

**Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation  
&  
Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine**

Narrator: TIFFANY LE

Interviewer: Roger Le

Date: November 10, 2010

Location: Westminster, California

Sub-Collection: Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation 500 Oral Histories

Length of Interview: 01:05:18

Transcriber: Stephanie Wong

NOTES [blog posted on [sites.uci.edu/vaohp](http://sites.uci.edu/vaohp)]

**Boot camp, epiphanies, and bun bo hue**

By Stephanie Wong

I recently completed the rewarding task of transcribing an interview conducted by the Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation. Much like the Vietnamese American Oral History project here at UCI, the VAHF is dedicated to preserving, understanding, and celebrating Vietnamese Americans' heritage through oral histories, but is nationwide whereas the VAOHP focuses solely on Vietnamese Americans in Southern California.

From the moment I started watching the video of Tiffany Le's interview, I was intrigued by her calmness and her anecdotal answers to Roger Le's questions. Having conducted an interview with my father before, I sort of understood the ropes of an oral history. Yet transcribing this interview was a whole new experience, as instead of physically conducting the interview, I was an outsider, someone looking into Tiffany Le's open book.

Tiffany served in the United States Marine Corps for 6 years, and in the interview she recounts the life-changing, life-rewarding, and essentially opportunistic experiences of her 3 month recruit boot camp in Parris Island, South Carolina. Although at first she was hesitant to enlist, her past high school delinquency and search for a purpose in life and improvement behooved her to become one of the only female Vietnamese-American marines. Growing up in Riverside, CA, Tiffany vividly remembered how she experienced complete culture shock upon arriving at boot camp, and compares the trek from California to South Carolina as the first time she was really exposed to people from a huge variety of backgrounds.

As I continued to watch the interview, I honestly felt like I knew Tiffany. Throughout the interview she brought different thoughts and experiences to the table, exposing her life in a detailed nutshell. In fact, the moment that stood out to me the most was when Tiffany describes how she missed her mom's bun bo hue and home, how she felt regret for joining the marines, and how because of these emotions, she realized she had a deep appreciation for the things she had in life.

During boot camp, Tiffany came to an epiphany...

“So that’s when I realized... that’s when I realized what kind of hell a first generation, Vietnamese American child had put my mother through. That’s when I understood the hardships my mom had, and why it was hard for me to accept my delinquency. But I’m glad I went through boot camp because without it, I don’t think I would be able to appreciate the small things, the freedoms that we have here. I don’t think I could appreciate just how lucky I am to be able to actually have, to be afforded the opportunity of being a Marine, and the doors it has opened for me. I mean, I always tell people I joined it because it was really cool for a Vietnamese girl to join, but I really appreciate the opportunity.”

Overall, Tiffany’s inspirational journey throughout boot camp, her withstanding determination to not give up, and her success today as a Nguoi Viet journalist captures her experiences as a first generation Vietnamese-American. I was shocked when listening to some of her boot camp stories, became emotional when she described her regrets growing up, applauded when she graduated from boot camp with her mother and brother watching, and have been inspired by her motivations to make a turn-around in her life. Her story is just one of the many young Vietnamese-Americans here, and with it brings a great preservation and celebration of Vietnamese American history.

**The Vietnamese American Oral History Project (VAOHP) at UC Irvine is pleased to collaborate with the Vietnamese American Heritage Foundation in the important work of processing the interviews collected in Southern California by this non-profit organization. We share the similar goal of preserving and making widely available the stories of Vietnamese Americans. This blog post shows the fruits of such collaboration and we hope readers will visit our digital repository through UCI Space once the interviews are put up in their entirety.**