Vietnamese name is Vuong The Hung. And I have a nickname too, people call me Gioi.

SW: How did you get that last..nick name?

HW: Well, when I was a – young, and my- I was born, and my dad went to do the birth certificate, and, [clears throat] excuse me – and the government officer asked what name you’re
going to put in for your son, something just popped up in his mind and he said oh, let’s just get this name, uh Gioi. And I have a name, initially it is Vuong Yay Yo, but then later when I was grown up, I changed it back to Vuong The Hung. And that is my official name in paperwork.

SW: Okay, so backtracking a little bit, I’d like to ask you where and when you were born.

HW: I was born in a small town called Tan Phuoc Khanh… is a small village and belonged to the province of Binh Duong. About 20 miles distance to Saigon, the south Vietnam capital.

SW: Could you tell me more about that, your hometown?

HW: That town had- about let’s see, have the mixed ethnic Vietnamese and Chinese, and most of the Chinese had factories to produce the pots. The town was about I think 2,000 people population. And it’s half industrial town. They produced the pottery like bowls, dish, a lot of ceramics stuff, something like that.

SW: So would you say that your town was more poor or more on the richer side?

HW: I would say the town because most was considered half industrial, including people, who produced, they had factories, manufacture, so they, people had jobs, and employment, so the living, I would say looked very okay. From that town, if you go deeper about a mile or two miles inside, that is rural and farmers, and people were more poorer.

SW: Could you describe to me how your family was growing up in this village of yours?

HW: When I, my family, has 7 brothers and sisters. My mom and my dad have a factory to produce the pottery, so when I was a child, I used to go to school, and when we come back and have time, we help the parents to work on some of the jobs that are minor stuff. You know, we can help.
SW: Going back to when you said your town had approximately 2,000 people living there, could you describe to me how the relationship was between your family and your neighbors, were you close, did you know them, and how was the relationship?

HW: Well, people live, the neighbors, they come to my mom and dad’s factory, and work. And in that time as I remember, we are very friendly, and people were very helpful. We help each other if we could, that’s considered a village in that time during the war. So, sometime at night the communists – the Vietnamese communists, they come, and they ask for food, then sometimes they come and they don’t leave, and in the daytime people have to evacuate because the government army will come and attack them, and try to chase them away. And have airplanes, drop the bombs, so we have to evacuate. As a child, I had to run so many times and when we come back, the house damaged because of the bombs, and we have to rebuild the house. Some of the storage, the factory, when you say factory it’s not as big as in America, it’s a small, but maybe we have 10 or 20 employees working on. But the living was considered very good. As my family, we were considered middle class. For my family, when I was a child until I grew up, we, I always have food to eat, you know. We can buy, have income to buy things that we want, not like people that we saw living in the rural or farming, they have to struggle a lot.

SW: Okay, so I know you mentioned that you grew up during the time of the war and could you let me know what your date of birth was, or around the time you were born so I could get a sense of the time period?

HW: I was born in 1960, so by the time the war accelerated, like 1968, we have – how to say, the “Viet Cong” attack 1968, the new year’s – Chinese new year, they call Mau Than. And I was 8-9 years old, and we have 1972, the war was very – broke out in fighting, very accelerated, a lot and
both sides had casualties. In 1972, they called Mua He Lua Do. Well, in that time I used to see a lot of soldiers, get killed, and their bodies brought back to their families and we, as a child, I would run over to come look at. And the relatives, the soldiers’ family members crying, and at that time I was very sympathetic for their families.

SW: Okay, what do you remember most about that war time period, growing up during your childhood?

HW: As I mentioned earlier, when I was a child, these two times of the war that broke out really, really deadly is 1968 and 1972. And I have to run to evacuate so, so many times. In particular, my village, but not mentioned 1975, the year that the North Vietnamese– North Vietnam successfully invaded and took over the South Vietnam. And my village, not many deadly fighting happened. But another different area, we see a lot of people get killed, soldiers, and they have to run, and some of them fighting back the “Viet Cong”, and they have to, some of them, you know, dropped the weapons, and take off the clothing, the army clothing, and tried to run for their life.

SW: Were you or any of your family members involved in the war?

HW: My family was lucky, in that time, especially me and my brother, nobody get into the army. Only my big, biggest brother, he served in the army but he got injured and he got discharged earlier, so from those two times of the 1968 and 1972, my family and even with my brothers, sisters, and family members, nobody was involved in the war, fighting.

SW: Okay, so, you said that no one in your family besides your big brother was involved in the war directly. But in that case then, how did the war in Vietnam affect your family and your community?
HW: Well, we always remember that the war in Vietnam, that it’s a war that have a lot of people get involved, served in the army, and get killed. For me, I think both sides – the “Viet Cong”, and the government army, have a lot of casualties. So many families had to be- uh, suffer, in terms of the uh, financial, physical, and emotionally. So, the war uh, finally ended but not the way we expected because the “Viet Cong” successfully took over. And uh, so many people had been suffered a lot because of the war, because of the policy of the North, northern Vietnam, put in uh, on their people.

SW: Okay, so where were you during the last days of the war? What were your memories of those final days?

HW: I remember on April 29th, on that night, uh, I was at night time, we uh, at home, and some of the um, the “Viet Cong” come and knock the door, and saying – prior to that day, we already aware of the situation of the war, not very good, and the war, maybe ended very soon because a month earlier the president of South Vietnam resigned and give up his power to another vice president. And in that time I already know, my family already know that very soon the war would soon be over, and north Vietnam would have more power, stronger, because they have more ammunition, everything, they get help from Russia and China, they will successfully and more power take over South Vietnam. Because in that time, uh American USA, would give more, just give little aid, and the South Vietnam government and soldiers not much ammunition to fight back North Vietnam. So, my family, as everybody in community, in um, in general, everybody know that the war would be ended because the North Vietnam have more power and stronger and so many territories were lost to the north from South Vietnam, gradually, so we know that. So talking back to the day uh that before the last day the war ended, and in that night, April 29th, I was at night – that night time, the “Viet Cong” knocked the door and they staged
some of the positions to get ready for the morning April 30th, 1975. So they told us that the next day, they gonna come over and take over everything so we – we already get ready, but in that time, my brother and I so scared, we had to hiding in my house in the room that we have uh a separate area to hide, because we are so scared that we thought that they come – the “Viet Cong” will come over and sometime force us to follow them to go with them, and to work – they call Lao Cong something. In Vietnamese they call Lao Cong, so we so afraid, so scared and when we heard that my brother and I, we have to hide in the room, we have a special area that we hid. Until, you know, the morning, and we heard that almost over, we know it, because we, my dad and mom, the day time, they lie, and all the neighbors, and soldier, um government army, and solider, they already withdraw, and run away, and only the post – um, some of the how to say the, spot that the government officials guarded, buildings, they abandoned it, so all the community over there they know that the war was ended. Later that day, about by noon, when we heard in the morning on the news that the president uh Duong van Minh call all the army to drop the guns, weapon, and you know surrender to the North Vietnam, uh in that time, people have uh mixed feelings. Some of them happy, some of them very scared because they know that communists took over and it’s not really good for the country because they gonna kill a lot of people to revenge. And people, so scared. Some of the soldiers, the South Vietnam army, if they have a chance, they just run away and just get on the boat or helicop, airplane, and go to the American um, carrier, outside the sea, waiting at the sea, they just get on there and get out. Even in the American embassy, a lot of people there just try to get in the helicop to fly out to the American carrier outside the ocean, waiting outside. So, there’s a lot of people who tried to get away, run away if they could. And a lot of people, very bravely, commit suicide because they couldn’t live under the Vietnamese how do you say it, communism, the North Vietnam and the
South Vietnam. Some of them, even the good name generals, they commit suicide. In that day, we don’t know, but you know, when I later on, I read the news and heard that, so we know. Because in under the “Viet Cong”, the North Vietnam, the media very strict, you rarely know about the news. They control everything, the media, the radio, you couldn’t hear it. You wouldn’t know about anything. They always talking about the Vietnamese communist party, the leader, Ho Chi Minh, something, and in that time I was so scared too. Because we really, my mom, my dad, we they are Chinese, they come from China, and that time the Chinese communists were very brutal too. So my mom my dad they know communists were very bad, and they know it’s not good, we don’t have a good future. They will – no freedom at all.

SW: Okay, so you mentioned a lot about how people felt during the war, but I’d like to ask you what your personal feelings were during the war. Like, how did the war affect you personally?

HW: I think the war [pause] happened because both sides, after the 1954 Geneva Agreement, Vietnam was split in half at the 17th parallel, and the north was North Vietnam. South Vietnam from the 17th parallel down south, is the democratic country, and will be allied with the USA. The North Vietnam followed with what’s called communism and allied with Russia and China. And because North Vietnam tried to take over South Vietnam and tried to take over, American came over and tried to defend the freedom, a democratic country. That is why we have a worth between the North and the South. The north tried to invade and the south was defense. And that’s a long war, it happened for many, many years and a lot of human casualties were involved, and so many young people had been killed, unfortunately. For my personal feeling, when the war ended, my family was happy, that nobody else would be killed in the war again, but besides that, we worried that the communist would be oppressed on us and put brutal policy on us. That’s why we worried and a lot of people couldn’t live under the North Vietnamese regime and they had to
escape by boat, and that’s why we have a lot of Vietnamese refugees who went to the Southeast Asian countries like Malyasia, Thailand, Indonesia. Many, many people died at sea for the wait while looking for freedom.

SW: Okay, so you mentioned that after the North took over, that everybody was scared so, could tell me a little more about how your family decided to escape Vietnam and rebuild your life elsewhere?

HW: My family, like most families who love freedom and democracy, we know that under the communist regime, it is hard to live under their rule. So, because the food, the field, everything, the government controlled. We had to get rations for food, the food had to be rational, the field, same thing. There is nothing that we can buy and use frequent. They went backward because the economy was so bad, people had not enough food to eat, even if you had money you could buy, but would not really get enough for the population in the country. That’s why a lot of people tried to get out of that country, escape. They used the boat, they had to escape to different countries in order to emigrate to freedom countries like America…western countries. For my family, we always had the same thing, so we just worked, and made money, so when we had some money… the government had a program where they organized boats for people who wanted to escape and you had to pay gold to the government. They let you use the boats to escape to a different country. At that time, my family had some gold and we let my sister go first to register with the boat owner, and she successfully went…on the way to a different country and in the ocean, when the boat go out and you don’t know where to go, you just try to go to Indonesia or Malaysia, but her boat was luckily rescued by an American boat. They took everyone on her boat to Singapore to do papers and she lived there for 3 months and finally she immigrated to USA in 1978. And in that time, my sister lived there in USA in California and she
did paperwork, and sponsored my family back in Vietnam to come over to USA. [Pots/pans noise in background] And at that time we got the papers and registered with the government to proceed with what’s called giay xuat canh” – in Vietnamese it is called giay xuat canh. And that’s like when you get permission to get out. And my sister sent the sponsor paperwork in 1980 to my family, and we registered in 1981, yeah, we got permission – the paper from government, gave us permission to go out. We had to register to get interviewed with an American representative in Saigon, and finally, we got accepted and everything and we leave for United States in 1982 – November 1982, yes, via Thailand 10 days, under the program called ODP, Orderly Departure Program, sponsored by United Nations, and my family was so happy, and we can get out and immigrate to a freedom country. At that time, I was really young, I was in my 20’s, about 20 years old, and we were so happy because this country gives so much opportunity and freedom. And, free speech, everything, you can do whatever you want as long as you’re under the law, and if you work hard you’ll get rewards. And at that time, you just bring personal things like clothing, they let you bring some of the stuff, but prior to that my family had a factory and some stuff, and I was doing paper work for my family at that time and so I know some of that stuff, and I had a friend, they knew a government official – so I was able to transfer all the paperwork and ownership to my uncle, so we can leave and later on he could sell back in the future for some money. Prior to that, my family have some money too so we could send back to my sister here so she could have some money here to buy some things here first for my family. but talking about when we departure to America with my family, we were able to bring some personal things like clothing, a watch, and two little gold – like you can wear a gold chain and necklace or you can get one of those gold chains, but a little bit, not much. They just let you do that under the custom, and well in that time my family was very thankful and happy to get out of
that country by airplane, and the United Nations sponsored us so we were happy. My family immigrated to America and the first destination we lived in is Orange County since then - for many, many years, Orange County is the county that my family lived in.

SW: Okay, thank you for that. So, I just wanted to ask you if you could let me know your feelings about leaving Vietnam – how you felt about that, and would you have preferred to stay in Vietnam, your home country, if the circumstances were different?

HW: Well, you know everybody loves their country and their homeland. And I am one of those. That’s where I was born and my birthplace. If it wasn’t for the communist taking over Vietnam, I wouldn’t go anywhere because that country is so beautiful, and the people are so nice, and we live there with so much nature – beautiful nature, the environment, the people, so helpful, friendly, compassionate…my family had to leave for American because under the communist regime, we couldn’t live under that regime because you know economically, we got oppression, no freedom, and the working conditions and the food, everything – it was so hard.

SW: Okay thank you, so I just wanted to piece together more about your immigration experience. Could you describe to me what things you had to leave behind, I know you only took personal belongings, but did you leave behind anyone in your family? Did you leave any pets? What do you feel that you left back in Vietnam that you wish you could have brought back to America?

HW: Well, in that time you could only bring personal things – clothing and some of the let’s say, a watch, a little bit of gold chains, or necklace…besides that, there’s no pet that you can take with you, and in that time, in that period, when you immigrate to America, in my mind, I know – I knew – I knew in my mind that I would never come back there because of the communists. I
thought I would never have a chance to go back to visit my relatives, because I had an uncle and auntie still left behind. So, in that time, in my mind and everybody in my family had feelings and thoughts that we would never, never have a chance to go back to the country and see them again, because in that time, there, the propaganda always accused America and talking about their communism idealism and it was very extreme. So, we always knew that no way, we would ever get a chance to go back. But, when my family stepped on the plane, we still weren’t sure that we could leave Vietnam for America until the plane landed in Thailand. In that time, we were sure we would get freedom. Because any moment that you’re still in Vietnam, they could hold you back, even if you were on an airplane and waiting for take off, they would still come there and hold you back, arrest you.

SW: Okay, so you mentioned that you arrived in America after ten days in Thailand. Could you tell me more about your experience in Thailand?

HW: Yeah, we lived there for just a short time, only about 7-10 days in the camp that they reserved for the [pause] people under the program they called ODP. For my camp, they called it Phanat Nikhom. So, we just stayed there to do the paperwork and get some interviews with the American officer. And before, we come to the United States…I stayed there in the camp, but next to another camp with a lot of refugees. But those refugees in the other camp, came by boat or by walking. So, that’s different. They were waiting, but their conditions were so tough, not as prioritized as my family, because we got a visa, and everything, just getting ready to immigrate to the United States.
SW: Okay, so just going back a little bit, to your childhood, I was hoping that you could describe your schooling in Vietnam. What level of education did you have and did you learn about American prior to coming here?

HW: Because… my family, my mom and dad, always hope that their family would escape by boat or to western countries, especially since everybody liked America, and that’s why they let their children study English. For my elf, my education level is high school. I was in 11th/12th grade when I was in high school and that’s when the north took over the south, and I just quit, I didn’t want to go to school anymore because I just wanted to stay home and help my dad, my mom. And um – because we had thought that we would escape by boat or register with the government officials to go out to a different country by boat, so we learned English and studied English. We got ready.

SW: So, would you say that you were proficient in speaking English, or how was your level like?

HW: Well, that’s just beginning level. We just learned writing and conversation – um, that’s a beginning level and we were just learning some vocabulary and grammar because we knew that once we would come to America, it’s a requirement that we learn to speak English to communicate with the people in the community. So, but uh, with a high school education I had a chance and opportunity to learn fast, especially since I was learning French in high school. So, I have experience in French teaching and grammar, and that’s why we learned English easily – only writing and practice in communicating.

SW: Okay, so you mentioned a couple of languages. I was wondering, what languages you speak in total and do you speak a different language in different settings for examples as in home, school and work?
HW: My family, my mom and dad, originally came from China, they are Chinese. So, when I was a child, I was born in Vietnam, I considered that I was Vietnamese and Chinese – either way. But when I lived in the small town, village, when I go out, I speak Vietnamese with the people, but at home, I speak Chinese. But I had a tendency to speak Vietnamese too so every time I spoke Vietnamese my mom and dad won’t allow it. So, we always try to speak Chinese with them. So that’s why. Also, when I was 6, 7 years young, my mom and dad sent us to the Chinese school too, in order to learn Mandarin. So, for me, I was lucky, I had opportunity so I can speak Chinese, and Vietnamese too… I can speak and writing Vietnamese because after the 6th grade of Chinese school, I transferred to a Vietnamese school, so from these I went to high school too. I speak Vietnamese fluently, Chinese – Mandarin, Cantonese, and when I came to America I went to ESL school. I went to college, that’s why. To improve English, I took some classes in college also. I tried to learn more and more by watching TV, communicate with the community, talk more, practice a lot more, so in order to improve my language skills.

SW: Okay, so, before we expand a little bit more on your earliest experiences in America – could you describe to me where you first settled here in America and how you came about to live in Southern California?

HW: As I mentioned before that my family was lucky, uh – we immigrated to the United States. The first destination was Costa Mesa, and we lived there for a couple years – Costa Mesa in Orange County, California. And we just moved up to another neighborhood city in Santa Ana, and we lived here up to date. Like I said you know, we are so grateful that we have so many opportunities to live in Orange County.
SW: Okay, so just to get a glimpse of your family’s cultural practices…I was wondering, does your family practice any particular religion, churches or organizations?

HW: Talking back about my family’s roots in religions…my grandma, in Vietnam, uh she was a Christian. She already believed in God, and from my grandma’s generation down to my dad, and my mom, and to me now, we, my family, are Christian. We believe in God, so when we come here to the United States, we go to join the Vietnamese church in Santa Ana. We have a Vietnamese pastor, they rented a space of an American church to learn about the Bible, singing, and you know, time passed and we got more and people joining. We raised the funds to buy land in a different location and we built more space and seats for the church.

VAOHP0005_T02:

HW: Thus we remodeled, and to increase the room and [pause], and capacity of the room for more people to join. And that’s because the pastor worked really hard. We had a pastor who had been working since ‘82, he built the church. Now, we go to the church called Midway City Church, under the pastor Van Dai.

SW: Okay, so from what you’ve been telling me it seems as if your family is very close. So, I just wanted to know…does your family hold reunions or annual gatherings, and what happens at these events. Like is it yearly, annually, weekly...monthly, could you just let me know more about that?

HW: Yeah, like I’ve said, we, my family, is very grateful, lucky, to have the opportunity to live in the United States. We never forget the day that we came to America, so, every year, on the day of November 29th, that’s the day that we, my family came to the United States, my whole family now, we are all grown up, we have a lot of brothers and sisters, everybody has been
married and they have kid, and we just tell the kids that we experience coming to the United States. So we take that day and we celebrate with a party and everybody comes together to enjoy food, be happy and talk, and memorize back the memories that we had in the past. We, talk heart to heart with the family members, my mom, my dad, every year, about what we had done. We had been successful in the United States, what we have done and what we have to do more. And, we enjoy it. Every year, we, my family celebrate and we have a party and uh, we tell the kids, don’t forget, you know, America is the country that gives so much for Daddy’s family. And, everybody in the family’s opportunity to live in freedom, freely, and if you work hard you get rewards, so, that’s all, every year we celebrate.

SW: Okay, so, just wondering, what were some of the challenges you experienced in starting a new life in America? How did you and your family make a living, and what challenges did you face?

HW: Well, you know, when you first come to United States, everything is new. And, you have to…it’s like a new land, you come in, and appreciate the freedom. But, besides that, daily, you have to face the reality that you have to study English, and you have to look for a job, making money, pay for the bills, and get the car, thinking about your education. So, there’s a lot of stuff and most people come, the first time when they come to the United States, they have a lot of stress, struggles, uh, they have to go through a lot, uh, they have to go through a lot the hardships. To…adjust with the living, of a new country, the culture, the community. Everything’s new.

SW: Okay, so, you said that coming to America was something completely different from Vietnam in every sense. What were you thinking upon arrival in America, so do you remember
what you thought when the plane landed in America and how you thought that your life would be changed?

HW: Well, uh, back in my country when I was a child, uh, until I grew up, I always think that America is something great, beautiful country. But you have to remember when you come here, that you have to work hard, that you have to [pause], struggle a lot, because everything is new, and compared to your country, your homeland, everything – some of the items you use like the house you have, you, for my family, the house I live in, I didn’t have to pay the rent. And right here, you have to pay the rent, utility, in my country you ride the bike and if you have the car, you don’t have to pay insurance, and everything is more easier than over here. Over here you have to look for jobs and speak English, learn English, and everything in the bills you have to pay… so many bills. And that’s why you don’t get used to it. You have to get experience for a long, long time before you get used to it and adjust to the environment and the conditions of the living. But, overall the America, the living conditions is really high, high standards. If you work hard, everything can be okay.

SW: Okay…wait.

VAOHP0005_T03:

SW: Okay, so, it seems from what you’ve been telling me that from childhood until now you’ve always put America up on a pedestal. So, I’m just wondering, do you have any negative feelings about America withdrawing from the war and supposedly leaving Vietnam, or South Vietnam, on its own to…you know, to lose the war on its own?

HW: Everybody in Vietnam, they have to go through a lot with the war, and with the news and with the American soldier and army there, with the luxury of the Americans being there, as a
child, or even when I grew up, I always have thoughts about American, the beautiful America. I is a rich country and everything – something really, really big, big, and in terms of the economy, financially, everything. Talking about America, everybody, even my friends, when they talk to them, they love it. not even mentioning how you immigrated to United States, America. At that time, I have some friends in the neighborhood and some people would travel to Hong Kong or Thailand, or somewhere, and I hear that, I really, really love that you know. So, America in my mind at that time is something really, really, uh [pause] really big. A place, a country, that if you can live in, is something really, really cool ideal. In my mind, my chances, my opportunity, my family, got it, and I’m really, really happy. So far, and right now, even know when I talk with you, I’m still grateful that you know, I can live in this country, it gives so much. If – IF it wasn’t generosity of the Americans, I don’t think my family would be here. So, I was – thank you very much and grateful for the opportunity and the chance to be in the United States. Yeah.

SW: Okay, so it seems as if you really love America, and I was hoping that you could tell me how you identify yourself in American society. Do you consider yourself to be solely American or do you consider yourself to be Vietnamese, Chinese, or what do you describe yourself as?

HW: Well, I’ve been here for almost 30 years. I have a family, I’m married, and my wife and I have three daughters. And they all, are grown up. And, we work really hard. We built a family here, we, my wife and I, have been American citizens for long time, many, many years. I consider this country as my country. I, my wife and me is American, although my roots are Chinese and Vietnamese. Obviously, I don’t forget my roots, where I was born, my homeland, where I lived for when I was a child, until I grew up. Um, Vietnam is a beautiful country, I never forget, but uh, as I say, you know, I have a family here. My wife, we’ve been married for many, many years, we have settled here for long time. I love this country too. And I consider that we
are Americans, so we will do everything for this country if this country needs us. And uh, I always told my daughters, my kids about this country, about this beautiful country that gives so much opportunity for my family, for my mom, my dad, for everybody that lives here. So, America is the country that I always, in my heart.

SW: Okay, so I know you just talked about this, but could you tell me more about your family – your wife and how you met and married, how many children you have, what they do, and what do you talk to them about? And, how you feel that your experiences growing up in Vietnam are similar or difference to their experience growing up in modern day America?

HW: Well, I met my wife 22, 23 years ago. And, I met her via a friend that introduced her to me. And we became friends, and [pause] I was dating her, and she went to college and I come to see her and sometimes pick her up. And, we have the same ideals about building a family, I have a good relationship, what’s the conception of having a family, good family, and a valued family. Uh, so uh, for a couple years that we’ve been friends, and uh, my wife and I married, and we have three daughters. Now, they are, some of them grown up. I have one go to University of Irvine, third year, and the second one – uh, she’s almost 20 years old. And I have a second one, 18 years old, daughter, going to University of Berkeley, the first year. And I have a third daughter, 15 years old, in 9th grade in high school. Those are the three daughters that I have and I always tell them about this country, America, that they have to study hard, get a degree, in order to get a good job and make good money for a living, because if you don’t have a degree and you are not educated, it’s hard to make enough money to support themselves and family for the future. So uh, I always explain to them that uh, for myself and my family, some of the sisters and brothers, we don’t have much, many opportunities to complete the education and become educated, but now we have to work hard and sacrifice and help my kids, the next generation to
be successful in education. So, they have to work hard, and listen to my advice. And uh, so far, I am very happy and proud of themselves. They study hard, and they understand what I have told them, talked to them about the future for themselves.

SW: Okay, so, since living in America, have you gone back to visit Vietnam? If so, how was that experience like, going back to this country that you left?

HW: Well, I always say that I never forget my homeland, my roots, where I was born, my birthplace. And, in 1992, and I went back to Vietnam one time to visit my relatives, my aunt, my uncle, to look back the country, the place that I had missed so many years, to look back, what was the country, in that time now. Um, if that country had changed, if Vietnam had changed, and I saw that it was a little bit better in that time. In that time, because the government, the Vietnam government started to open the doors and policy, they ease the policy for the economy, to all, for more countries – different countries outside, a lot of companies come to invest, and at that time it just started. But I could see the signs of improvement, of the economy. Uh, peoples’ living conditions were a little bit better. The second time I came back there is 2009, after 17 years, yeah. Because my kids grow up, my oldest and the second daughter were old enough, so I decided to give them a chance, and the taste to go back to my country, Vietnam, to see where I was born, my birthplace, and uh, the school, the uh, the experience that my childhood went through, the place of the especially like the elementary school, middle school, or high school. I took them there, to see the value, the memories of my childhood and to see my grandma and grandpa. Some of the signs that the factories still exist, but uh, the country has changed a lot, in terms of economy, peoples’ living conditions are better, more openly, and because the government eased a little bit more freedom on people. Because I remember in 1975-1978, 1989, it was very strict. If you say something, not even if you sing something of the South Vietnam
songs, you will be in trouble with the police, they call the Cong An. And now, in 2009 when I go back there, you know people can talk freely, more easier, as long as you don’t touch the politics, and you’ll have no problem. And, because a lot of companies of different countries, western countries, came in and invested and bought land, and they poured money into Vietnam, so it helped Vietnam’s economy – a lot better, especially people who live in United States or western countries, they send money back to Vietnam to their families, and they contribute to the economy, to make it more stronger.

SW: Okay, so um, going back to Vietnam those three times, did you ever feel in a sense like an outcast coming back to your home country as you know, an American citizen?

HW: Well, you know living in the United States for almost 30 years, and you consider it like your country, you never thought or had any idea that you would ever come back to Vietnam and live there again. You just want to come back to Vietnam to visit, to have a look, how the country improved, how the people live in the conditions, to visit friends, relatives, um, [pause] you live in the United States, for me, I consider this as my country. And now, I have thought about Vietnam, it’s like a place that you know, that I was born, but I need to come back sometime to see, to visit. But for the idea that I will come there and live permanently, I don’t think I will do that. But it depends on the individual. Some of the people, they have different ideas. Um, but my family and me, we live here, it’s like a tree, you plant it, when I was small and now grown up, the tree is bigger and bigger, and your roots already go deeper into the soil. And, it gets stronger, stronger, deeper, deeper, bigger, bigger in this country. If I want to go back to Vietnam, I just go back to visit, more often if I could, because Vietnam is really, really nice and beautiful. And hopefully, that one day Vietnam’s government, they will follow, they have to reform in terms of the politics, and they gonna change to become a more freedom country like western countries.
Hopefully one day, they will be not far away, and in that day I will be even happier for people living in Vietnam, that they have equal value, freedom, and more rights, their rights are more respected, not violated, as uh my family, and myself living in the United States.

SW: Okay, so you talked about how your family resettled in Orange County and currently this is a place where many Vietnamese Americans have resettled. The city that you live in currently is close in proximity to Little Saigon, and I was wondering what do you think of Little Saigon and what do you think are the most important things that people should reminisce about Vietnam within this little community?

HW: Yeah, living in Orange County, and you have to [pause] know that uh, Little Saigon is the place where the Vietnamese community; commercial, uh business, uh open there and the Vietnamese people work hard, are smart, wisdom, and they want to preserve the culture too. And after more than 30 years settling in Orange County, they open a lot of businesses. So, they call the Little Saigon, most of the businesses are concentrated in the cities of Westminster and Garden Grove. I’m proud of the Vietnamese community, I’m part of the Vietnamese too, so my family, my wife and I was born in Vietnam, so my wife and me speak Vietnamese. So we went to the market there. We buy food, we eat at the restaurants, yeah the Vietnamese grew up – big and big, really big. And when you come to Orange County, you have to know Little Saigon. And it’s a big, big community, a grown community, and they are very, very united. Um, people, Vietnamese people work really hard. They keep their culture, they keep their family value, to plan with the American culture. Whatever is the best, they will learn from and take from there. But uh, a lot of the Vietnamese children, the kids, and the Vietnamese people, they are very successful. They become a lot of famous and help growth in the society. And, like doctors, pharmacists, everything. Engineers, and they contribute in this society – in American society a
lot. And they grow very fast in the community compared to other communities. I’m proud of the Vietnamese community. So, [pause] that’s the pride that we always have, every time we pass by Bolsa and Westminster. They offer so many things – culture, food, service, it’s very wide and uh [pause] very large.

SW: Okay, so, you just stated that many Vietnamese have resettled in Little Saigon and you are very proud of that. I was just wondering, have you been able to reunited with any former neighbors or people that lived in your village that were able to come here to America? How did you feel when you were able to reunite with them?

HW: Yeah, living in Orange County, in United States, everybody has to cope with their busy schedules, time, working, we sometimes, even the friends, we only see each other on the weekends or sometimes chatting on the phone. And, occasionally you know go out and eat at the restaurants. But we enjoy, we get used to the way that we live in the United States, as most Americans. But it is very good way, we sometimes drive, fly to visit friends, and go to different states, vacations, and to see the friends and relatives.

SW: Okay so going a little bit off of that, do you keep in touch with family, friends, or relatives from Vietnam. And if so, who and how?

HW: Yeah we sometimes call back to Vietnam or occasionally give some money to relatives. Like if there’s a big event for the new year coming, because we know if right here for many years we work really hard and save some money, we just give a little bit back to Vietnam, to relatives to celebrate the new year or some event. Like marriage events, or commemorations for something. And many, many years what we did is through mailing. But now, telecommunication is easier by phone so we just call and talk, chatting, and uh, even now friends and relatives in
Vietnam can call United States and talk. It’s very convenient now, but you know, the Vietnam, a lot of friends and relatives make a lot of money now. They have better living conditions, and sometimes even better than us, better than me, the people for ourselves living the United States. So, it depends, if my relatives, and my friends need help, or conditions in terms of economy are not so good, we can do that you know, I can help, send them some money.

SW: Okay, so, what are the most important things that future generations of Vietnamese Americans should remember about their past?

HW: For my kids’ generation, if the parents don’t tell them about the past, I don’t think my kids will know about Vietnam. As a parent, you have to tell them, where you come from, the roots, the place, the country, your experience of living, your experience of childhood, and from there, apply your experience the best you can and give back to your kids and tell them to apply whatever is best for them in America. Because, the youngest generation… like my kids, they hear more about American community than myself. But uh, always you know, tell them the value of my culture, to use whatever’s the best to apply in their life, to help them be a better person in society. And make them be a successful person in society, in the community. For them to know the culture of parents, that’s very valuable, very precious. So, don’t let them miss what the value, the familial values, the cultural values, the freedom, the opportunity that parents have. And they learn and they use it, what they could get out of it, to apply for their future, in their life experience.

SW: Okay, so are there any other memories or stories that you would like to share that I haven’t touched upon, that you think that we should know?
HW: Well, I always remember the day that my family came to United States, to immigrate to this country. That’s the big day, my family was so happy. And this country gives so much opportunity, I’m so grateful. And I will use all the experience, the value, that I got – my family experience, and I will give back to my kids and teach them what is the value and tell them to learn it and apply it in their life, daily experience. That’s all, but the day that I came here, I was so happy. That is the wonderful day, the big day for my family. Everybody – my mom, my dad, was happy. It’s like we [pause] got to the country that has so much freedom. It’s not easy to find and get it. So, America is the best, the number one.

SW: Okay, any last comments?

HW: As I say, uh, for many years, 30 years, and now I have a family, my kids go to college, I have good living, my kids go to college, uh, I have education, and we got a job, via income to pay the bills, live a life normally, and whatever we want to do we can do. It’s America, so hopefully my expectations, my ideal, my hope is that my kids will get educated, get a degree, graduate from college, and get a job and make good income and money for their living, for their future. That’s always a parent’s hope, and expectation.

SW: Okay, so I just wanted to say that you for your time and that concludes the interview today.

HW: You’re very welcome.

SW: Thank you.