture um and that's it. Right?

LN: Yeah.

CG: So you... you didn't bring anything back from Vietnam?

LN: Nothing.

TN: Nothing.

LN: We escape.

TN: We left. Well actually we went back in 1998. But just for a visit. You know. Our home is here. Now. Here. So it's just.

LN: Yeah.

TN: It's just visit.

LN: Nothing in back in Vietnam.

TN: Yeah.

CG: Do you still consider Vietnam as home?

TN: No. Um. We use to say back home, back home this, back home that, but no. It is actually no um we don't consider.

LN: We live here longer here than over there.

TN: We will um as of this year. We rooted here. So I don't think that someday or somehow, you know what you never know, but I, I don't plan, I don't plan to uh to uh someday, you know, to go back and live there. No.

LN: Go back for visit yeah.

TN: We probably visit but that's it. I, I don't plan to go back and live there. Um we, we rooted here.

CG: So what is Vietnam to you now?

TN: Um Vietnam to me now is um the past and Vietnam right now is um probably is just a place that you was born and grew up. If you looking for the um responsibility to Vietnam uh you know I love that country no question about it but my one of the place I was born and grew there. But here uh I think the country I live here is I am an American now so I think we, I should have some responsible, responsibility here. With this country more than I am proud to be a Vietnamese American no question about that you know but um decide that and that's it.

CG: What are the most important things that future generations of Vietnamese Americans should remember about their past?

TN: I want them to um retain the family value um to begin with. Um I want them to um remember that they are Vietnamese American. Um I want them to know if they study about history and to know about the past, to learn the lesson in the past, but not to hate, you know, not for hatred but for healing. So I want them to um to learn from the past, basically history is a lesson from the past. Yeah. Basically lesson from the past. You know. I want them to be remember that they are Vietnamese American, to retain the values, to retain um the good part of our culture, you know, to learn about the history. They will, they will make the choice just themselves. You know. I really don't want to drive them into um history or divide. And I think they are smart enough to do that.

CG: Do your children know about the history of Vietnam? Of the war?

TN: Some of... some yeah... in some part, some part because history now um record you know um a lot. I mean. In college, in college there are courses about Vietnamese war, the Vietnam War, um they learn about it from television and in the documentary things, uh in book. Uh my children, they do not know much about it, but someday they will, someday they will. My daughter is already have some few questions about it. But you know. Um I think the history part um will give them some idea about the war. And I want them to learn about it. Basically history. So that's um.

CG: Do they know about your life in Vietnam?

TN: Um yes. Not very detail but um not in detail, but there is yeah but I hope someday we have a chance to talk more about that.

CG: Are there any other memories or stories you would like to share?

TN: Um yeah. I have uh quite a lot of stories. Um. The um... They have a lot of... I have quite a bit. Um. Which one do you want to hear? One here... One that I came here... Or the one, the one I still there. The one that is still um. When I was in Vietnam.

CG: Do you have any memories of your parents or grandparents back in Vietnam? Any happy memories?

TN: Uh um when I was um... I think I was 3 years old. I still remember. I was, I think I was 3, but very vague memory. Uh however, um my dad he went to uh, he had to stay for training, short time probably for a year or something like that, I was too young to remember but when he went home, he brought me a toy, you know. A car with a flashing light, motor running, or something so um I have the vague memories of something big, something fun, something colorful, something real technology. You know, because um I have a very high tech toy. You know. Only, I'm the only one that have, that have a high tech toy in the neighborhood. Even the car can run everywhere with a motor. When it hurt the wall, it turn back and they have the flashing light. They make noise, they make sirens when they, when they move. So that was an expensive toy. Yeah. You know. Back then we don't have, have, you know, we a poor country. Most of us have a plastic toy that you can move around manually, and I, I'm the only one who have that, who have that kind of toy. Who have. So I really enjoy it. The uh. Oh. Um. Another question... another story that I want to share to always believe in yourself that something that you uh are much better than the others that you don't know. Um when I had my first job it was before I applied for a um the company who made the auto part for, you know, GM, and Ford, and um Reynolds. That was in, that was the uh the company that made parts for they build cars, you know, for GM, Ford, and um I applied for the job, and the job, the job fair was held by the union meaning um they um they were going to accept your applications. They will test you to see how far, how good about your knowledge, you know, so they can um set you up for appropriate position. Now I um was applying for an opening position meaning I did not accept everything, everyone, and you know in the factory uh job in a ranking for the engineer, you know, the manager directors or all the way down to talking attendant or something, you know. So um hey I

thought that um I just hoping for you know maybe for any opening position, maybe open the gate or something, but, but it turned out I'm scored pretty high on this uh on the grade because um I do it very well in math. I did very well in um metric, you know, because you know I was like born to do metric, you know. Everybody here is using the standard system. I pretty good at metric so um I um, I went on the um first test I passed. I went to the second still passed. I go to the third still passed. I go to the next, next, next, next, next, next. I don't know. I think I had to go the next day I still pass. So they, they was very surprised, you know. And um finally I, they caught me something and I fail because uh I think I uh, I put the period instead of a comma at the after 3 digits like million, you know, you have to put 1 comma and three zeros and another comma and then put another three zeros. So uh I fail that part and uh I fail uh, what are they called, I remember they asked me about fractions or something and I put name the denominator now. And finally and uh and uh the final, they reversed the grade because they say no, impossible, this guy he can do all the x-y coordinate, he can do all the graphing, there's no reason he can't do you know...

LN: The fraction...

TN: The fraction. There's no reason you know and um and finally I was called in and explain what I meant and it turned out the entire world, only American and English, put the comma behind the uh you know the three digit you know like thousand or million whatever it is. The entire world is using period. Only the American and the English using the comma.

LN: The comma.

TN: Okay one thing.

LN: They're different huh.

TN: Yeah, no big deal. And um another story is that um you know that English is the my barrier, the most challenging barriers. So I was trying to study English in a community that I lived in that time is I would say 99% it was white um no Asian no minority. So the only English class they have in the community center, it was like history or Shakespeare or something. Yeah. It was Shak... So I but anyway I um registered, registered in the class because that was the only class available at that time. So that was a part about um I still joke, you know, with my friends, you know what before I learned to say, before I learned, you know, to speak any language, you know what I read Shakespeare. I read. So but, that's the only class available in the community center. Well anyway so I went there and um I had to study and discuss with I don't know number of like insurance salesman or um I don't know loan officer or some guy in the bank or something. They just want to you know enjoy in the, in the, to some in the community center you either learn to paint or you learn uh poem. You know. So actually um I studied about poem, about Shakespeare before I speak any English. Can you believe that? You know and it was with um. I had a very good experience too. You know and I was still in back in Vietnam, so we pretty much respected, you know, the instructor or the teacher we highly respect them, and my first day in the class I was very early uh I was one of the first one you know in the class so I was sitting in the desk now and uh about few minutes later, you know, I saw a very good looking man, you know, with glasses, with tie and suit carrying the suitcase. I thought that uh...

LN: The teacher...

TN: He the teacher so I stood up and then, and then he went back and sit behind me. Oh so it not him. So well the next person to come in, you know, there is an older lady about 50, 55, 60 you know also where glasses, you know, also hair, well dresses to come in good looking too.

LN: She a student.

TN: I thought she's a teacher so I stood up and no she just a student and she come and sit next to me. Oh okay well. And uh.

LN: Then a young guy comes...

TN: Then a young guy comes in and you know and it is about 15 people in the class they all I would say well respect in society. They all, you know, middle age and finally there is a guy, you know, who is about 20, about 30 he's uh, he look like.

LN: 29.

TN: No he is an Indian.

LN: Oh.

TN: American Indian. His hair is about be long, his back and he wearing a black tshirt with a hole right here and he wearing a jean and he didn't wear a shoe either. He wearing a sandal. And he just have a stack of paper. He put around his armpit and he walked like this. And I was like oh man okay forget it it's not him. And he's the teacher. And he's a professor too. He's a professor from Penn State. Yeah he's a Ph.D. in the American literature and uh poetry. Wonderful. Great guy. Good guy. He lectured.

LN: Symbol. Dress up.

TN: He lectured with all you know passion and when he read Shakespeare with a true English accent. You know. Forget it. He like or he. I don't know see you, see and Mohawk or whatever. He actually is an American Indian. And he earned a Ph.D. in American literature. He is a full time professor in the Penn State but he also volunteer in the community service. And he teaching um, you know, two, one classes in Shak... So I read about Hamlet and everything before I speak, I speak, I speak any English. So yeah. So that's, I think that's a funny or wonderful experience whatever it is yeah. So uh that's my first English clas... first English class. So I still remember that.

CG: That was in Vietnam, right? Or was that...

TN: Here.

LN: Here.

CG: Okay that was here.

TN: Yes. That's one of my... that's I think first month or second months here. I attend a community uh classes and um I have training at the same time... Mmhmm same time.

CG: Is there anything that I have not asked you that you feel is important to add at this time?

TN: Mmm... I thinks that um, but actually you did ask but I think I didn't fully answered that question. I mean uh why did I left, why did I left the country. So I didn't decide to come here but I did decide to leave the country right. So I did. Uh after 6, I mean 5 years, uh 6 years under the communist regimes there is no future you know what there is no future for the entire country not just myself but for um entire country. And it's not very difficult to make that decision you know. I know when I leave I am facing death you know. On the journey, I could face prosecution if I get caught uh but the, the freedom outweighed everything I would even death you know. So the, the decision that I decide, it's not very difficult one you know it's not a difficult one um most of the people would think because the economic condition turned very bad so that's why most of us had to leave the country but that's not true. Most of leave the country is because of freedom. Okay. And the secondly um most of them have either a strong tight or little tight with the previous government or regime, they facing a safety issue okay. The different touches, they didn't touch you then they might touch you now because there is no law to protect you, you know, there is no protection, there is no protection at all. So there, that's I think two main issue. Uh that most of us face with is this the freedom and the safety. Uh a lot of them left everything you know back home.

LN: Yeah.

TN: All they did, all they did was just...

LN: Freedom.

TN: All they, all they have is a hand, you know. Myself I didn't have much, you know. Well actually I didn't loss, I didn't lose much beside my family.

LN: He too grown-up.

TN: But a lot of people like my Uncle...

LN: Yeah.

TN: Left a fortune. He left a fortune back in Vietnam.

LN: A lot of you come back.

TN: Just to flee with his family. You know. He lost million and million. In dollars. Not just not the, the currency. They had property. You know. They, they, they a lot of people left a fortune behind them. So it is not about um um economic downturn or economic condition we all know the government was bad but not the main reason. So um that's what I meant... what I need to clarify in your project for two main reasons see for freedom and for their safety. You know. So um some people um that I have encountered with they think uh the people who fled before 1975 um that the truly the refugee and the one who fled after was just because their economic condition turned down to bad and they had to leave but that's not true. I mean. Let put it this way if you fled before the Saigon fall, before the war, you don't know communist yet right you haven't tried them yet. You know. The one who fled after they been through that they know they cannot live with that you know they have to leave their homeland you know they have to leave their homeland, they have no choice you know the one that fled before you scared. Right? You scared that was it. Right? So uh for us as a refugee as a whole to me hey you fled before or after it doesn't matter you know you make a right decision. We, we all make a right decision. But you know all of us, not all of us, made it out not all of us made it, not all of us. I don't know how many people died in the ocean, died in the sea I don't know.

LN: Yeah.

TN: A lot. I don't know. You know. We just one of the few lucky one I guess. I think, I think probably 1/3 of us did not, 1/3 you know. And some of them get caught. They died in the prison. Some of us didn't make it into the safety. They get shot. Some of us, they died in the ocean. The hunger because of terror terrorists, number you know. We have been through a lot.

LN: Her, her sister died in the ocean.

TN: Yeah not all of us made it out, not all of us, some only I would say at least 1/3 of us didn't make it. So and because of, and because of that um some people right now in our community they are very anti-communist. Very anti, very anti-communist. So.

CG: Are you anti-commun...?

TN: Yes, um anti-communist but I have a different um you know um I have a different opinion about, about ideally. Not because of hatred or because um, um what they did to me. Right? Like revenge or something. No I don't put that in front. But I don't put that. Ideally uh communist... communism doesn't work. You know. Won't work. Okay. Right now in the country, they abandon a few principal about communism for one thing, for several things. First of all, for freedom, I mean the um, the possession, now people have possession a lot, a lot of commun... a lot of high ranking communist party have a very rich corruption. Right? Okay they uh freedom of uh freedom of um possession, property, now people have property okay which is the principal against the communism okay. Uh conduct a business, now an individual you know uh conduct a business. You know they can have, conduct a business which is also um against one of the principals of communism you know with the government running anything you know so as long as the, the leader and the government agree at this point they already change. We don't need any revolution, uh we don't need any killing, or we, we don't need any violence to change you know

when they change those principals now they have to do a few more of things: freedom of speech okay and then um human right.

LN: Yeah the young generation now they growing.

TN: Now the entire country collapse, they collapse themselves. They... They don't do anything. You know. Now the communist people, they would love to have their property. They would love to have their possessions. So they corrupt themselves. You know they don't do anything. You know. We don't have to do violence. Or we don't need to have any revolution or nothing like that. You know. So that against, against themselves. You know like um Mar... Lenin the Russian, they always insist that we need a revolution, we must have this to achieve that, you know, but things can, people can change. And right now. They change. They already did. And they are changing too. You know. So um and I think that the Vietnamese government, they want to normalize relationship with any country in this world. They have to do the same thing. They have to do, they have to um put especially the pressure from the United States. Not just Vietnam, not just Vietnam. But um Iran um you know, any hot part in the world, they always put human right and the democracy on the table you know in the negotiation you know we can't talk so um I am very excited to see how North Korea you know change you know. Vietnam already did. They already did.

LN: They all communists.

TN: Yeah. So China is one thing. China already did now. Long time ago. So China did. Vietnam did. Um there's only two, two countries left. Cuba and North Korea. That's it. It's just a matter of time. Just a matter of time. Yeah.

CG: Okay if there is nothing else you want to say, this is the end of our interview.

TN: Uh-huh.

CG: And I would like to thank you.

TN: Is that all? Or did I answer all of you. Or do you have to review or rewind?

LN: She already. Taped here already.

CG: I already taped it on here. But yeah.

TN: Okay sure.

CG: Thank you so much.

TN: Okay.

LN: Uh-huh.

TN: Thank you Camille.