Lena: Today is November 26, 2012. This is Lena Nguyen with the Vietnamese American Oral History Project. I will be interviewing Dr. Suzie Matsuda in Santa Ana, California.

Lena: Can you please tell me your name?

Dr. Matsuda: Suzie Xuyén Đông Matsuda.

Lena: Can you tell me your date of birth?


Lena: And where were you born?

Dr. Matsuda: I were born in Vietnam

Lena: Can you tell me the names of your parents?

Dr. Matsuda: My parents, my mom’s name is Tin Hà and my stepfather his name is Hùng Đông.

Lena: Can I get the name of your biological father?

Dr. Matsuda: My biological father’s name is Mùi Nguyên.

Lena: Can you tell me a little bit about your family history?

Dr. Matsuda: What do you mean history?

Lena: Just about your family?

Dr. Matsuda: You mean where I come from and how…

Lena: Yes
Dr. Matsuda: My mother was born in the north of Vietnam, my biological father was born in the south, my stepfather was born in the middle of Vietnam. I myself, was born in Saigon and my mother migrated from the north to the south, I believe in 1954 and her parents, which are my maternal grandparents, I believe were were killed by the Japanese bomb and so my mother was an orphan along with her siblings. When her parents passed away they were homeless kids and so my mom did child labor for people who took her in and later she followed the crowd and moving from the north to the south in 1954 around seventeen to sixteen seventeen years old. And so my father’s family… in the south Vietnam there’s a lot of alcoholism in the family and my mother and father met. They never got married, they did not get married because his family did not except my mom for the fact that she did not have family, she was an orphan, she didn’t have education blah blah blah. No matter how, you know, she was a good looking woman. So my... I was born to that union, but my father, my biological father left my mom when I was born and so he had this, you know, paranoia where he thought I was not his kid. He was very jealous and didn’t think that I was his kid. But anyway, he left my mom and later his family married him, found another woman and he married. He had a wedding with that woman. So anyway, I grew up and then my mom before that she had she had different… I have, its interesting, I have two half brothers, the same mother different father and I also have three half brothers that the same father, different mom. So, my mom basically raise me and my… the other half brother who is older than me, like a single family home. And she, you know, as a single mom...these are the people who make less money without enough support, but my mom managed to take care of the family. She was just always try to make take care of her two young kids. She had another child, which older than that
brother than I, but that brother he live with paternal side, his father’s side. So, I remember, growing up in the single family home, my mom always away and there was like a...what you call?...She was, she was taking care of me...oh, Baby sitter! She was taking care of me and my brother. She much older, she was in her sixties and I remember she had me drink coffee...like black coffee when I was like, you know, few years old.

My mom rarely home anyway, single mom and I...later on my remarried to my step dad and he was always in the battlefield. He only comes home for a few days after two, three months or so...even though I had a father, he’s not there, even though I was very connected with him because he didn’t have another child with my mom so he was very...for some reason he’s really connected with me and I really connected with him; we bonded, but he never home. My mom raised us basically and she...the stepfather always away so my mom has her own crowd and her own social life too. We have maid in the house at that time, but I think before 1975 its not much as stressful as until after 1975, because after 1975, my stepfather was arrested and put in prison; they arrested him right at the battlefield so he never come home. So, my mother after 1975 continued to raise her kids as a single mom. The situation was much harder, she began to have to sell family belongings, one piece after another just to try to survive. She didn’t have...all the skills that she had, she was not able to use so she become...like a, street vendor...try to sell different things. I remember the communist police used to be after street vendors, because they don’t have permit. So, they would confiscate all her products, goods and that’s all the money she invested into. Every time she lost them, she was like really desperate and really shock and stressed and traumatized—a lot of traumatization. And I remember, also, my half brother, the one that I live with, he was...because my stepfather
was in the military, in the Republic of Vietnam and he was in prison right from the, you know, they picked him up, arrested him, put in prison from the battlefield. My mom was very harassed, because by the local police—communist police and also the neighborhood association, you know, the leaders, because there was always after my mom or most of the women who have husband in military in the Republic of Vietnam. So, my mom was very harassed so politically and emotionally, and psychologically she’s very stressed, right? Let alone having to deal with the day and meet everything. I remember my brother, they was hunting for my brother and forces him to…they tried to draft him to…the communist army. My brother was…he was near-sided, very severe near-sided and my mom didn’t want him to go and he the only son she had and so I remember the police—communist police come to our house with guns in the middle of the night. They bang on the door and they got right in and there wasn’t warning, nothing and they put the guns to my…my mother and asking for my brother. That time, my brother was sent away to live in a relative’s house already because we knew that they going to come after him, but that was very dramatic and subsequently my mom could not make enemy so we keep losing things in the house…and ‘til the house become empty, my mom has to sell the house so we become practically homeless. So it was a very stressful situation. I remember when my mom under stress it grew up with a lot of verbal, neglect, but also she was not emotionally available because she couldn’t handle the situation. And also a lot of verbal abuse because she herself, been through…she was traumatized so many times in her life—lost her parents and was, you know, child labor and she also was…I believe she was raped and molested when she was a child too. So, so much drama and so when my mom under the stress with the situation I just told you, she couldn’t handle it so she
flipped. She basically, she just break. And then she put a lot of...she took it out on me and my brother—a lot of verbal and a lot of emotional a lot of blame on us. So that was, but you know, she did everything she could and she didn’t get any help...there was no help with psychological and emotional help any kind of support. My mom was just very lost. And so for that, I survived my first suicide when I was sixth grade. I remember, I think, it was time my mom were out for days and my brother and I didn’t know where she was...I was in fifth grade, my brother was in sixth grade. We didn’t know our mom going to come back. We just keep cooking fried eggs, you know, and with rice and just eggs and rice rice and eggs for a few days. I was very lost, I felt very unwanted with all the blame..that I feel a burden for my mother and as a young fifth grader I felt really unwanted...self-esteem—nothing. I didn’t feel...so I did try to commit suicide, I was saved. That was my first and...

Lena: How old were you at this time?
Dr. Matsuda: Sixth grade
Lena: Sixth grade?
Dr. Matsuda: Yeah, so about..I don’t remember...age ten or eleven.
Lena: Eleven
Dr. Matsuda: And I remember, something triggered me. I got a haircut, the haircut didn’t go the way that I wanted it. I look at myself in the mirror and I would...there was a psychological pain, like a side ache, you know, that I couldn’t deal with and I didn’t have anybody to turn to. I feel so unwanted at that time. So I tried to kill myself. Anyway, that was my first time. I basically took about twenty-four sleeping pills for a kid. Very fortunately that the medication, you know how it is in Vietnam. People put medication in
the cabinet for a long time until it no longer effective. So, I even though I took that a lot it was enough for me to sleep like over several hours—fifteen, twenty hours or something. I didn’t go to school that day. My mom was away, she’s not home at that time. My aunt who come by to visit the family discover me..that I passed out. And then I got help. But anyway, that was my first time. So anyway, after all that going on a lot of trauma a lot of stress. So growing up, I was a…I did well at school, friends were my family school were my safe haven. So, I did well at school. But then later in the teenage age, I had a lot of problems with my mom, you know, with her stress taken out on us and I couldn’t take it anymore. So anyway, she kept sending us away, you know, escape from Vietnam. She wanted us to have a life and a future. So, she sent my brother several times and he were arrested several times when he was twelve to eighteen or nineteen, he was arrested several time and she was traumatized by the experience until today. My mom paid his way, he didn’t make it so the last time she paid it for him but he didn’t want to go. So, my mom said she already paid she didn’t want to lose the money, she asked me to go, so I did—I went. And, I think the second or third time I made it. So, I left Vietnam when I was seventeen with our family. My mother stayed back to visit my stepfather when he was still in prison. They moved him from the south to the north of Vietnam near the border of China for hard labor. He was in prison camp for over thirteen years. When I said they, it means the communist government. So, my mom stayed back to take care of my brother, my father and stepfather, I mean. So I just left by myself. It was four days and three nights. I was lucky, there was nothing happen, but there was hunger and thirst. I think if its…if we didn’t get rescued for few days it could have been very detrimental ‘cuz I remember when I was rescued, I couldn’t walk, I lost so much weight that I was so
weak I could not walk. I was a boat alone, I actually almost fell off the ocean—almost because I, I fainted and I tried to crawl up, you know, top of the fishing try to wheeze some air and I fainted there. And because the boat was so small I and the wave was so fast and powerful, I fell on the edge of the boat. If not for one lady who pulled my leg down, pushed me back to the basement, I could have just fell off the ocean because I didn’t have any family nobody knew me in that boat, you know. I was just seventeen years old kid, not connected to anybody.

Lena: Sorry, was this before 1975 or after?

Dr. Matsuda: Everything I tell you right now is after 1975, the escape and everything. It have to be after 1975. That make sense?

Lena: I mean..during 1975?

Dr. Matsuda: No, no, no, this is in 1983 I left Vietnam.

Lena: Ok, 1983.

Dr. Matsuda: So, I checked in there the boat people not leaving before 1975 but this is in the nineteen eighties so I left Vietnam in 1983. So I come to the refugee camp and of course, you know, as a younger woman without family is subjected to, you know, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and things like that. There’s several incidence but I am not going to share here. I overcome that, but it took a toll on me, it really did take a toll on me. I feel so, you know, after the escape experience and after the experience living without..coming to another country without family. Coming here to this country without family, I always have to do everything I could to be accepted by other people. There’s nothing all unconditional, but you know I very grateful for the people that took me in and I am grateful for the people who have helped me along the way and that’s why I become the volunteer after 2 years, I come to this country, I become volunteer. I want to give
back. Definitely, the dramatic experience that I had the emotional abuse the verbal abuse and sexual abuse is the reason why I am in the field of psychology, clinical social work and get a doctorate in clinical psych, because it help heal me first. And I wanted to help… I feel like when we in service for other people it’s a self-healing process. So, I find myself in service for others. When I first come to this country for the first seven to ten years I was very lost…I was very lost. I was stricken by my grief not having my family a lot of tremendous sense of loneliness. And then, seven to ten years for me to be able to find myself again, I was very lost. If its not for the confident of internet, this was an international conference that I went to by a recommendation of a church. I was there and there was one thousand women there from all underdeveloped countries and I remember there was a session done by a professor from Korea. He was talking about women experience during the war and rapes and sexual abuse and when she talk about it she had us listen to the voices of the women being raped and also the art work done by the survivors. And we all, one thousand we cry, we all cried together and I at that time realize it was not my fault, that I was not alone and I thought of my mom and my aunt who also was sexually abuse as well. My cousins, I grief for me, I grief for them but after that conference I come back a different person and I think I at that time I went directly to the psychology program and my career start from there.

Lena: Can you tell me a little bit about your religious background?

Dr. Matsuda: My mom sent me to private school, catholic school when I was little, but when the communist took over the south, we moved back to public school and I had wonderful experience in public school. I have always been exposed to Catholicism. Even the public school I was in were next to the church and for me every day to go and pray in the church
or nearby Mother Maria. It would be a meditated moment for me. I learned to pray I learn to rely on higher power when I was very young. And then I went to refugee camp and I come here to this country when I was in between adjustment a young girl and adjustment to the bi-culture of values. I was very conflicted so a family pastor…a Vietnamese pastor..Christian pastor took me in and so I had the exposure to Christianity and after I got married I exposure to Christianity but in the Presbyterian denomination and I like the philosophy there because its very progressive and inclusive and less judgmental, but I find myself going to Saint Joseph’s hospital the sisters ceremony there. And I find myself going to meditation with Tibetan Buddhist Monk and I explore Buddhism. I explore Catholicism, Christianity and different…even some other values as well so I find myself to be very eclectic in that sense. But I believe in higher power, I believe in God and also want to practice the Buddhism way of living.

Lena: Do you keep an alter for your ancestors?

Dr. Matsuda: No, but I do keep my…no, not really.

Lena: Is there any traditions or customs that you still celebrate now?

Dr. Matsuda: Of course, you know, the Vietnamese New Year, Tét. That’s the one that my family still celebrate.

Lena: Can you pinpoint any difference or similarities from…in Vietnam and America?

Dr. Matsuda: Of course in Vietnam, Tét celebration would be the whole nation, the whole country. So you have the ritual, everybody engaged in it. We all for ten days or two weeks, you have a ritual where the first day you be wishing best wishes to your family first and the second day, to your teachers and then the third day, to your friends or relatives, etc. So you have these kind of practices that you know…that you come wishing the best in people and trying to really positive during those times and just celebrate and
have a good time we have good food and laugh and talk..free from daily stress, free from life obligations and just coming together with people in your family and friend. Those celebrations are the best days. You wear new clothes and you taste your favorite food and you just have a good time. Just celebrate and free day free relaxation day. Over here, it’s only in your spirit. You still go to work, nobody share that with you. It’s not a nationwide kind of celebration and the practice where you know best wishes to your family, remember it dies out too. Get together and eat it’s more simplistic and of course the intensity and the joy in celebrating is very much different.

Lena: Do you have a family right now and can you talk a little bit about them…your husband?

Dr. Matsuda: I married with Japanese American who was third generation. His mother was born in L.A. His grandmother was born in Hawaii, he was born in Garden Grove, Orange County. He’s a school administrator. Graduated from USC and UCLA and third generation Japanese American so its very interesting as well. There are things that we are connected being Asians and there are also differences. He’s not being Vietnamese I am not being Japanese. Although he doesn’t have a lot of traditional Japanese values, but the way family member…difference between men and women how wife being treated or how they treat women in general I don’t know where he learned that from, could be from his Dad, doesn’t have to be from the culture but I think it’s still interesting to talk about.

Lena: Right after you got here to America, did you think about your family in Vietnam and were you going to sponsor them over here?

Dr. Matsuda: Definitely, I thought of the first thing when I was in the boat and I realized I was by myself and don’t know when I am going to see them; that was the hardest moment for
me. The day I come here, even when I was in the bachelor’s program I didn’t have money. I work full time, the only two months that I’m off is when I have my baby, my child, my son. So I worked and go to school along the way. I remember I didn’t have money, I was homeless at that time. I managed to get the loan from school loan and I sent all the money…the school loan, I used some of it to pay bills and the rest I sent to my family in Vietnam. But at that time in Vietnam they didn’t know that I was in hardship and they was thinking when you in America, you’re better off than us so you better send money. They resented it, that if I don’t or I didn’t send enough money for them. But when they come over here, my mom also escaped from Vietnam. I didn’t see my mom and stepfather it’s about ten years later and then I just sponsored my half brother and his family to this country in 2007, so it’s about five years ago. So, up ‘til today I am still…if anything they need…I use to send home every month or every other month—the money, just supply that, but when they come over here I don’t do that anymore but I was still the person who they can turn to financially if they need to even though I wish I can give more but I don’t always have all to give. But, yah, if you talk to Vietnamese family there’s a financial support. A family needs help is one of the very focal issues.

Lena: Can you tell me where your mom and half brother is currently living?

Dr. Matsuda: My mom live in Garden Grove, she in the senior community center—senior homes. She’s happy where she is. There’s an apartment, she lives alone, but she has friends live around there and my aunt also live nearby the same apartment complex. My brother live in Garden Grove also with his wife and two kids.

Lena: How have your relationship with your mom changed since the days in Vietnam?
Dr. Matsuda: It has changed for the better. I remember, there was a….I told you about my adolescent years with my mom, but when she first come here she resented me that I didn’t her enough money. She didn’t even look at me when I come and pick her up in LAX. First day she was here in this country, and I found out later that because she didn’t think I send her enough money she live with resentment me when I was a young person you know, still in school and did everything I could to do so. After the years, she live here and she realize how hard it is here. She turn around, I think she turn around also because I wrote her cards and notes and told her how…she went through a lot of hardship in her life and emotional challenges in her life. She later divorced my stepfather and I always tell her how I proud of her and how she was a single mom and she did everything she could and she has…a woman with the most compassion for other people that I ever known. So I told her everything I thought of her and I think she…the first time, for a very long time anyone give her some acknowledgement and validation for her strength and her effort…so I think that help her turn around felt that I…she was understood. So, since then I think our relationship change and my mom, she needy but she’s not a taker, she also a caregiver. She likes to give although she needy because she grew up in a very broken situation. She didn’t have enough love when she was a child, so could I see psychologically, she could be very needy. But she become a very compassionate person for other people who have unfortunate experiences so it have been for the better.

Lena: How many children do you have?

Dr. Matsuda: I have one son.

Lena: And what’s his name?

Dr. Matsuda: Ethan Matsuda.
Lena: Is he following your career path?

Dr. Matsuda: I don’t know, he changes his mind over so I don’t know when he’s enough… he’s in speech and debate team right now in his high school. He’s very articulate and he enjoy…he has a lot of humor. He enjoy laughing and he enjoy having humor in his life. He use to involve with my husband to write books when he was seven years old. He’s very environmentally and social conscientiously aware of things going on around the world. His speech, often time, on international issues, he’s a nine grader. I can see he has an old soul, which sometime I see is a plus but can also be a minus, because he have deep thought about things and sometimes put a weight on him.

Lena: Can we go back to the time when you were in Vietnam? And can you describe what you were doing and where you were at during the Fall of Saigon?

Dr. Matsuda: During the Fall of Saigon, what I was doing, I was in fifth grade and I remember they saying that the communist coming and everybody was afraid of the bombs and violence in Saigon. So my mom took us to a relative house that have three floor and then we was in the basement to try to being away from, you know, save ourselves. And then we come back home and at that time a lot of people in my neighborhood, they fled already and we see houses, tiny loft and friends that I know gone. I was longing for my step dad to come home we can leave together but he never made it home. So, I remember looking, you know, looking out for my dad to see and wishing I would see him approach from afar and never happen. That was what I could remember at that time.

Lena: How did your community, your neighbors, family change during that time?
Dr. Matsuda: People left, no longer the same, not intact anymore. I lost friends, they left. I didn’t have a chance to say goodbye anyone of us. So after that everybody was scared because there’s a lot of harassment and I remember they used to call my dad this label, negative label a lot of stigma for family who have people involve in the military of the Republic of Vietnam in the south government. Lots of stigma and a lot of discrimination and prejudice, you know. And I remember there’s a lot of brain wash too. I was in, in the youth. Hồ Chí Minh youth group. In school we learn a lot about hate, you know, hate the people like my dad. Hated people in America, all the U.S. government, a lot of hates. A lot of labeling, negative labeling so I remember that. As young as I was, I went with the crowd and…but, I think the thing that really help me survive was a lot of social connection with friends at school and friends in the neighborhood and that was protected factor for me when I was growing up and it help me to be more sociable be more out again… much less narcissistic wrap up in my own needs. I did a lot of community work at that time through that youth group, you know, different thing. They, on one hand they brainwash you on the other hand they, as young as I were I took that opportunity to doing volunteer service and stuff, but it kind of help shape me too. When I come here right after two years, my first volunteer in the country was my friend and I at Chapman University, we collected can foods and clothing and all these things and we drove all the stuff we collected all the way to Tijuana, the dumpster there and give ‘em out to people who live on the dump side. That was my first volunteer work.

Lena: What did you think about the education they were giving you in Vietnam?

Dr. Matsuda: I think the education, minimum but I still was in school. I still learn French four hours a week. A lot of brainwash, we have to take politics and even literature. I mean it’s
all pretty bias and very...a lot of hate, you know, but you know as innocent as I was it didn’t make me hate anybody. I think if I stay there long enough I could have, but then again. The protective factor was friendship, you know. The connection with nature and being with people I...that was the protective factor it didn’t change me, I was...I did what they asked me to do, all kind of community volunteer work and stuff but really it did put a shield for me to have this critical consciousness of what, where I was, I was very brainwash. I didn’t have that critical conscious until I come here and then met with friends and know about the prize of freedom and freedom of speech and freedom for fear and all of that. I didn’t, you know when the fish is in the water it doesn’t know it’s wet until it gets out from the water, right? So that’s what happen to me. I was pretty much brainwash, until I come here.

Lena: Where did you first reside when you got..?

Dr. Matsuda: Westminster, Orange County.

Lena: Westminster. Did you live in an apartment or...?

Dr. Matsuda: I live in an apartment with my cousins and all five men...five guys.

Lena: Who were these guys?

Dr. Matsuda: These were my cousins who come to this country way before me.

Lena: Ok

Dr. Matsuda: And three of them was in high school and then my oldest cousin, he was working as a marchinist and then...
Lena: Can you repeat that? Marchinist?

Dr. Matsuda: He work in “Marchine” shop, it’s a shop that make machine, you know. So he work there and then in that two room apartment, I stayed together with three guys in high school and that the adult cousin stayed with his friend in the other room. So, five people in two bedroom. I share that room with three guys.

Lena: How did you reunite with your cousins?

Dr. Matsuda: They were here and I come. At first I stayed with them first, but then as you can see, I was eighteen years old, young woman, I live with three guys in a room. I had no privacy. Their friends come over and drink and all these things going on. I didn’t have my space and my older cousin who, they try to take care of me, they good people but they knew it was not appropriate place for me. And my oldest cousin, he feel responsible for me too and he didn’t know how to raise or take care of me. So, he ask the church to see…I went to the church at that time and I told him, maybe I can come live with a pastor family. So they took me to that pastor family and that’s when I live with the pastor family.

Lena: Can you describe the neighborhood that you were living in with your cousins?

Dr. Matsuda: It was an apartment, right at the corner of Bowen and Westminster, it’s an apartment complex. It was mostly quiet, you know, safe. But course for low income people who live there. Like five of us in two bedrooms and I used to work, I go to school and I work at the same time too. I used to work as an assembly...in an assembly line, as an assembler. Doing the same thing eight, nine hours a day physical labor and I remember I was...that environment was very...a lot of turmoil a lot of very stressful. I
remember a lot of the people who worked with me, they drank for party and went to my apartment and look for me and that kind of …it was very unsafe situation for a young woman.

Lena: Did you experience any racism or…?

Dr. Matsuda: I remember every time I was member I went to rent videos when I tell them my name is X-U-Y-E-N and I remember the customer service guys were, two or three of them laughing my name start with an “x.” You know, I remember that. I think what I probably more subtle more covert than overt.

Lena: Can you describe what happen after you were taken in by the pastor family?

Dr. Matsuda: I remember, I basically my life when I live with that pastor family it’s all about the church. I do Sunday school, I go to school at a community college, I come home, have bible study. Everything is around the church religious activities, everything. I remember did not have a time or focus I didn’t write home for a long time, totally devoted to that. And they have the subculture I have to adhere to and there was time I could not connect or adhere to it. I remember I was kind of ostracized, ex-communicated and I left and I left. At time I left, I was practically homeless, but I called to a friend, African American friend, at the University of Chapman and she told me she had her place and she moved in with her boyfriend so her place is vacant and said I could come and live there for few months, so I did.

Lena: How long did you stay with the pastor family?
Dr. Matsuda: I think, probably in the about maybe, let’s see 1984 I started living with them in 1986 until 1990 possibly, yeah, so about few years I stayed the most five, six years.

Lena: Did you join any club and organizations in the Vietnamese community?

Dr. Matsuda: Not at that time, just everything around the church. After I went...first group that I attend was Vietnamese Professional society. I graduated from college in psychology and I remember I do the community health fair and a friend, an acquaintance, later become friend invited me to Vietnamese Professional society. That was my first group I associated with.

Lena: Did you, were you involve in any other events or...?

Dr. Matsuda: So that my first group, but I later involve in UVSA (Union Vietnamese Student Association), I involve in UC Irvine VAC program. I used to be mentor advisor there for UCI VAC group, Vietnamese American coalition group. My husband and I founded the Vietnamese mentorship program bringing university students to mentor for high school kids. I also involve in Việt Tân, is a political party that advocate for freedom and human rights in Vietnam and by peaceful means; we believe in peaceful means. And, I am still involve with them since 1997 until today. And I also was cofounded the Vietnamese support group for Vietnamese with disabilities. God, I was involve in so much groups. I, and another group I help cofounded is the Vietnamese American…it’s called Viet Care. A community empowerment, resource empowerment called Viet Care. It comprises of Vietnamese health professionals and consumers and their families that advocating to provide education on many health issues.

Lena: Can you tell me some of the activities you guys do in the Việt Tân organization?
Dr. Matsuda: Yeah, we do lobby, lobby in congress, lobby in the state, especially in congress and the congress and they, we also promote empowerment in Vietnam to providing news. You know, not state control news and we help expand the access to internet. We provide services in firewall. Basically, breaking the firewalls to get into our side. We promote internet, freedom of information. We lobby to help rescue folks to Vietnam through being in prison just because they have an opinion or different voices or we let the world know the abuses that happening in Vietnam. Both for the farmers, the factory workers and for people who have different descanting voices. So we do…our group is international. So we have people in Australia, in Europe different country in Europe. We connected very closely to the government everywhere in the United Nations, we advocacy and we just basically put out to the international community what’s happening in Vietnam. That part and we also, do support people in Vietnam for peaceful movements.

Lena: Can you tell me what your husband thinks about your community involvement?

Dr. Matsuda: My husband is very politically connected to human rights issue to equality and justice especially for him, especially in education because he’s an educator. He is very politically involve in the…he used to run for state assembly and he…but he’s now elected at the board of trustees for the North Community District in Orange County. He’s been there for several years now so besides his full time job, he has the politically active as a volunteer both at the local and state government. It used to be the California state commission for education. So he’s very politically connected in what I do as well. So that’s something that we support and not questioning each other for what we committed in.
Lena: How does he view the Vietnamese Community?

Dr. Matsuda: He think that Vietnamese community still need to know a lot more information so that they can see things more progressively and more informed. Then just to listen to…he thinks the education needs to be done to get to equality and justice. And how the people can…for the people in the community in America in U.S. there’s a lot of education to be done.

Lena: Do you have any goals for the future or is there anything you haven’t accomplished that you want to accomplish?

Dr. Matsuda: I, because I…part of my time is also for, I participate in Việt Tân, I dedicate it there so for my career I sort of move along, but I don’t put full force to my career as a psychologist. I do my full time job as a psychologist but I don’t do extra, as I would like to like writing books or creating a treatment center that I am inspire to create, that kind of thing or having a blog interaction and talking to people in Vietnam about health issues and psychological issues, relationship issues and all of that. I mean, I am very much feel that I have passion for those things but because what I do right now with Việt Tân, I sort of not putting full force in my career. With Việt Tân, the reason why I am doing it is because it’s part of empowerment for me as well, because for what I have here how far I have come and I do want to pave the way for other people and future generation to come to have the same opportunity and same respect as a person, respect for their dignity and self worth like I have here and for that reason I told myself I happen to be a Vietnamese for a reason and if Vietnam is part of my blood and soul. If that country is still suffering
then I need to do something about it and not to leave people behind and just enjoy what I have here. I don’t think I can see myself doing that.

Lena: Do you see a democratic Vietnam (in future)?

Dr. Matsuda: Right now, it’s run by dictators, basically those people monopolize in power, monopolize in resources and a lot of corruption so it’s not any ideology anymore, you know. And so it’s about greed and there’s not stop to power and what they try to copulate. A lot of suffering for the people, it’s a state control country. They control religion, they control the press and I mean they have six to seven hundred press agencies, it’s all state control. Education is pretty much brainwash. And so I mean, I’ve been there, I see how stressful, how dramatic and how traumatizing it was for my family and myself growing up, really lost, you know. And so, do I see…I think people inside the country still try and still want to make an effort to make it happen and it will happen. It will not happen when we give up, when we don’t give up, it can happen.

Lena: Have you gone to Vietnam or…?

Dr. Matsuda: I went back in 2003.

Lena: What was the experience like then?

Dr. Matsuda: Still a lot of poverty and I mean if this country if kids seven years old out on the streets, ten, eleven o’clock at night they would be picked up by the police. Over there, they all over the place ten, eleven, twelve, one o’clock in the morning, what they do?...they pick up trash, they pick up recycle stuff so that their mom can sell the next day. There’s no protection for children. Will you imagine those kids being exploited and
abused by an adult in the middle of the night in the middle of the street like that even adult alone is already very unsafe let alone a vulnerable child. So you know, there was no protection for the weak, vulnerable population, the elder, the young kids, the poor. There's maybe 5% or more than 5% are very very rich. I mean, over there now, 25% making $15,000 a month, 5% making $25,000 a month. But the rest of the country, close to 80% barely making a few hundred a year… so the gap is so huge that I think that can be change, that can completely be changed.

Lena: What area did you visit?

Dr. Matsuda: In Saigon and I also went to the south.

Lena: What part of the south?

Dr. Matsuda: The deep south. I don’t remember exactly where…Long An and somewhere in the south I went to ….Cần Thơ…all those. We can stop.

Lena: Is there anything else you want to say?

Dr. Matsuda: I think it’s ok, I don’t…I didn’t tell you very in details about the traumatic experience that I went through. I am not in the mood to talk about it.

Lena: I understand.

Dr. Matsuda: But I think in a nutshell, I share what I meant to.

Lena: Ok. That’s all I would like to ask you today and I thank you for your time.

Dr. Matsuda. Ok.