Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

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Interviewer: Kathy Le
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KL: Today is November 26, 2012, it’s a Monday, my name is Kathy Le. I am interviewing Loan Nguyen for the Vietnamese American Oral History Project at UC Irvine. We are interviewing at her house in Duarte, California.

KL: What is your name?

LTN: My name is Loan Nguyen.

KL: And your date of birth?

LTN: February 21, 1960

KL: Where were you born?


KL: What are your parents’ names?

LTN: My dad’s name is Vinh Nguyen and my mom’s name is Thanh Nguyen.

KL: Could you describe them for me?


KL: Where did you grow up?

LTN: I grow up in Saigon.

KL: Could you describe your hometown where you grew up?

LTN: Oh I lived in, grown up in the city. That’s all the south people and all mostly Catholic people in that town.
KL: Where have you lived in Vietnam?

LTN: I lived in Quận Bà, thành phố (city) Ho Chi Minh right now.

KL: Could you describe those cities?

LTN: I lived in not that big city, but mostly in my country before, when we young, we cannot go out a lot. So we stayed in the house and hang around all the family member in the house.

KL: Can you tell me about some of your childhood memories? What you did when you were a child in Saigon or in the other cities you lived in?

LTN: Oh I don’t remember much.

KL: Do you know what kind of music you listened to when you were younger?

LTN: That’s what I like.

KL: What were the main industries in your hometown? For example, was it farming?

LTN: The people just working in the market a lot. Or same as life here, self-employed.

KL: Do you remember your neighbors in Vietnam?

LTN: Not really.

KL: What kind of community was it? Were you guys close together or was it, you just, minded your own business?

LTN: We just mind our own business.

KL: Did you guys have any local events together as a whole city?

LTN: Like working together?

KL: Yeah.

LTN: Hang around with the neighbor? Stuff like that?

KL: Yeah.
LTN: I don’t think so because I was 14 year old and I’m working already so I don’t have time for that kind of stuff.

KL: Do you remember how you celebrated têt?

LTN: Oh, Vietnamese New Year’s is so beautiful and when we’re kids we loved it because we have the lì xì.

KL: Do you know what else you did during that time of the year?

LTN: Like what?

KL: What kind of food you had or..?

LTN: We had all the special food. The family together, eat, and gamble, and have fun for three days. Doesn’t work at all, just eat, and gamble, and play.

KL: Do you remember how you celebrated birthdays in Vietnam?

LTN: Oh, in my time, we don’t have the birthdays, we don’t celebrate the birthdays.

KL: What kind of jobs have you had in Vietnam?

LTN: When I was young, I just go to school, but after 75 I go to work with my mom in the market, be a butcher.

KL: What kind of schooling did you have in Vietnam? Up to what grade?

LTN: I think I just finished about middle school. Ninth grade?

KL: Do you remember what your teachers were like?

LTN: No I don’t think so, because in my country, we just, when we in middle school, about 6th grade, we just start to study with a lot of teachers, every subject we have one teacher. So every teacher for an hour, study. So the teacher and the student before very strict, so we cannot make jokes or laughing with the teacher, we don’t have that kind of living like America, where you go to the teacher.
KL: Do you remember what your other classmates were like?

LTN: No, no, I don’t remember.

KL: What do you remember most about your parents and grandparents when you were a kid?

LTN: I remember my grandma, she take care of me because my mom she had a lot of kids, so she working very hard. So in the daytime my grandma take care the kids, cooking and take care of them. So she’s very nice, very soft, very good grandma.

KL: How about your father and your grandpa?

LTN: My grandpa passed away a long time ago, so I don’t know him. But my dad, before he just, he in the linh (army), he went to linh (army), so working all the time. So my mom working all the time, so we don’t have much time with the parents, very close to aunties and grandma.

KL: What were your aunties like?

LTN: Aunty, that’s her job, because in Vietnam, you know, all the family stay together, sleep together in one house, so we take care each other, so she helped my grandma take care of us. So I have ten of us, so my mom not home all the time.

KL: What do you know about your family name? Your last name? Are there stories about it?

LTN: Oh, no. I don’t know that

KL: Are there any traditional names in your family, a first name that you pass down from generation to generation?

LTN: No we don’t. In Vietnam we cannot do that, we’re not allowed to do that. That means when you have kids, you cannot name your kid like your, like in America, like you love somebody, you name your kid like them. In Vietnam you’re not allowed to for the older people, like your uncle, or whatever, you cannot name your kid the same name with them.

KL: How come?
LTN: They not allowed to, they say, không có (don’t have), what they called? Không có (You don’t have) respect. You have to respect the older people.

KL: What memorable stories do you remember about your family members, or that they’ve told you about the past?

LTN: Oh no, they don’t, we don’t have much time to sit there and talk and tell the story, we don’t have that much.

KL: What kind of jobs did your family have?

LTN: My mom, she’s a butcher

KL: Your grandparents as well?

LTN: They stayed home; be housewife, take care of the kids.

KL: Did everyone in your family go to school?

LTN: Everybody have to go to school, you have to, but the only thing after the war, most people don’t go to school. Like me, I drop out of school to work, to survive.

KL: Did the rest of your sisters and brothers do that as well?

LTN: At work, I work, and school, just a little bit after the war

KL: In Vietnam or America, did your family hold reunions or like an annual get together?

LTN: Yeah. Go to church, and after church go together at home, eat something together.

KL: Do you guys share stories at these get together?

LTN: We talk jokes and we have fun, that’s it, but we were kids at that time, so maybe we fighting a lot when together.

KL: Today do you guys have family reunions?

LTN: Yeah.

KL: What kind of activities do you guys do?
LTN: Talking, gamble, shopping. The men, the boy, after they eat, sit down, talking a little bit, drinking, and gamble. And the girl sit down together and joking, after that go shopping.

KL: Do you all like to share stories when you guys are together all at the same time? Stories about the past, or remember anything from the past?

LTN: Sometimes we talk about that. Some fun memories, some sad memories.

KL: Do you have a husband?

LTN: Yes I am.

KL: How did you meet him?

LTN: We know each other in Vietnam after the war; we know each other about two years. Then we left the country in 1982.

KL: How did you meet him?

LTN: No, because my dad and his dad, they friends, best friends, why we know him, I know him.

KL: Could you tell me more about your relationship with your husband before the war? Or before you guys came to America?

LTN: After the war, I met him, I think 1978, I met him. So just on and off for about two years. So 1982, so we run away from the country by the boat because communist, so he and I, we left with my dad and my sisters. So we left Saigon, and we come to Indonesia. And I stay there in the refugee camp for about 6 months and my brother and sister from Canada bông xoa (sponsor) us, so I come there. My boyfriend, my husband right now, he stay back to the camp for another 6 months. So after that he come to America.

KL: How did you guys end up getting married or how did he propose?
LTN: So we keep in touch, write the letter and when eh come here, he call, and for about a year and a half we getting married. When he have the dream car, he drive car to Canada, so we married in Canada. So I go with him here to America after that. So a year later, I had my first child.

KL: How many children do you have?

LTN: I have three beautiful daughters.

KL: What do they do?

LTN: My oldest daughter now is 27 years old, and she do cancer research in Nevada. And my middle one, is Kathy, the one interview me right now, she go to school in Irvine, and my younger, Stacy Le, it’s her first year in college at UC San Diego.

KL: Do you talk to them about your history?

LTN: Yeah I talk with them when I’m very close to them. So we talk, we have a lot of fun together.

KL: What kind of stories do you usually tell them?

LTN: I tell them about the hard life, the story in Vietnam, the story about their father and I come here with nothing, work very hard to survive, to have the day today. So I tell them that so they can try harder for their life so they don’t have to suffer like us.

KL: Do you keep any family traditions once you came to America? Something you’ve always done in Vietnam with your parents that you keep doing today with your family?

LTN: I try to keep the family together, like Sunday we want to go to church together, go out to eat after that a little bit, and we have time to go around and have fun. I want the family together. I want to keep them close to us as much as I can but sometimes life right now is very hard, we
have to work so much so the time is so little. So now the kid all grow up, so they have their time, and sometime I try to keep in touch with them as much as possible.

KL: Did you family keep an altar for your ancestors, those who’ve passed away?

LTN: Yes.

KL: What kind of things do you usually put on the altar?

LTN: Flowers, fruits, and sometimes we put thập nhang (pray with incense); I don’t know what the name of it is.

KL: How has what you put on the altar change from when you were in Vietnam to when you’re in America?

LTN: It’s still the same, we do the same thing.

KL: What religion does you and your family practice?

LTN: We the Catholic.

KL: What kind of things did you do? Attend church every Sunday or…

LTN: Yeah we go try to go to church every Sunday.

KL: Are there any special foods or recipes that you pass down in your family?

LTN: I do, like phở, canh chua.

KL: Are there any special foods that you’re passing down, that you cook only during family gatherings, or when the family is all there?

LTN: I know how to cook a lot of foods, so whatever my kids want, so I cook for them.

KL: Do you have any family heirlooms or like objects that your family passed down?

LTN: I don’t know. What’s that?

KL: Like pictures or jewelry?
LTN: We have a lot of pictures, but jewelry I don’t think so. After the war, we don’t have anything left.

KL: How were the photos handed down?

LTN: Yeah.

KL: Were they handed down in photo albums?

LTN: Yeah, they saved a lot of pictures when I’m very baby pictures, so when we left Vietnam, my mom bring all of them to us and give to each of us, all the pictures we have when we baby. So I keep it now, so hopefully when I pass down to my kid, here mommy, when mommy the baby.

KL: Are there any memories or stories you connect with the pictures, when you look at them? Are you reminded of stories?

LTN: I don’t remember about that, I don’t know why, I don’t have anything remembered when I’m a baby.

KL: Were there certain pictures that were taken at certain events only or were they just taken when you were a child?

LTN: Just when I was a child, and like some occasions, New Year’s, and stuff like that, we have some pictures.

KL: How did the war in Vietnam affect your family?

LTN: It was very sad. We lost a lot, most everything we lost, money, everything. So we had a hard life when, in 75. Like we have little bit family.

KL: Where did you all live during the war?

LTN: Yeah, we lived in Saigon, all together in the same house.

KL: Were your grandparents and aunts still living with you at that time?
LTN: Yes, but they married, so they live not far from home, from my home.

KL: During the war, what job did you have?

LTN: I was still a butcher for a long time. 14 years old until I left Saigon.

KL: How old were you when you left Saigon?

LTN: When I 22.

KL: Did your job environment change when the war started? Did it become more dangerous?

LTN: No, more harder, not danger, but harder to earn the money. To make the money.

KL: Why was it harder?

LTN: Because the people poor, so we don’t have the money to buy food. So we sell very little.

KL: When you weren’t able to sell anything, did you end up keeping the food for the family? Or did you have to find another way to sell them or did you just throw it away?

LTN: In Vietnam we don’t throw away the food con [endearment term], we don’t throw away; we try to make something work. Make, cook something. We don’t throw away.

KL: When you couldn’t sell anything, did you end up cooking the food, did you share with the community or to feed the family?

LTN: No we feed the family.

KL: Was anyone in your family involved with the war?

LTN: Yeah, my brother.

KL: What did he do?

LTN: Linh (army), the navy, or I don’t know.

KL: What did you remember most about the war time?

LTN: Scary. A lot of bombings, the people die in front of my house. So, so, scary.

KL: What did you have to do when there were bombings occurring?
LTN: So I just try to go under the bed to hide.

KL: How about while you were working, what would you do if there were bombnings or attacks?

LTN: Oh no, that time we don’t have that. After the war, the communist already, so we just working, no more bombing, no nothing.

KL: Were you working during the war?

LTN: Yeah, during the war.

KL: Was anyone in your family, or you, ever captured and held by the enemy during the war?

LTN: Yeah, my two uncles.

KL: How did you feel?

LTN: Of course it sad and he die after that, after the war he died.

KL: Were any, did any of them pass away while they were held by the enemy?

LTN: Not held, because we run away from the communist, so I think what happened, but some friends come to tell us my uncle die on the way to run from, run home. When the communist come to Saigon and my two uncle die.

KL: So there were, were they killed on the spot, or captured and then..?

LTN: Maybe they have an accident or something, the shooting, so he die.

KL: Were you or anyone you knew in a reeducation camp?

LTN: Nó là gì? (What is that?) You mean the jail?

KL: What dad was in, in camp, the re-education camp?

LTN: What do you mean? We know?

KL: Did anyone you know in your family in the camp?

LTN: We go by the whole family

KL: No in the re-education camp, nó là…
LTN: No we stay in the

KL: No that was the refugee camp; re-education camp was like when the soldier was caught by the communist.

LTN: Oh no, we don’t go there. We don’t have the problem with that

KL: Did anyone in your family/family member become injured during the war?

LTN: No, no one

KL: Where were you during the last days of the war?

LTN: In the house. That year I was 15 year old, so just, the war, we just try together in the house. So my mom always tell us if we leave, we leave together, if we die, we die together. So my mom keep all the kids around.

KL: What were your memories of those finals days before the fall of Saigon?

LTN: They were scared, we just kids so when you see something bombing, the people running and crying, we scared. So we don’t run out on the street, just inside the house.

KL: What did your community or city look like around the time of the fall of Saigon? Was it destroyed?

LTN: No, nothing. Just people scared that’s all. No destroy, no bombing in my city. But the people try to run anywhere, that’s all.

KL: What was your family and your life like after the war ended? How did you, like, get back on track?

LTN: Not for a while, not right away.

KL: Did you go back to working right away?

LTN: I think after a couple weeks, we back to work. So we have food to eat, so we have to work.

KL: How did you feel when you were leaving your home country?
LTN: I left because all my family go, so I go with my family, so I don’t have a choice.

KL: Would you have chosen to stay in Vietnam if you did have a choice?

LTN: Before, because my family, when we left Vietnam, we left couple trips, so the first trip I don’t want to go. And the second trip I don’t want to go either because I scared the ocean. So the third trip, the last trip, that, most my family go so I have to go.

KL: So on the first two trips; did other parts of your family already leave?

LTN: Yeah.

KL: And your parents wanted to stay with you and your sisters and brothers? Instead of going on the first two trip?

LTN: Yeah because when we leave after that, we don’t know we make it or you not, so that’s why my parent’s try to send the kids different times. So any time, couple kids, because we have ten of us, so we don’t want the whole family go and something happen, we come back we don’t have house to live. So we send couple kid, but the last trip, so five of us go and my mom stayed back to keep the house in case we doesn’t make it, but we make it, so my mom stay back and after two years later and my dad work to bông xoa (sponsor) her to Canada.

KL: How did you leave Vietnam?

LTN: By the boat. Yeah.

KL: How many people were on the boat?

LTN: My trip about 36 total.

KL: What kind of things or objects did you bring with you?

LTN: Nothing, just clothes, food. But mostly when I go to the boat I cannot, I very sea sick very bad. So for two days I don’t move, I cannot move, I cannot do anything; I just throw up everything, like water, so I cannot eat for three days. I lie there like dead people.
KL: How long was the trip?

LTN: 3 days.

KL: Was it tough being in a boat with 36 people, was it crowded?

LTN: Yeah.

KL: What kind of things did you have to do on the boat?

LTN: Nothing.

KL: Were you the oldest out of all your siblings that were on the boat at that time?

LTN: Older? No we have a lot of older people.

KL: But were you the oldest out of your family?

LTN: My family, yeah I am the oldest sister. Normal five sisters, four sisters.

KL: Did you lose anyone in your family during the journey?

LTN: Oh no, we don’t lose anybody.

KL: Were you or your family in a refugee camp?

LTN: Yeah.

KL: Could you describe what the experience in the camp was like? What it looked like, what kind of things you do?

LTN: When we come there we share with a lot of people on another boat in a big, big, house. So we just sleep together. And living down there very hard, we don’t have money, we don’t have food. They just give us enough, a little bit something, so if you don’t have the money, you cannot buy the food. So we have to eat less to keep the rice and go to the market to sell the rice and get the money to buy the vegetable to eat because we don’t have enough vegetable. We eat in the can. So we have to grow whatever we can, make it happen.

KL: Did you have a job at the refugee camp?
LTN: Oh no, they just don’t do nothing, just learn English and play.

KL: Was it a program learned English in or…?

LTN: No we just want to learn, that’s all the people know to teach us, no class, no nothing. We just learn from the people or from the book or whatever can learn English, that’s all.

KL: How long were you in a refugee camp for?

LTN: I stay there for 6 months.

KL: Where did you first settle after the refugee camp? Where was the first place?

LTN: Canada.

KL: What city?

LTN: Prince George.

KL: Did you entire family settle in the same area or did they move around?

LTN: No they settled the area.

KL: How did you come to live in Southern California?

LTN: Because I married with my husband so I go with him to California.

KL: What was your family’s response to you leaving Canada?

LTN: What do you mean response?

KL: How did they feel about you leaving?

LTN: They don’t feel anything, when we marry, that’s the life. You married you have to go with your family husband. That’s it.

KL: After resettling in America, and in Southern California, how did you make a living, how did you take care of yourself and family?

LTN: My husband working at first for Winchell’s donut. And the half the day he go to gas station to pump gas to take care me for take care the wife and one kid. So after that and we learn,
he learn to do mechanic so he go to the dealer, so he work for Ford Company. So to take care the family and me be the housewife, take care three kids, and my job I do the sewing at home for a while. And after that I don’t sewing no more, so I try to have the babysit to take care after school. I pick them up; I have another three kids take care besides my three kids. So I make some money for the living.

KL: Did you work for companies when you were sewing? Do you remember which companies?

LTN: No I don’t remember.

KL: Do you remember how much you were paid while you were working for them?

LTN: Oh very little. About a couple hundred dollars a month.

KL: How much did you have to sew within a month?

LTN: A LOT.

KL: What kind of things did you sew?

LTN: Sometimes whatever they have, sometimes the skirt, sometimes the shirt, but we sewing step by step.

KL: Were you trained to sew?

LTN: I know how to sew in Vietnam, so I come here I learn quick.

KL: How did you find these jobs?

LTN: Oh friend of mine tell me.

KL: Were you only paid in cash or by check? Did you get any benefits?

LTN: No I don’t have benefits, but I have benefits from my husband work.

KL: When you brought the sewing jobs at home, did you have to do them while you were taking care of the children?
LTN: Yes, I had to take care of my children and working when they sleep or when they have time so I work at night.

KL: Today how do you feel about your decision to leave Vietnam and come to America?

LTN: Oh I think I am happy here. My kids have a good future. And I believe anywhere you have to work, so even I’m here or I’m in Vietnam I’d still have to work.

KL: What were some of the challenges you experienced in starting a new life in America? What was the most difficult thing you had to deal with?

LTN: The English, I had to learn a lot.

KL: Were there any other challenges you experienced in either Canada or..?

LTN: No, in Canada I just stay there about a year so I just work be the housekeeper that’s all, so no challenge.

KL: What did you do as a housekeeper?

LTN: Clean the house, cook for them, go school to learn ESL in the morning and after school I go home, I clean and I cook.

KL: Did you enroll yourself in ESL or did the family you were working for?

LTN: No, the government they helped us for the people just come from another country. So they have the class so we just enroll and we go school for couple hours a day.

KL: When you came to America, to Southern California, who helped you find a home?

LTN: No one. We just go and look.

KL: Was that difficult because of the language barrier?

LTN: Yes, very hard.

KL: How long did it take for you to find a home here?
LTN: My husband have to take for couple weeks to look for place to live, but at first it very hard, very small, very tiny, but we don’t have much money so we don’t have a choice so we do it anyways.

KL: Where did you stay while you were looking for a home?

LTN: At first we live in Monrovia, so my first daughter born in Monrovia.

KL: How did you find a job in the US?

LTN: From the friend.

KL: Was sewing the only job you had?

LTN: Yes

KL: Today what kind of job do you have?

LTN: I do manicurist right now.

KL: How did you come to work as a manicurist?

LTN: After my older daughter turn 14, so I decide to go to school to learn that, to make little bit money to help my dad to grow, to raise the kid, so when I go to work I just work couple hours in the evening after I take off, take the kids home. So I work couple hours only for a while when my kids all go to school so I work full time.

KL: Compared to what it was like in Vietnam, how would you, what would you say about the community you live in right now? Is there anything that was the same as when you were in Vietnam or where you’re living now?

LTN: No, where we living now it’s better. The livings better.

KL: Is there anything here that reminds you of Vietnam?

LTN: In the town I live most we don’t have the Vietnamese people. Not like in Phước Lộc Thọ, so you feel Phước Lộc Thọ like the Saigon in Vietnam, but not the town I live.
KL: Was there a reason you chose to live in this city even though there is not that many Vietnamese people or any at all?

LTN: Because before when I decide here my husband work around Duarte, Monrovia, Arcadia so when we decide to buy the house we look the house in Duarte because I like the city, small city, but very nice and quiet. Very good to raise the kid.

KL: Do you ever want to live in Little Saigon in Westminster?

LTN: Oh, no. I don’t want that. I live here already almost 30 years, so I get use to the quiet city, so over there I think that too noisy for me.

KL: Where in America have you ever experienced racism or comments that have hurt you when you heard them? Like people treating you differently because you’re not…?

LTN: I don’t care. I doesn’t worry about that. Because I never involve with the people like that so I don’t want, if the people racist, so I don’t talk to them. Just stay away from them, that’s all, I don’t want to involve with them.

KL: In the community you’re living in now, because there’s not that many Asian people that live here, do you experience that more often, racism or is the community more friendly and accepting?

LTN: Oh I like, they very nice people and friendly, I don’t see anything racist, because in my town, some neighbors is Vietnamese, couple families only, but American, Mexican, Philippine, so I don’t see anything racist in my town yet, maybe somewhere else, but not in my town, place I live.

KL: How do you identify yourself in America? Like for example, do you consider yourself Asian, Asian American, Vietnamese, Vietnamese American?
LTN: So I still Vietnamese, I am Vietnamese. Even I have the citizenship, but my blood, I is Vietnamese.

KL: So you say you’re Vietnamese or Vietnamese American?

LTN: What people think about me? Vietnamese American? I in Vietnam and I have citizenship so maybe I’m Vietnamese American right?

KL: But how would you identify yourself if someone asked you or?

LTN: I am Vietnamese.

KL: Is there a reason why you would rather say Vietnamese than Vietnamese American?

LTN: Because I am born in Vietnam, I am raised in Vietnam and I come here because of the war, so I’m Vietnamese.

KL: What was the process like for you to be naturalized as a citizen? Like how would you describe the process of what it was like to become American through citizenship test, like when you took the citizenship test?

LTN: Oh, it’s okay. I, with me, I think it’s not that hard.

KL: Was it a long process? Did it take a long time?

LTN: No, my interview about 15 minutes when they interview me about the history about America, so not long.

KL: How long did you have to wait before you were able to have the interview?

LTN: When I apply, so maybe not long, about three months, so they call me to interview and I pass it.

KL: Do you have any funny experiences of coming to a place where there weren’t that many Asian people? Any memories of what it was like to come somewhere where the culture wasn’t something you were used to?
LTN: No, I don’t understand that.

KL: Like, is there something, a story, you remember experiencing when you came to America where you didn’t know what to do or what to expect because your culture wasn’t the same as the rest of the city?

LTN: No because my husband live here, so when I come with him, I feel nothing, I don’t feel anything. So my husband take care of me, and sometimes I don’t understand anywhere he go, so he do it, so mostly I don’t do much.

KL: When it comes to elections and voting, do you vote?

LTN: Yes.

KL: Why do you vote?

LTN: Because I live in America so I am the citizen, so I have to do my job.

KL: Do you take pride in the fact that you are able to vote in America? Like are you proud that you have the ability to?

LTN: Yes.

KL: Does your entire family vote, or is it something and your husband decide to do because you guys had to go through the process of becoming a citizen?

LTN: Yeah, me and my husband go to vote.

KL: Do you keep in touch with your family in Vietnam?

LTN: I don’t have anyone in Vietnam right now. All my parents, brothers, sisters, live in Canada.

KL: Have you gone back to visit Vietnam even though you don’t have family there?

LTN: I go for just two times to travel.

KL: What was your experience like when you went back the first time?
LTN: The first time I came back I feel I’m lost, they change too much after 25 years I came back, they changed a lot. So I come to my house, the house I live before, I cannot recognize them.

KL: What were you expecting it to be like when you first were returning?

LTN: I thought they will different, but they do, a lot a lot of different with the time I left.

KL: What kind of things did you do on your first visit, or what plans did you have to do?

LTN: Oh just go around to travel, to see things, to see all the friends, and members, family members. But I came back and doesn’t happy because the weather, I cannot stand it, that’s too humidity.

KL: On your first trip back did you visit places that you thought, that you wanted to see from your childhood?

LTN: Yeah, that’s the first thing I go, to my neighbor before when I there, but when I there I go up and down, up and down, in my street, I don’t see anything, any people, I know when I’m there. Because they all grow up, so maybe they don’t recognize me and I don’t recognize them.

KL: Why did you go to Vietnam the second time?

LTN: Oh, just try go there relax, to have fun. That’s it.

KL: The second time you went there, did you visit the same places that you visited in the first trip?

LTN: Uh huh, yeah.

KL: Why did you do that even though you already saw them the first time?

LTN: I still want it. And I go the someplace I never go before, when I’m young, I don’t have the chance to go before, and when I go back, I do.

KL: When you go back to Vietnam and you come back to the US, do you miss Vietnam?
LTN: No.

KL: How come?

LTN: Because I don’t have any memories in Vietnam when I’m young. So I come here, I just go there because I just want to go to vacation, that’s all.

KL: Does going to Vietnam remind you of your childhood or has it just become a place you just visit?

LTN: Just want to come to visit.

KL: Are there any songs or pictures or objects that remind you of Vietnam when you’re in America?

LTN: No

KL: Are there any traditions that your family used to celebrate when you were a child that you try to celebrate here in America as well?

LTN: Like têt, Vietnamese New Year. So I do the same thing for my kid to know, same like in Vietnam when I’m young.

KL: Are there any traditions that you had to give up or change because you were in America?

LTN: Oh no, I don’t think so.

KL: In your opinion, what do you think about the Vietnamese community and culture in America? How do you see it, like Little Saigon, what do you think of those areas or those communities?

LTN: I don’t know. When I go to Little Saigon or Phụroc Lộc Thọ, I see it so busy and I don’t think I can handle that, so mostly I just stay in my town or if I go to grocery, I just go to Rosemead or someplace nearby. So once for while I go back there, in Little Saigon, I don’t go there a lot.
KL: When you go to Little Saigon, does it remind you of Saigon when you were working there?

LTN: Oh no, nothing about that.

KL: What does Little Saigon remind you of when it’s so busy? Or is it just, its own place that doesn’t?

LTN: Just a place that Vietnamese people live, but nothing about same like Saigon.

KL: Do you think the Vietnamese community in America is different than the Vietnamese community that was in Vietnam?

LTN: Yes.

KL: What makes it different?

LTN: The, I feel the people here, the life so hurry, and the people live here, they just don’t care anything. No feeling, but when the time I live in Vietnam, the people care each other. They take care each other.

KL: Is that why you chose to live in a community you live in today, instead of moving to Little Saigon?

LTN: Yes

KL: Even though you don’t live in a Vietnamese community, do you try to stay involved with them by interacting with any Vietnamese groups?

LTN: Not really.

KL: What are the most important things that you think future generations of Vietnamese Americans should remember about their past? Like, what do you think, something, is important about your past that you children, or your children’s children should know about Vietnam?

LTN: Yes, they need to know, because that’s their country too.

KL: What kind of things should they know?
LTN: I want them know how about the living over there, how hard is it so they can, they know how they lucky when they’re here to America. How lucky they are.

KL: Do you have any photo albums or home movies that you keep from your trip from Canada?

LTN: No, only I have pictures, in my time, that time, we don’t have the movie yet, we don’t have the VCR, we don’t have that.

KL: Do you have any photo albums of your family that you keep? Like of your family today, and your aunts? Your sisters?

LTN: Yes

KL: Your sisters?

LTN: Yes, I have that.

KL: Why do you keep them?

LTN: That’s a good memory.

KL: Do you have a lot of pictures from Vietnam?

LTN: Yes

KL: What kind of pictures do you have from Vietnam?

LTN: Like the family pictures. And some the day I have the communion, some like that.

KL: When you became a Catholic, when your family became Catholic, did you guys convert from Buddhism to Catholicism?

LTN: No, no. We the Catholic.

KL: Were you taught by the French, or was this something that was already present when you were born?

LTN: Yeah, we already.

KL: Did your parents know French?
LTN: My dad, little bit.

KL: Was your dad part of, take part in the Vietnam War?

LTN: Yes

KL: What did he do?

LTN: He the, what they call, trình tim, đánh, I don’t know.

KL: How long did he serve during the war? Did he fight the entire time?

LTN: Yeah.

KL: Are there any other memories or stories that you remember from Vietnam?

LTN: No.

KL: Do you keep in touch with any of your friends from Vietnam?

LTN: Just some, but now they move a lot somewhere else, so I don’t, so I lost in touch.

KL: Are there letters or pictures that you keep of your friends?

LTN: Yeah.

KL: Do you still have those with you today?

LTN: Uh huh.

KL: How do you keep those memories? Do you keep them in a photo album as well? Or scrapbooks?

LTN: Uh huh Uh huh.

KL: Were there any stories of your best friends and how you found each other after you guys both resettled in America?

LTN: Ohh, when I run away from my, the country, so after couple years, my friend and her husband run away, but only my, her husband make it, so she stay back with three kids in Vietnam. So after that she come here, by her husband, we lost in touch over 10 years, so one day
we meet each other and we found each other. And right now she live in Colorado, and in the future, couple months, from next year, she will move back to Duarte. So she and I will close again.

KL: How did you two find each other?

LTN: My mom one day go to Missouri, and they found her sister, so that the time the sister give me the phone number for her, so we keep in touch.

KL: How did you feel when you were able to talk to your best friend from Vietnam again?

LTN: Oh I so happy, we know each other when she 13 and I 14.

KL: What was the first thing you two talked about when you were able to talk?

LTN: Oh in the past, we talked about the past we had, the fun we had. Now we come here, she so busy, I’m so busy, so we just talk little bit on the phone once for a while. So I hope when she move to Duarte, so she and I have more time together.

KL: Do you think she’ll move back here, it’ll be like when you two were in Vietnam?

LTN: Yes I think so, I hope so, I wish.

KL: When you two were catching up, did you share any stories of what it was like to come to America? And how hard it was?

LTN: In the past yes. Uh huh, we talk about that

KL: How did that make you feel?

LTN: Feel sad, of course, but now we so happy to found each other.

KL: Was her trip similar to yours?

LTN: No, she go by her husband bông xoa (sponsor) her.

KL: Is there anyone in Canada that you met that you keep in touch with now?

LTN: No.
KL: What kind of environment did you want your family or your children to grow up in when they were in America versus what it was like for you in Vietnam?

LTN: What?

KL: Is there something that you wish your children had that you had in Vietnam?

LTN: No.

KL: Do you want your children to keep the traditions that you kept with your family?

LTN: Yeah I want that.

KL: Are traditions for you just focused around food and têt, or did you want?

LTN: No I want the family come together every Sunday, or any holiday, that I want.

KL: Was that something you always did in Vietnam?

LTN: Yeah, always.

KL: It wasn’t something that you started when you came to America?

LTN: No.

KL: What kind of holidays did you celebrate in Vietnam?

LTN: Like Christmas, Easter, New Year, do (praying for ancestors)

KL: When you were in Vietnam, was it always part of your life or did it happen after America...”

LTN: No, no, they part of our life.

KL: Is there anything you want to say about Vietnam or anything you want to share?

LTN: I wish one day I can bring my kid back to Vietnam so they know when, to see the Vietnam, to know about Vietnam more than I can tell them.

KL: What are some of the things you wished they could see in Vietnam that they can’t find out?
LTN: Because they’re born here, so their lives so easy and they have everything, I want to take them there to see the people, how the people live over there. They have a hard life, very hard life over there.

KL: Do you think the lives the people are living now, with Communist rule, is just as hard as when you were there during the war?

LTN: Yes, yes.

KL: Is that all you want your children to see?

LTN: I want them to know so they more respect it here.

KL: Do you want them to bring their children there when they have children?

LTN: No, up to them, but I don’t think it very hard, just even my kid, I bring back home it’s hard for them too because they born here, they live here, so their life is here.

KL: Would you ever want to return back to Vietnam for good?

LTN: No, my kid here, so I cannot leave them. Even I’m older, I go there for just travel, that’s it.

KL: So do you think in general it’s important for your children to know?

LTN: Yeah, how Vietnam, how the life is in Vietnam.

KL: Do you think the way Vietnam is now represents what Vietnam was like during war time?

LTN: It’s better than it was in my time before, but compared to America, still hard, very hard.

KL: Okay, thank you.