

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

FIELD NOTES

The interview was conducted in Tuan Nguyen's beautiful, two-story home in Orange, California. I arrived at their home a bit early, and the family was eating dinner. So I waited in their formal living room. It was such a beautiful home. I could not help but notice the different portraits around their home – a picture of a man and a woman over their fireplace (later in the interview I would find out that they are Linda's deceased parents), a portrait of Tuan and Linda's marriage, and a family portrait. When the family was finished eating dinner, I was invited into the informal dining area where the interview would take place. Linda offered me a drink - Sprite. Honestly, I was nervous and maybe a little intimidated because I did not know what to expect and being Filipina American I was not sure if Tuan would open up about certain things such as the Vietnam War. I know Tuan's wife, Linda, because she has been my hairdresser since I was a child, but I did not really know Tuan. I just remember seeing him sometimes at the hair salon when I was younger.

Present during the interview were the Narrator, Tuan Nguyen, the interviewer Camille Garcia (me), and Tuan's wife Linda Nguyen. Occasionally, their son, Ben, would pass by during the interview. Ben actually introduced himself to me before the interview. I felt very welcomed. His two daughters stayed upstairs during the whole interview.

Tuan showed up to the interview dressed in his scrubs. We followed protocol and signed all consent and release forms prior to beginning the interview. I was surprised that Tuan signed all the consent and release forms without me giving a full explanation of what each form is. I basically just said the title of each form. It seemed like he signed all the forms really quickly. He even filled out the biographical survey quickly. After signing all the forms, he actually mumbled that it is good to tell them about the history and culture – something along those lines. Hearing him say that made me less nervous.

At the beginning of the interview, Linda was actually doing the dishes. So you can hear water in the background. It was not much of a distraction. She was also making tea or coffee for herself and her husband. You might also hear Linda talking to their son Ben in the background at some times. There was actually a time when Linda went to her children, and told them to listen to their

father talk about Vietnam. Linda would also talk during the interview sometimes, but Tuan did the most talking of course. Throughout the interview, I noticed Tuan would say “um” or “uh” a lot, but it was not because he was nervous. It seemed more part of his thinking process in what to say next. He actually did not seem nervous at all during the interview. He moved his hands a lot, but it seemed like he moved his hands to emphasize some points. At times, it seemed like he could go on and on talking about certain things. I did not want to interrupt him at all when he was talking. When he talked about the effects of the Vietnam War on him and or his family, you can actually see the sadness in his eyes. One could tell that the Vietnam War was serious just by looking at his eyes and also by the tone of his voice. Also, you can see the happiness in his eyes when he spoke of coming to the United States and getting his freedom. He talked a lot about freedom. The United States really symbolized freedom for him. I really loved the way he talked about certain things in detail especially when he talks about San Francisco with so much imagery – how it was cloudy and how red the Golden State Bridge was. He said it was beautiful, and it was definitely beautiful the way he talked about it. He looked so happy, and you can hear the happiness in the tone of his voice. He sounded so inspirational. Even though he said that speaking English is a challenge for him, his English was actually good and I understood everything he said.

After the interview, I said my thank you’s, and Tuan actually thanked me as well. I thought that was nice. Linda even said that it was good that I interviewed Tuan instead of her because he has a lot to say. She said her interview would only be 15 minutes long.

Then I took some photos of Tuan. He had no problem with me taking pictures of him. He smiled in each picture. He took a picture at the informal dining table where the interview took place, in the kitchen, in the formal living room by the fireplace, by a portrait of his family, and in the informal living room.

After taking the pictures, we actually sat back down at the informal dining table and talked for a few minutes. We talked about UCI and a little bit more about the project. Tuan even talked about his experiences of interviewing people for school projects. We could have talked forever, but it was getting late so I had to go.

Tuan Nguyen and his wife Linda Nguyen were very accommodating throughout the entire process, and I am very happy they participated in this project. It definitely seemed like they were happy to participate in the project.