Vientamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: THUY TRAN GUTIERREZ  
Interviewer: Brandon Gutierrez  
Date: May 5, 2012  
Location: Irvine, California  
Sub-collection: Natalie Newton Class Oral Histories  
Length of interview:01:32:12

Time Log

0:02 Introduction of participants, Brandon Gutierrez (interviewer) and Thuy Tran Gutierrez (narrator), in the Vietnamese Oral History Project Interview. Thuy proceeds to give a brief biography of herself before moving into the interview.

2:20 Thuy describes her journey from Vietnam to U.S. starting from her childhood in Bien Hoa and the adventures and hardships she experienced on the boat that was lost in Malaysia on the way to U.S., as well as on a coconut plantation in Malaysia.

18:35 Thuy discusses how living under communist rule was very hard because her family was forced to give all of their money to the government and was compensated only with 200 dollars. She said that she learned about how glorious Ho Chi Minh and communism was as part of the school curriculum.

23:23 Thuy explains how, since she has been in the U.S. for over 30 years, she would support her adopted country over her native country of Vietnam.

24:50 Thuy defends her reluctance of returning to Vietnam for the first time since she escaped in the ‘70s, citing reasons such as diseases and the remaining presence of the communist government.
27:45 Thuy explains how the fish gathered from lakes and rivers in Vietnam were so delicious that she would go back just to eat them.

28:56 Thuy describes how living in close proximity to Chinese people influenced the foods she ate, as well as Chinese and Vietnamese restaurants possessing dishes from each other’s cuisine.

30:23 Thuy describes the carryover of traditional Vietnamese cooking into America, and confesses that specific ingredients in Vietnam were more abundant than in America.

32:30 Thuy details how choosing to marry a non-Vietnamese person (Mexican, more specifically) presented problems for her traditional Vietnamese parents who wanted her to marry a Vietnamese man. Her mom said that interracial marriages would result in a cultural “downgrade” and that the Vietnamese heritage would be diluted with a different one. Her husband’s Mexican family shared this sentiment.

36:20 Thuy says that since her parents have lived in the melting pot culture of the U.S. for so long, they have become tolerant of multicultural relationships.

37:13 Thuy explains that interracial relationships can function successfully only if both sides can accept each other’s differences in cuisine, religion, etc.

40:24 Thuy describes the honoring of ancestors at altars with food offerings next to their pictures. Religion was only a passive subject for her.

44:20 Thuy believed that the U.S. would be entirely glamorous like in Las Vegas and the women beautiful like in JC Penney clothing catalogs. When she first arrived in America at a New York airport, the leaves were dead and the landscape was
empty, convincing her that America was more boring than she originally thought it was.

47:42 Thuy describes one terrible experience of discrimination when one person told her to go back to her country. While initially distraught by the encounter, she later ignored the audacity of that person to succeed as an immigrant.

49:49 Thuy explains her open mind to other cultures such as being hooked on the salsa condiment and sharing it with her family.

52:45 Thuy discusses how having a non-Vietnamese looking son contributes to random people in public wondering if she married a Mexican man and she is happy to explain to any curious people the details.

54:45 Thuy elaborates on significant experiences that she had on the cramped refugee boat such as a random old lady resting her head on her stomach one night and found out that she died a few days later. Also, a woman on the boat gave birth to a baby, which led some people to believe it was a miracle, considering the lack of space and food.

1:01:22 Thuy discusses her decision of moving from Anaheim to Irvine with the reasons being better education and less bullying.

1:04:26 Thuy explains how the enrollment of her sons in a Vietnamese school was to make them understand family conversations fully and allow fluent conversing also.

1:06:23 Thuy hopes that Vietnam will eventually be rid of communism in the future and the people will live in better conditions. The fall of communism in Vietnam will encourage her return to the country greatly.
Thuy believes that kids should be given an opportunity to be better as a person and should have encouraging parents as well.