ES: This is February 15th at 10:30. This is Emily Stavros interviewing Alex Pham for the Vietnamese American Oral History Project. We are in his office in Westminster California. Alex, can you please state your name and spell it.

AP: It's Alex Pham, A.l.e.x P.h.am.

ES: Perfect. Where and when were you born?

AP: I was born in actually Saigon Vietnam 1967. I know, old.

ES: And what are your parent’s names?

AP: My parents name, uh Vietnamese or American?

ES: We can do both.

AP: Okay well the Vietnamese name my mom is Men Thi Phung. And my father’s is Qunh Pham. He took the American name as Michael. So it's Michael Pham. And then my mom’s Maria Phung.

ES: And what are your parents like?

AP: Um, they are not as traditional as most other parents I know. They are a little more open since they’ve been here forever. But yet they still retain a lot of traditional values. Um like when we were growing up the girls couldn't go out too
late. The boys of course could. We could go out till like midnight the girls 10 maybe 11ish. Um but then again it was actually a little reverse on my side cause my sister—
course she was very studious—so she always gets straight A’s so she can do
whatever she wants. Me, I was not a straight A student. So I was always, they always restrict me not her. So she could go out late and I couldn’t so it was kinda reversed. I hated that. Because my other guy friends they could go home at midnight and I had to be home early. So it didn’t seem fair so I rebelled. I was very rebellious during my teens.

ES: Okay and where did you grow up?

AP: I grew up in Saigon. I remember a lot of things even though I was about four or five years old. Yeah, four or five. I remember standing on, cause we used to live, we had 3 floors, so on the top floor, which was pretty high. I could see out where the airport was, and I could see planes taking off and blowing up in the air. I thought it was just fire works.

ES: So you remember this?

AP: oh I remember that. And I remember screaming. A lot of screaming. I think a day or two before the communist came in so rumors were spreading that we no longer, the government was falling. The VC was coming in so everyone was scrambling especially the officers cause they knew the VC comes in they’d get caught not only them but their families too. And so a lot of officers were fleeing. So you’d get a lot of high officers fleeing first which I think I really despise them because they didn’t stay back and help they just took their families and were gone. And also because of high
ranking they had relationship with the high-ranking U.S. So they were flew out.

Cause you see a lot of photos of helicopters.

ES: So did you feel abandoned by them?

AP: Oh yeah, a lot of the officers—like the lower ones—like my father he was just a captain he wasn’t a general or anything, so they felt abandoned. And then during that time my father told me a little bit not order. There was a lot of chaos, there was no order it was everyone for himself. So that’s why you don’t have a very united force that’s trying to stop them. My father, of course, was very smart. He acted quickly so that’s why we’re here. Otherwise we would have been in a concentration camp for at least ten years. They put you in a concentration camp based on your rank. So if you’re a low rank you’d get five years. For my dad it would have been ten to fifteen. Maybe twenty. And if you’re in a concentration camp it’s definitely not like the prison here, its nothing like you can imagine. You know you heard a bout Hitler. It’s something similar to that but worse.

ES: So you said your dad would be put in a concentration camp. What would happen to you and your family?

AP: well we would, my mom wouldn’t be able to find work because she would be associated with an officer which goes against communist. And so she would be um no one would hire her and then when we go to school they wouldn’t take us in so we wouldn’t get an education. And even if we did, if she’s able to bribe the school to let us in, we wouldn’t be able to go to high school. So the highest we’d be able to finish is either grade. If I’m lucky.

ES: so you said your father acted quickly. What did he do?
AP: well he um, well first he got wind that the communist was coming in, that we lost. So he what he did was he took his brother and sister, my uncle, my three uncle, and he kind sorta went to the sight where there was a bus. The officer and the family. And he got them in there and drove them and used his rank and he got one of his brother into one of the busses. And he wasn’t supposed but he did. So one brother that bus the other brother the other bus. So they were shipped to the state, I don’t know New York or something. So once we got to the us we tried to locate each other. We were able to contact each other after five years.

ES: wow, so they all got shipped somewhere else?

AP: yeah he not only got us but he got his brother out. My aunt the youngest sister came over to visit our house. She was lucky she came over to visit with one of her best friends. And so he took them along because they were just happened to stay with us. Then plus his cousin and his family which they just happen to came over to visit too. He and his wife and I think his daughter came. And so they got out too. Plus our family. We had six brothers and sisters. Yeah so can you imagine we’re a year apart so I was about five and four three two one. And then my mom was pregnant. About six months pregnant at the time.

ES: so you were the oldest. How many sisters did you have?

AP: I had four and three brothers

ES: so your father was able to save a lot of people?

AP: yeah he was really quick thinking. We got on the moped. I was sitting in the middle my mom in the back and my other brother in the front. And then my cousin and my aunt was driving my other brother and sister. So we packed up whatever we
could. My parents of course at the time thought that Vietnamese money could transport to us so they took millions. Yeah so gold is very valued in Asia. It still is. When we came to America we only had a couple, maybe one or two gold bars. We were able to transport that to a couple thousand. That was all we had. Cause the Vietnamese didn’t know. Because the US didn’t convert it to the US. Because there was no relation back then. Because they cut off ties right after. So Vietnamese couldn’t. So even they brought ten thousand dollars worth. They lost that. We pretty much had nothing.

ES: so what did you do then when you came to America?

AP: well luckily, when we were camped in the Philippines. We were lucky.

ES: so you went from Vietnam to the Philippines

AP: well yeah cause we went on a boat. So we got on a bus and he drove the bus to a pier. And people were like scrambling out on the boat. So he got us on the boat. This was a small fishing boat. People were just like jumping on it. It was amazing Pregnant and she still was able to. And so he got everyone on board. We didn’t bring any food or anything. We didn’t think it was going to be that long. So when we were out to sea we had nothing to eat.

ES: so there was no food on the boat?

AP: well there was some. We would share but there wasn’t enough.

ES: how many people were on the boat?

AP: hundreds of people. And it was a small boat. We were lucky we didn’t get capsized. Because the boat could hold maybe up to 20 people and there was a hundred on it. The boat was going really slow cause it was so heavy. And of course
the engine died because it was over working. So we were just floating out there for a week or two. And we were lucky to be picked up by a bigger boat. And they gave us organs. And we were so happy. They picked us up and took us to the Philippines. And they dumped us there to get processed. The US were agreed, because the US came to the ally country, like the French and Australia, that’s why you have a lot of Vietnamese there. Each country agreed to take in some. The US agreed to take in 7 thousand. We were the first wave so we were easily processed and brought over. Later on it was harder because the US stopped accepting so much people. Because it was getting full. So we were processed and they asked us where we want to go, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Virginia. And we said we want Oregon. And they said why. Because we had an uncle who lived in Oregon. He had a scholarship to go to college over here. Because he was one of the smart one. He was studying to be a doctor. So he was in med school. He was here in 1960. So he was here two three years before. So he pretty much escaped anything, the chaos. And so he was the only person we knew in the US so we said Oregon. And they said fine we ship you to Oregon. So that’s how we end up in Oregon cause of my uncle. And then he gave us American name. he register us to my first schooling was first grade in catholic private catholic school. So we were the only Asian In the whole school. We live in a white neighborhood area. All white so we were the only Asian. Cause in Oregon they have like a um, I don’t know what, Hosey square. That’s where they ship all the Asians there. Everyone there. So they were going to ship us there but we said no we don’t want to go there because our parents didn’t want us to associate with a lot of Asians
cause they thought we might have a hard time learning the English language. So they opt to go out to the white area. So we went to the north area.

ES: So did you originally come into Portland?

AP: We came into Portland near St. Johns. So back in 11975 it was all white. There was so Asians we were the only ones. I didn’t speak a word of English. There were a couple kids next door. They came over to play with us. We did not understand what they were saying. At the time they were like twelve or thirteen. So they were older than us.

ES: Did they accept you all well?

AP: they tried to play with us. One of them, my first experience to smoking was this kid. He light up and started smoking. I said what is that. And he was like 14 years old. I remember, I forget his name, but I remember his face. Kinda like a littler than you, brown blondish hair, green eyes. he and his brothers always come over. And we had no idea what they were saying. So we just say go home. And they say why why. But we couldn’t tell them why. That’s all I could say was go home. Cause my uncle taught us that. He said if someone come over talk to you and bother you you say go home. So I said go home. So anyways, they tried to play with us but we didn’t understand. And we went to the catholic school. Nuns were teaching. I remember we had this old nun, she was in her sixties. She taught us every after school and she taught us English. She had cards. What is this, table chairs. She was very helpful witho0ut her we wouldn’t have learned anything. Everyday after school she would spend about an hour tutoring us.

ES: would she do it for free?
AP: yeah. She years later I came back to visit the school and I heard she died. Cause I wanted to see her again. And thank her. But then that was when I was in college. I decided to come back. Cause I think in my mind that she lives forever. I didn’t know she was sixty at the time. So I came back and asked about her and they said she died years ago. So I didn’t get a chance to talk to her. But anyway she, there was three of us, my brother sister and I we had tutor and beginning, I don’t know when it started sinking in but we started watching TV and we started understanding. And we used to go to church and they would sing and we would just mimic and sing along. We had no idea what we were saying. But overtime it just starts sinking in. I don’t remember when. I just started understanding the English language and I just start speaking it.

ES: was it more difficult for your parents to learn English?

AP: it was they had to go to ESL. They only went for a month or two. And then they had to find work. Cause they had to support us.

ES: Where did they work?

AP: they worked at an assembly plant. They work for Techtronic’s. You know assemble parts. At the time Techtronic’s accepted refugees. And so they worked there for 12 or 15 years.

ES: So they worked at the same place?

AP: Yeah same place but the bad part was that they had to work the graveyard shifts so like 6 pm to 7 in the morning.

ES: So you didn’t see your parents a lot?
AP: yeah since I was the oldest I had to take care of my siblings. I had to do the chores. Make sure their homework was done. Teach them Vietnamese. Then cook for them. So I cooked. So I cooked, I make sure, so my brother and sister were more afraid of me than my parents. They would listen to me than my parents. Because I was pretty much their parents. So they were very afraid of me. Cause I was mean back then, I had authority. Not anymore. But I um would cook, see whatever’s in the fridge. I would make. Another Alex a la cart. Cause I just make it up just whatever I could find.

ES: Would you do the grocery shopping as well?

AP: No my mom did the grocery shopping. So my parents would go grocery shopping and then I would cut it up and make it. And then sometime my mom would cook but my sister and brother wouldn’t like what she cook so I'd make them something. So I didn’t really have a childhood. Then when I was 7 every summer I would berry picking. Yeah so I would pick berries 30 40 dollars a day and while other kids go to camp I go berry picking. And it was terrible. It wasn’t a really pretty sight. I had to wake up at 3 in the morning and start picking berries at 5 it was cold and rainy or foggy. I was always soaked always freezing. I could not pick as fast as those old ladies. The Vietnamese old ladies could pick so fast I don’t know how they do it. They would speed by me and I was still halfway like two rows down. Me and my sister she was six and I was seven and my mom at the time before she worked at Techtronic’s. We would berry pick with her. And after awhile a lot of times she would get sick and we would just go. Can you imagine six and seven without a parent? We were just by ourselves.
ES: How many hours would you work?

AP: All day from 5 to 3 or 4. Yeah we did that until I was in high school.

ES: Did you work any other jobs?

AP: no just that, just berry picking. Because you know that they do not hire you until you’re fourteen and you have a working permit. My first job was McDonalds. That was when I was 15. Yeah and all my paycheck went to my sister. Buy her clothes.

ES: Was that willingly?

AP: Yeah willingly. Yeah so I didn’t spend any money on myself.

ES: and you said you went to the school first at a catholic school was that through high school as well?

AP: no just a year and then after that, of course it’s a private school so they let us slide for a year for free but then the second year we had to pay and my partents didn’t have any money. It was like 8 thousand back then back then that’s a lot of money. So we went to public school. So we went there from 2nd grad until 8th grade. And then I went to Bensons high school.

ES: Are these both in Portland?

AP: yes both in Portland. Bosons is by Loyed Center.

ES: Oh yeah Loyed Center the mall.

AP: yeah its still there. I’m surprised you haven’t heard of it. It was an all boys school. And then they started to accept girls two years before I came. Back in 1980 they started accepting girls. So when I started high school back in 1983 or 1984 they were only I think 30 girls out of the whole school.

ES: how many boys were there?
AP: in my class there was 600. And you can imagine if you’re lucky you have a girl in your class you have 1 girl. Just one girl. And the girl in our school was butt ugly. So there was no selection at all. So even if you want to you couldn’t. Just one look at her. And there were no Asian. There were only 2 Asian girls in my school. That was it. And then the next year. We had a flush of Asian. But anyway at the time there were not a lot of Asian girls. Most of the girls end up in the medical industry. That’s where the end up. Me I was in the engineering side. Which only had like, luckily one or two girls. So I was studying mechanical engineering. Bensons had automotive, electrician, pretty much trade school really. Not like other high school. They teach you general. My teacher was telling me that they used to have a course where they teach to how to horse shoes. That’s a trade. Yeah to be a blacksmith. So they had a course in blacksmith. And I didn’t know that until he told me that and then of course over time you train so I went and took some automotive course. I hated it. I didn’t like cars. Yeah all my friends loved cars loved engines I just, too greasy for me. I just couldn’t picture myself to be a mechanic. So I focused on engineering. We had to spend hours on lettering cause back then there were no computers. So we had to draw everything by hand. We had this big engineering table. We had different type of pencil. Different grade of texture of pencil. Number 2 number5 all that. We did that so I studied that for two years. And when to college I was going to major in mechanical engineering. But then that’s when the booming of the computer age. Computers start coming out. So I change my major and went to computer science.
ES: Where did you go to college?

AP: Portland State. Yeah and I graduated there. Um I studied that spent hours in the computer lab studying basic Fortran. Which those language is now obsolete.

ES: What year did you graduate Portland State?


ES: Did you continue with schooling after?

AP: No after that I got a position at K-Mart to be an assistant manager. Here

ES: So this was in California?

AP: yeah in California I had an offer so I move here. I didn’t know anyone. All I had was just my aunt so I stayed with them. I worked here for a year and then I couldn’t take it anymore cause I didn’t have any friends. California was totally different. As you know in the heart of little Saigon there are lots of Asian. Too many Asian for me. Cause I was never used to Asian. Hanging out with Asian. I had to speak Vietnamese. I learned they Vietnamese culture the dating. Between boys and girls and how we what we should talk or do. Cause in being American you know white folks, they easy, you know you see someone you like you just go up to them and what’s your sign? You know you start conversations and of course they reciprocate and if they like you they give you their numbers. And then you start form there. But Asian no. you come up to an Asian girl and you do that they think you some kind of pervert.

ES: So did you parents not teach you etiquette?

AP: No because they never thought about that. They just want us to assimilate to the US quickly. Learn the English language and schooling.
ES: So they weren’t concerned with you keeping your background?
AP: At home she made us speak Vietnamese. So that’s how I was able to keep the language. She wouldn’t let us speak English. So when mom came into the room we speak Vietnamese but when she leaves we speak English. So when I got to high school that’s when I first started to date. I came up to this Asian girl and I start talking to her and she looked at me funny. You know she said who are you do I know you? Why are you talking to me? So I learned the hard way. I just wanted to talk.

And then I befriended a guy so he was my best friend. He said no no no you don’t do that. you have to have people introduce you. That’s how you get acquainted. Someone they know introduces you then they will talk to you. Otherwise they don’t know you so they don’t talk to you. He grew up in Hosey square so he knew all the Asians. And so he knows this girl that girl oh yeah. So he introduced me. That’s how I got introduced to Vietnamese. He took me to Asian parties. I don’t know your experience but Asian parties I like it a lot better. There’s not a lot of drinking. The heaviest thing is the punch. We have cake, we have good food, pastries. And there’s dancing. But not just dance you know how American night club you don’t need a partner. You just dance by yourself. That’s totally weird. Asians, we don’t do that. we have to have a partner dance with you. You can’t just go out by yourself. I was totally shocked when I went to a nightclub. It was boring. Then I start to see a lot of differences in American culture that I didn’t like uh American culture in term of friendship relationship. You’re very very cold. That’s the word id have to put it. You know when a guy asked a girl on a date a lot of the time a girl don’t want to feel obligated so you go Dutch. That’s the first time I heard about the word Dutch. In
Asian when a guy asks a girl out he pays. And of course he doesn’t accept anything. When a guy as a girl in America and he pays she feels like she owes him I had no idea. When I took a girl out and paid she asked me where we gonna do this. I said where are we going to do what. And she said well sleep with you. And I said why would you do that. and I said well I like you but not to sleep with you yet I don’t love you yet. And I was totally surprise and she goes no cause you paid for the date. And I said do you do that with all the guys. And she said yeah. And I said okay no. I told my friend and he slap the daylight out of me and said are you stupid. You say yes. So I wouldn’t sleep with a girl unless I really care and love her. So I just blow me away. And then another girl I asked she said okay cause she didn’t want to sleep with me so she said lets go Dutch so that way she doesn’t feel like she owes me. And I couldn’t understand why did she say that. and I go what is Dutch and she said we each pay our own. And I felt so awkward. In Vietnamese when they friendship you know just friend we go out I would pay. And then later if you want to you pay. Back and forth. We don’t keep track and American do that. oh you paid the other time ill pay. They come to a tee. And in marriage the same thing. You say that’s his that’s hers. You know his towel her towel. Everything’s split in the middle. Asian is not like that. once your married everything becomes one. And then when they get divorced they don’t say okay I bought this much you know. And we don’t have prenuptial. That’s another thing that just boggles my mind. Cause when you sign one you just saying that okay well were gonna break up some day. So its not gonna last hunny. So lets just sign this. Then what’s the point? Asian we don’t, see back then in Asia there was never divorce. It was really rare. And even if they do they didn’t make a big
scene and they don’t do paperwork they just separate and keep it quiet. Cause they
don’t want rumors and bring bad name to the parents her we starting to
assimilating to the US. The Asians have a higher divorce rate because we've
assimilated to the American culture. We’ve become more Americanized. Especially
in the younger generations. Cause in my parents generation when you have
difficulties, here you just divorce they very selfish me me me, if you notice in the
English language its always I. you don’t have a higher calling. Like grandma you call
grandma. You differ between moms side and dads side. In Asia you do. Someone
who’s older than you you have a status you call them. Just like in japan they call you
your name, whatever your last name is, then they ad son at the end. It’s a term of
respect. In English, American, they don’t. you either call them Mr. of coarse Pham. Or
just Alex. A lot of people when I meat say oh just call me Joe. And it was very
awkward for me cause I would go Mr. this and they said no just call me John. It kinda
bring it down another level of respect. Even your boss or whatever you call them by
first name. in Asia you don’t do that. You have a term. Your parents same thing.
Brother and sister same. I have this authority as an older brother. They have to
listen to me. In your family I don’t know if you have that kind of you have that why
do I have to listen to my sister or my brother. You say screw you and give the finger.
We never do that to my parents or brother and sister. My brother and sister never
give me the finger.

ES: So there’s more respect?

AP: Yes. When I first go to school. I had my first course I sat like this when the
teacher came in. you know I didn’t move. And when my teacher speak then I would
speak. Kids were jumping around spit wads you know. I was like what the hey. Its like where’s the respect. There is no respect. When I go to high school I see that too. They call teachers names. In Asia you would never do that. never. The teacher has absolute power. They would hit you with a big ruler cause back then the education is go by memorization so they don’t teach the way Americans do. They make you memorize things. I have very bad memory so I could never ever remember much. So I would always get hit. They had a big ruler and they hit you even you bleed. They have that power. Your parents couldn’t say anything, that’s a sign of respect. Teachers have a lot of power. Here they don’t they just send you to the principles office. Big deal. You just sit there. What are they gonna do? I see how Americans discipline their kids. You know, they don’t believe in spanking, okay that’s fine but your kids don’t respect you they call you names. What do you have to resort to. My parents, you know, they rarely spank us but if they do we definitely feel it. We do not want to get to the point where they would spank you. You listen. That’s how it was. You know even that don’t have to say anything they just kinda give you the eye. When their friends come over you did something inappropriate and they give you the eye you know you going to get a spanking. That silent communication. Here I don’t see that with I don’t know how your family is with my American friends I don’t see that. I see how they act, they call their mom sometimes mom and even sometimes their first name. and even stepmom I have a best friend his name is Scott, he calls his stepmom by her first name. I was like she’s your stepmom you call her mom, you know. Even if its not mom. He says no she’s my stepmom. Its like she’s not my mom. It just blows me away the sign of disrespect. So and then the way how they
raise the kids by 18 okay you're an adult now shoo shoo. Toss them out. Asian you can live there till your 40. For the girls of course you live with your parents until you get married. So you cant move out of the house until you get married. For the guys it's easier. I can move out whenever but for the girls they have to live with their parents. I know a lot of girls that when they woul 30 they were still with their parents. So a lot of them marry just to get out of the house. Which I feel bad because a lot of them didn't marry for love cause a lot of them their parents were so strict.
That’s the bad thing about the Asian. That’s one thing I don’t agree on, Asians families being too strict. And they just worried that the girls tend to become bad and all that. and so they tend to be more strict.
ES: Was your family that way?
AP: No, actually my parents were not as strict.
ES: So your sisters moved out before they were married?
AP: Yeah well my sister moved out when you went to college. She went to U of O. the ducks. At Corvallis. So that's how she was able to move out. So that's really why she went to college far away. Cause if she went to Portland state she would have to stay home that's what I did. I wanted to save money. I didn’t get to stay on campus and I was so jealous of my sister. Cause they went and they were able to stay on campus. They had a social life and I didn’t. PSU is not really a social college. Its right in the middle of the city so everyone right after college would disperse. In Corvallis its like a little city of your own. You have parties at someones dorm. At PSU you don’t have that. You cant make friends really. When I went to visit my sister it was so easy to make friends. You know everybody. I came and they talk to you as if I was their best
friend. I loved it. I loved the warm, the friendship you know. Cause everyone stays and shares the same bathroom and all that, so you get close to everybody. So I like that. I wish I would have went cause I would have made more friends. So that's my college years. Didn't like it at all. My sister did. I got sidetrack sorry.

ES: No, its fine. So after college you came here?

AP: Yeah I worked for a year and didn't like it cause I didn't know any Asians and it was hard to make friends cause they're not like American you cant go up and say hi. ES: Even with friendship?

AP: Well you have to know somebody. So I started joining the choir. That's when I started to know a little bit of people. Nothing like a girlfriend. Its really hard cause Asian, especially the female here, they tend to be more materialistic than the Asian girl in Oregon. The Asian girl in Oregon is homier. More wife material. Her they're more party kinda girls. Materialistic. What do you have in the bank account? What do you do? What do you drive? So when I met this girl I was just driving an old Honda accord and that was 1992 you know. So it was an old car and so they wouldn't date me cause you know I had an old car. So I didn't get that many dates to be honest. So I felt very lonely and I my aunt cousin relative that I have here, I wasn't close to them. They were too, since they live here they changed. When they first came they came to Oregon. We sponsored them. They stayed with us for 6 months or so. They came here and totally change. So when I meet them years later when I came over here. Cause they were here 7 years already and I came and stayed with them and all they talk about was money and material. I was like that is not you. They totally changed. I couldn't relate to them you know. Cause I have then Oregon
mentality. I would never call myself a Californian. You know when I drive I let people out, here they were so rude they cut you this and that. they selfish and mean. I just let them in or whatever, I hope by doing that other people see that and follow. But and then my first encounter when I first came over here was I paid gas. Of course you pump your own. I was just sitting there waiting for someone. I was like where is everybody. I get out and I go where’s the gas attendant. And they say you pump your own buddy. So I had to go pay the whoever. Behind the bar window, and then glass. The gas station you have to talk to someone. I was totally flabbergasted. Why do I have to talk to you between bars? He talked and I couldn’t hear him. I say what? He said what do you want. I was like I want gas. He goes money. I go oh oh okay. He had to show me how to do it and then I had a flat tire I was out there and nobody stop. In Oregon people stop. They don’t stop for you. And even if I do stop to help someone they think I’m going to rob them. People don’t stop for people. Even if your being a Good Samaritan they think you’re going to rob them. Especially when you’re Asian too. So I was totally shocked. I wasn’t used to it. I was used to the slow, laidback, the warmth. And here you don’t have that so I packed up and moved back. And then I worked for the government, the state of Oregon. As a case manager. Social worker. I wanted to help people. And so I dealt with a lot of teen pregnancy. A lot of those, and homeless foster kids all that. I dealt with a lot of that. and I help. But then after five years I got burnt out.

ES: Was this in Portland again?

AP: Yes, I was house in SE Portland. I worked there for five years then I quit. Couldn’t take it anymore then I worked for a Japanese firm. They made prototype
parts from liquid resin. Which is liquid plastic. When the liquid plastic touch the laser it becomes solidified. So I can make this. This that have to build this to make a mold.

ES: So you were building these.

AP: Yeah, I build the mold for this. Cause you need a mold to make anything. So I made that. so this would take about a day. Cause they build layer by layer by layer. So I would work on a 3D model.

ES: Did you enjoy this job?

AP: Oh, I loved it. I worked for seven years. Then they closed down cause they open a branch in Beaverton. So I worked in Beaverton near the, I forget where that is, greenbrier. Kinda near Hillsborough. Near Tigard. So I worked there. Then they I guess then they close down that branch in Oregon. So they downsized back to San Diego. That’s where the headquarter is. I think they’re still there, and they offered me a position in San Diego or in the Philippines. Since I’m Asian. Even though I don’t speak. so you know all Asian look alike. So I go hmm, San Diego, cause I didn’t have a very good impression of California. I hated it. I didn’t have anyone in San Diego. I don’t know anyone. And I don’t know anyone in Philippines. Why would I go there. So I said no. so I turned them down and then I went back to state and worked for the state. This time I worked in the IT department.

ES: What is the IT department.

AP: Information Technology department. I supported the backend of the social service, they system they used I support that. so I worked in Salem for seven years. And then I quit and then moved here.
ES: What made you quit?

AP: Family. Because by that time all my family, my parents, my brother and sisters moved here. They defected to California. Because the reason why is because my mom has lung cancer. Second hand smoke. We used to have a restraint and people smoke and she breathed it in. She got second hand from working in the restaurant. She had to have surgery. They had to take half of her lung. They caught it in time so it didn’t spread to the other lung. The doctor told her she needed to be in a warmer climate. They originally wanted to retire in Vietnam. But when they went back to Vietnam it was totally different. It had changed form when they were there in 1975. It was hot, humid and dirty. They didn’t remember. No they were used to US and they couldn’t live there anymore.

ES: So they originally went back wanting to live there?

AP: Yeah they wanted to stake out see how it is. But they couldn’t. so the next best thing is here cause of little Saigon. And the weather is perfect. Almost like Vietnam but without being dirty. And noisy. And so they moved her. And so every holidays I would miss it cause I couldn’t just take off and drive here, too expensive. And I could only stay for a week or two and then go back. So I was the only one in Oregon. I had cousins and stuff but I’m not close to my cousins. I don’t hang out with them. And I don’t hang out with the Asian. So who else do I hang out with. So my mom and dad say why don’t you move here. So I quit but the bad thing is I quit during the recession. Duh. Bad time to quit. So I came here and looked for a position and found this.

ES: Are you enjoying it?
AP: Yeah I do. I get to mingle with a lot of Asian. More than I ever. I learn a lot. Learn how to deal with the Asian. Learn to speak. but then when you learn to speak an Asian you kinda lose out on the English. I feel that my English accent is getting heavier. Heavier than before. Can you tell? I have this accent. No? Asian accent. Yeah so I don’t speak fluent anymore. Its like oh my gosh, I have an accent now. Im a boat person. But anyways so that’s how I feel.

ES: Is there anything else you’d like to tell me I didn’t cover?

AP: No just that we had a hard time, difficult, coming over here. Cause we started out with nothing. The good thing was that at the time back in 1975, the government had a sponsorship program where the American families sponsors us. They give us pots and pans, second hand clothing. They help us out a lot.

ES: Did you get to meet them?

AP: Yeah my parents still keep in touch with them. They had a large family too. They had like six kids. They helped us a lot. I think his name was Tom. They help us back in 75. They bought us canned food. Showed us where to go. So we had that. later on of course they stopped that because there was so much people coming in. so they get less and less every year. We had it good when we first came. Because when we first came there were only like maybe like 1,000 Asian. Or less. So there were not that many Asians. And so we first form like an Asian kinda church. We use the American church but we talk to them and they allotted a certain time for us. So that’s where all the Asians got together. I remember when we first started out it was really small. But they tried to keep tradition as much as they can, we had like Sunday school, bible school, Vietnamese school. They tried to teach us as much as they
could. That’s where I learn some Vietnamese how to read and write. Later I stop and
practice on my own. I can read and write but I would make a lot of grammatical
errors. Cause a lot of time it sounds the same. You had to really listen carefully. And
then with the notations. The question marks. When do you put that. I get confused.
But we had a really hard time. I remember my parents had to work long hours. I had
to you know raise my brothers and sisters. We didn’t have much. Especially for me
because my parents of course had six kids. She was pregnant with my sister and
brother so they were born here. Since I was the oldest I didn’t really get any toys. I
always get like K-Mart or Goodwill to buy me clothes. So I always three years behind
everyone else. She always buy me this colorful western shirt. You know how the
Mexican wear. I dress like them yeah I look like a Mexican kid. And so that’s why all
the girls run away. Now I know why I didn’t get dates. Because I always look like a
Mexican or something. So I never had the A crowd. So I never had toys. Never had
birthday parties. Only had one my whole life. That’s when I was seven. My parents
wanted to assimilate into the American culture so they decided to toss a big
birthday party for me and my sister. So she of course was very sociable, everyone
liked her and she had lots of friends. I was not very sociable. I had one friend. So my
birthday party I only had one friend. For her she had 12 people come. And I only had
one present. And my best friend at the time gave me his Lord of the Ring book, used
one. Yeah he read it and then he give it to me. Oh thanks. But anyway. That’s all I got.
My sister felt sorry for me so she gave me a pink teddy bear, can you imagine? So I
go no, I don’t want a pink teddy bear. She felt sorry for me cause I didn’t have a lot of
presents. She had a ton. So anyways that was my only birthday. That was it. She just
bought us a cake okay blow it out. That was it. So I never had really a childhood. And so I grew up without really enjoying a childhood. That’s why I was jealous of my brothers and sisters. And I kinda resented them. Oh and then being Asian they don’t really assimilate like the American parents do. Like go to teachers meeting, go to your kids game, show and tell. They never do that. ever. So whenever there’s a show and tell I was always by myself. My friends always have their parents, me I never have none of that, they never attend any of my sport games. Never once they patted my back or tell me they love me. I never show my affection to my parents. I never tell them I loved them. Even if I wanted to.

ES: Would they find that awkward?

AP: Yeah if I hug her and tell her I love you mom shed say are you high on drug. You don’t do that ever. I have never say I love you to each other. They never hold hands in public. So you don’t show that kind of affection. When I was growing up I though all couple were like that. so I never show affection to this day. So when I date someone they go how come I never hear you say I love you. I go you know I do. Its awkward for me. Very awkward. And if I do say it, it takes a lot for me to say. Because I’m never comfortable to say it. I was never taught to. And so years later I never really, I mean, it was hard to say I like you let alone I love you.