Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: CHRISTOPHER PHAN
Interviewer: Andrew Lu
Date: May 14, 2012
Location: Garden Grove, California
Sub-collection: Linda Vo Class Oral Histories, 2012
Length of Interview: 01:15:36

Field Notes

The interview was conducted at the Garden Grove Public Library. There was some difficulty finding a quiet private room to conduct the interview, however, we acquired a room after searching the library and speaking to the Library Director. Upon beginning the interview, loud yelling could be heard from the room next door. Rather than finding a new location, the interviewee and I decided that we would ask those in the room next to us to lower their noise level. The room itself was well lighted, and warm. Fortunately, though the room was temporary, no one came to claim the room, allowing us to retain it for the two hours we needed to complete the interview.

Upon arrival, Christopher Phan arrived at the interview semi-casually dressed, and at about three minutes late. He wore a dark blue polo shirt with sleeves covering half of his arm and white khaki pants. He had an upright composure and smiled when he had first arrived. After we had exchanged greetings and handshakes we headed to the library front desk where we had asked about any private rooms where we could conduct an interview. We were directed to the Director of the library and he provided us of a makeshift room.

At the very beginning of the meeting, Phan was smiling graciously, seemingly eager to conduct the interview. He discussed how run down the library was and how he was interested in building a new one for the county. He formally introduced himself to the library staff and told them that he was running for city council and that he would like to make some changes.

Continuing to the meeting room, we filled out all of the necessary documents, beginning with the consent forms, until the photo consent forms. He carefully read each document, and made sure he signed the paperwork exactly where it should be filled out. After filling out the paperwork, he patiently waited while the recorder and the questions were set up. He did not show any signs of nervousness, or like he was in a rush to leave. There were no issues with language, and no issues on time.

Once we had begun the interview, Mr. Phan seemed relaxed, friendly even. He patiently waited for each question, carefully thinking out the answers to each question. Even when there were
technical issues with the recording device, and we had to repeat a portion of the interview, he was very patient and understanding.

Throughout the interview his reactions were always seemingly happy. He smiled for a majority of our conversation. And rather than an interview, it seemed more like a conversation amongst friends. Perhaps it was the lack of formality in the interviewer’s role that created such a situation, but at least it allowed for an insider perspective.

Though, he was happy throughout the interview, there were times he showed signs of extreme joy and other times of the serious nature. During the times he spoke of happy memories such as his childhood, or the fun he had, his eyes twinkled with joy. However, when he spoke of the military, or his views on certain issues, his facial expression became more serious. Unless there was a joke, or a shared experience, in many of those situations, he had a tenser, more serious expression upon his face.

Also, during times when had to answer questions similar and or pertaining to his candidacy as a member of city council, the mood had changed. Perhaps it is over analyzing the situation, but when speaking about his candidacy, his words became more “rehearsed” and less spoken. The ideas of honesty seemingly faded away as if he had put on a face when answering such questions.

At times, he would stumble across words or struggle to find words to fit the meaning behind his story but most of the time he knew exactly how to answer each question. The stumbling and the struggles grew more apparent as the interview progressed. Late in the interview, he would stutter at least once every question asked. It is hard to determine whether or not the hardships were from nervous tendencies or whether it came from the time that had lapsed through the interview. However, the length of the interview had definitely taken its toll.

The interview itself was lengthy. Though it did not quite meet the requirement of ninety minutes, we had already gone through a majority of all of the questions. It was difficult diving further upon a question due to his joyful expressions. Certain aspects of his life seemed vague, and could have been further elaborated but was not.

At the end of the interview, I took photos of the narrator. It was difficult finding a good place to take the picture. Before we could take the second picture, he had introduced himself yet again to another faculty member of the library and begun discussing his candidacy and the age of the library.

I recommend a follow up interview so that we can obtain his perspective after the elections. Perhaps we should also interview his family members to fill in the loopholes provided in the interview.