Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: HUY BUI
Interviewer: Khang Nguyen
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KN: Today is Tuesday, November 13, 2012. This is Khang Nguyen from the Vietnamese American Oral History Project and I am interview Mr. Huy Bui. We are at his home in Midway City, California and I am going to start the interview. What is your name?

HB: Huy Bui.

KN: What is your name of birth?


KN: Where is your place of birth?

HB: Ricoh. [laughs]

KN: Place of birth?

HB: Oh, Vietnam.

KN: Where in Vietnam?

HB: Saigon.

KN: Is it North or South of?

HB: South Vietnam.

KN: South Vietnam. So you were born in Saigon?

HB: Yeah.

KN: Is that like the city?

HB: Yeah.
KN: Can you describe your hometown where you grew up.

HB: I grew up in the capital so it was very crowded. It has a lot of people. And it is a rural country area so it is a very crowded neighborhood.

KN: Is it industrialized?

HB: No actually it’s not. It is in Vietnam usually the industrialized areas are outside of the city, not inside of the city.

KN: So is there a lot of free land or?

HB: Actually it is in the city and it doesn’t have a lot of land.

KN: Okay, what are your parent’s names?

HB: Quang Bui, my father. My mom is Qhu Bui, I mean Qhu Nguyen.

KN: Do you have any siblings?

HB: Yeah I have two older brother, two older stepbrother and three younger.

KN: Can you describe your parents?

HB: My dad is the nurse and my mom is the merchant.

KN: Were you a part of a wealthy family?

HB: No, lower class.

KN: Oh, okay lower class.

HB: Before 1975, lower class.

KN: Can you tell me some of your childhood memories while in Saigon?

HB: It’s a lot.

KN: Is there any fun ones?
HB: When I go to school it was fun. Be a jerk. [laughs] When I was little, when I was in school. We traveled a lot because I like to travel around the city and South Vietnam. We go a lot of places so that was fun to see different places when I was young.

KN: What were the things that you found fun when you were traveling?

HB: The scenery, the beautiful scenery in Vietnam at that time.

KN: So in Saigon, there weren’t any manufacturing companies?

HB: They do but usually they are on the outskirt of the city, not inside the city. Inside the city mostly they have a lot of merchants and they don’t have the big manufacturing, just the headquarter of companies or something like that.

KN: Did you live next to a lot of neighbors?

HB: Yes mostly residents live in my area. I lived next to a cemetery. It was fun.

KN: How is that fun?

HB: We’d go in there and we had fun in there and play in the cemetery.

KN: What do you do in there?

HB: We play soccer in there and we do a lot of weird things in there, it was fun, fun things as a kid.

KN: Did you get in trouble?

HB: I do, do.

KN: What were the consequences when you go caught.

HB: Oh my mom and my dad beat me up, no not my mom and my dad, my brother, my older brother, my stepbrother beat me up [laughs]

KN: Did you celebrate Tet while you were staying in Vietnam?
HB: Yeah oh yeah. We got a lot of money and we do shopping, we play cards. We pray and we, yeah we visit the relatives, that was tradition. Like first day of Tet, we visit family member like grandmother, grandfather, brothers, like you know my mom’s brother, my dad’s brother, sisters something like that and after that the second day, we visit the close relatives and the third day we visit friends, that is the traditional Vietnamese celebration.

KN: Were there any festivals?

HB: In Vietnam, Tet is a festival already, yeah so they do have a festival next to the zoo, they have a big land they have a festival. Just like the Tet Festival they have over here with big rides and things like that. Before Tet they have a flowers market just like they have over here. And I don’t know now but before 1975 Tet was very fun.

KN: Did you have any jobs while you were in Vietnam?

HB: No I was too young. I go to school.

KN: How was schooling in Vietnam?

HB: I was the, it was fun it was very fun. It was very strict when you go to school but we have friends. It’s the same thing over here, we go to school and we have a lot of friend. You help your friends, you do some stupid things.

KN: What level of education did you have?

HB: I finished high school and I finished technical school.

KN: Were you a troublemaker in school?

HB: In Vietnam, yes.

KN: How did you teachers think of that?
HB: They remember, the teachers only remember the best students, the worst student and the bad student. I wasn’t the best student, but I wasn’t the worst but I was a very bad at the troublemaker so they remember me.

KN: What did you do to become a troublemaker?

HB: I did a lot of weird things like, stand up in the fifth floor, and put water in the bag and drop it on people’s head. [laughs] And I do some weird things, do you know the poison ivy, in Vietnam it’s not the poison ivy, they have a tree, a fruit that grows on a tree and you take the hair, the outside of the fruit, the very sharp needle and if it sticks on your skin, it will poke your skin and it will itch. It is just like poison ivy but it does not burn, it just sticks into your skin so I take those powder and I put that on top of the fan and walk out the door and I turn on the ceiling fan so I turn on the ceiling fan and the whole class got the whole thing so the whole class got itchy like poison. Like fifty people.

KN: Did you ever get punished for doing these things?

HB: No my teachers didn’t know about these things but my friend know and they take me out and they pinch me down and they open my, it’s like a backpack. What do you call it?

KN: Briefcase?

HB: Yeah briefcase, and they open it up and they see some of it in my briefcase and they put it all over my body. [laughs]

KN: What do you remember most about your parents and grandparents in Vietnam as a child?

HB: My parents worked a lot, to raise us. They were very patient with me and even though we were in the lower class and poor, they raised us to be very good people. That’s why now I try to raise my kids the same thing.

KN: Are there any stories about your family history? Do you know anything about their past?
HB: Yeah, we came from North Vietnam. My Dad came from North Vietnam, he married in North Vietnam. When he came south, he had two children, my older brothers. And they came to south and his wife, his first wife didn’t want to come south with him so she keep one brother in North Vietnam and one of my younger brothers, stepbrother come south with my dad. The funny thing is in the war the 1975 war, my brothers in South Vietnam army. My second brother in South Vietnamese army and my oldest stepbrother is in North Vietnamese army. Before they send him to South Vietnam to fight, they said to my brother that if he saw his father, would you kill him. My brother said “I don’t know” so they didn’t let him go to South Vietnam so that’s a good thing.

KN: Did you speak any other language besides Vietnamese?

HB: Uhhh no.

KN: Did you ever travel to North Vietnam?

HB: I did, in 1977. At that time no one could travel to North Vietnam except me because of my uncle. My uncle, he is a high-ranking Vietnamese officer so he came south and I was a very, very bad young man, young kid at that time so my mom and my dad send me to my uncle so he can take of me and teach me and discipline me. So I lived with him for a year and we went to North Vietnam to pick up his family so I go with him and go with him on the train, the first time I went on a train to go from South to North. It was fun, it was a good experience. At that time North Vietnam was very, very poor. We go over there, they don’t have anything. Every house, everything build came from 1954, so everything was very old, they don’t have anything new. The color of the clothes, they wear was mostly, you know the dark green, the military green, the white, black, and you know khaki pants and shirt. That’s it they don’t have different color. I went out there, I wore red polka dot shirt and wear the 1970 pant with the big trunk and they look at
me like weird. It was a trend at that time and in Vietnam, in North Vietnam it was so poor they
don’t have anything.

KN: Did you have a lot of family members in the military.

HB: Vietnamese military?

KN: Vietnamese military.

HB: Yes, yes. Both sides, yeah.

KN: Was there a lot?

HB: Yeah.

KN: Were they all male?

HB: Like my uncle. I have an uncle, he got killed in 1972, or 1971. He was in South Vietnam
army and my other uncle in North Vietnam was in high ranking. I got cousin and all kinds of
cousin in both side, so a lot.

KN: Were your parents educated the same way you were?

HB: My father is educated very high, educated. My mom, she, I think she finished junior high
and she had to work to take care of the family, yeah.

KN: Was that common?

HB: In Vietnam at that time yeah, that’s an old kind because they both is refugee, they came
from the North and ran away to the South because of the communist, yeah.

KN: How did your parents meet?

HB: Through family members.

KN: Did the wife of your father, I mean did you mom know about your dad’s other wife?

HB: Yeah, yeah.

KN: Was that normal?
HB: It is just like; they don’t know when they’ll come back. So it’s normal I think.

KN: Do you have a wife?

HB: Let me see, yeah. [laughs]

KN: How did you meet her?

HB: I meet her in the community work.

KN: Was that in America?

HB: Yes, in Southern California.

KN: When did you guys get married?


KN: Do you have any fond memories of both of you?

HB: Yes, a lot. Fighting. [laughs]

KN: Do you have any children?

HB: Yes I have two.

KN: What do they do?

HB: One is in college and one is in high school.

KN: Do you talk to them a lot about your history in Vietnam?

HB: Yes.

KN: What do you tell them?

HB: I tell them you are lucky you live in America. You have a lot of things; you have a chance to do a lot better than a lot of Vietnamese in Vietnam, especially right now. They go to school and they don’t have a future. Over here at least you have a chance to build your future so that’s what I tell them, to make the best out of it.

KN: Does your family have any special sayings or expressions?
HB: What do you mean?

KN: Like, is there like any motto that your family goes by?

HB: I told my kids this, just do the best you could, I told my kid this, and I live by this. We do
the best that we can in life and as long as we look in the mirror and say, “that’s all we can do”
then that’s all you can do. You can’t push yourself to do thing that you can’t. Sometimes that’s
extraordinary people, sometimes I say that that’s the best that I can do. And that’s the best I can
do. That’s what I tell my kids too. I told them if you can live with whatever you do, and you
think that’s the best you can do then I will not push you.

KN: Is that how your parents taught you?

HB: Every parent wants the best out of their kid. They want their kid to do better. They hope the
kid will do better. But in my family, it is different. I say, I told my kids, yeah I want my kids to
do better too but at the same time, just do the best that you can. And if you can’t…If you think
that’s the best that you can do, then that’s okay to me, but if you don’t try your best, then it’s not
accepted.

KN: Is there any special family traditions that you guys do?

HB: Yeah, every yeah-in America, the tradition is that every year we do the Tet Festival for ten
years now. Every year now we do…I take a week off, I help out in the Tet Festival and so does
my kids and my wife and it’s fun.

KN: How do you help with the Tet Festival?

HB: We build a Vietnamese village and we help people help the kids to have fun in there.

Because when you go in there you don’t see that it’s an American fair only. It’s an American fair
but we also build the Vietnamese tradition in there so it’s fun. The second thing is in my tradition
is that every year we have a family reunion in my dad’s side. Every year we have relatives from
Bui family everywhere in the world and also mostly in the United States, sometimes in the world too. We got together every year and different cities, different states. In Vietnam they have their own reunion twice a year. In North Vietnam they have one, South Vietnam they have one. And we start in America about 13 years ago and every year that’s a tradition that we have, that we do every reunion and that’s fun. It’s just like a vacation.

KN: Does your family keep an alter for your ancestors?

HB: Yes.

KN: What kind of traditions or celebrations do you maintain with your ancestors?

HB: We, just like I said we have family reunion to commemorate, to remember our ancestors, to thank. In America they think that they worship the dead, but we don’t worship the dead. We thank the ancestor, we thank. It’s just like “thank God.” But we different, we thank ancestors, we thank grandparent, we thank mom and dad and we thank the past people whoever gave us what we have right now. That’s how we worship our ancestors like that. We don’t worship our ancestors by worship death. We worship what they do for us.

KN: What do you and your family practice?

HB: Buddhist.

KN: Do you belong to any temples?

HB: No.

KN: Why is that?

HB: I think religion is in the heart. And also Buddhist is the way of life. Most of Buddhist teaching is way of life and I don’t know if you know anything about Buddhist but it is the teaching of the way of life and it doesn’t make you go to church. You go to church to remember the great man, the great Buddhist. Buddhist is, Buddhist is different. Buddhist is, anyone can be
Buddha. We don’t have one Buddha, anyone can be Buddha. You can be Buddha, me can be Buddha. Everyone can be Buddha but if you want to be Buddha, you have to…you have Buddha in you. But you want to become Buddha you have to learn, you have to learn a lot of things.

KN: Were there any other religions in your family?

HB: We have Catholics, we have Christian. It’s not in my family but my relatives.

KN: Is there any special food traditions that you and your family have? Like any special recipes?

HB: Thit Cho

KN: Do you possess any photos?

HB: Yeah.

KN: Any jewelry from your family?

HB: Yes, I collect the Vietnamese money from 100 years ago.

KN: Did your parents give or pass down any jewelry or anything to you?

HB: We came here and we got nothing. [laughs]

KN: Do you have any photo albums?

HB: Yeah, yeah.

KN: Any movies, home movies?

HB: Yeah, home movies when I came to United States. That’s all.

KN: What were they about?

HB: First time to the United States. Like Christmas and graduation. That’s about it.

KN: How did the war affect your family? The Vietnam War?

HB: Just like I said, my brother, my two older stepbrother, one in South and one in North and they used to fight a lot. My father got in 19-I think 1953, he got, what do you call it, executed by Vietnamese communists. Executed and luckily the bullet went through his jaw instead of his
head so he alive and he go to the South. And my uncle, the youngest uncle passed away and you know he got killed in the war, so yes the war affected us a lot.

KN: Where did you live during the war?

HB: In Saigon.

KN: Was it war driven?

HB: No, Saigon was like the capital.

KN: So there was no war in Saigon?

HB: No, the only time I see war in Saigon is in 1969. I think. It was the Tet Offensive. I don’t know if you know about the Tet Offensive yet. When the Vietnamese Communist, they attack and that’s it. In 1975 when the Communist take over the country.

KN: Did you see any of the events during the Tet Offensive?

HB: Yeah, I see a lot, I hear a lot of explosion but I didn’t see actual fighting.

KN: What do you remember most about that time period? During the Vietnam War?

HB: Most of them, because I live in the city so I don’t see a lot but I hear a lot of my cousins got killed in South Vietnam and I see of my cousin become amputated because of the war and I see a lot of people around the neighborhood got family member got killed in the war. During the war, it was a terrible thing. But at that time I’m too young, too young to think deep in it.

KN: Was there any of your family members that were captured and put into re-education camp?

HB: Yeah, my uncle. It’s not really captured in 1975. They took over, the Vietnamese Communist take over South Vietnam and they put a lot of South Vietnamese soldiers, the officers and the works, no I mean the government workers into re-education camps. And one of my uncles is my father’s brother. He go to reeducation camp, that’s what they call it, we call it jail. They put them in jail, I think he get out in three years, yeah he get out.
KN: Did you ever talk to him after?

HB: Oh yeah.

KN: Did he ever tell you about the experience?

HB: Yeah he was a big man. He was about 180 pounds. He go to camp and he came back and he go down to 100 pounds. He lost about 70 pounds and it’s very tough in there. They don’t have food, they don’t produce you enough food to eat. They make you work day and night and they can shoot you anytime they want.

KN: Do you remember the last days of the war?

HB: Oh yeah, yeah. We were inside our house and we hear a lot of explosion and out of the city, the outer city. Luckily no one around us got hurt and South Vietnamese. We listen to the radio, the president of the South Vietnamese said they give up and it stopped. A lot of people cry.

KN: Did you cry?

HB: No I’m too young.

KN: Did anyone in your family cry?

HB: Yeah my dad real sad yeah.

KN: When was it that you can to the United States?

HB: In 1978. I lived with the communist for three years.

KN: Oh you lived in the North for three years?

HB: No I lived with communist, under communist for three years.

KN: How was that?

HB: It suck.

KN: Was it different?
HB: Yes, it’s very different and the whole country is usually in 1975. Our country at that time, Korea and Taiwan and Thailand and those…Hong Kong, they look at Vietnam as the model. They look at South Vietnam as a model for their growth and in 1975 the communist pull us back for a long time. We don’t, we don’t even have the car, and they don’t even have the gas to run so they make the car run by water pressure engine. Do you know what I’m talking about? They use coal to run the car and they’re very proud of it. “Oh we,” the communist were very proud of what they did and “okay we don’t have gas so we use the coal instead of gas.” But they didn’t think that all of the world, in the world they passed us and we go backward and the communist make us going backward for so long and now we play catch up. And now the Vietnamese compared to Thailand, compared to Korea, compared to Hong Kong, compared to Taiwan and Korea is totally different. And Singapore, we are poor third world country compared to those countries.

KN: Did you feel unsafe while you were living three years under communist rule?

HB: Actually I was too young but my family, yes. They feel very unsafe and the government can come to your house and knock on your door and they can grab you and throw you somewhere and you don’t know and they could kill you and shoot you right there and no one can say anything.

KN: Did you stop going to school during communist rule?

HB: No I still go to school, yeah.

KN: How did your families rebuild their lives while under communist rule?

HB: We don’t rebuild our lives. We just live. We just live with whatever we got.

KN: Did you guys go on with normal routine?

HB: Yeah, yeah.
KN: What was it like leaving your home country?

HB: At that time, when you was young, you just think you are just traveling. But when you leave the country you feel lost. You say oh, whenever you come back there you just feel lost. And it’s just like, because I came here by myself. My family still back in Vietnam so it was tough. You’re missing your whole family and I left in Vietnam when I was 16 years old and just a kid. And by myself.

KN: Why did you leave by yourself?

HB: Because I am a troublemaker so I am against, am a anti-communist at that time. My mom, she saw it. I did some stupid, well not, well yeah when I think of now it was stupid but at that time I just hated the communist. I do something to be against them. So my mom see it and if I stayed in Vietnam I would have gotten killed by Vietnamese communist so she send me away, yeah she send me. I was one of the boat people and yeah that’s why I left Vietnam.

KN: What did you think about the U.S. policy during and after the war? Like the U.S. presence in Vietnam?

HB: Well U.S. involvement in the war at that time was the right thing to do because it stopped the communist but a lot of people over here don’t understand what the communist is and they’re against the war but at that time like, well, in ten years I think 1963 until 1973, I think they stopped from 1973 to 1975. Americans got killed by like 50,000 people so that’s why they use that to be against the war. But I think the war was justified to again the communist. But that time the Vietnamese government at that time, we didn’t build up our own strength so we depend on them so much when the United States drop us, we lost, we lost the war. Even though our military wanted to fight but we don’t have a mean to support ourselves to fight so that’s why the South Vietnam fall to the communist and the communist got support by China, by Russia and by every
eastern country in communist Europe support Vietnam so they sent a lot of money and stuff to Vietnam so that’s why we lose the war.

KN: How did you leave Vietnam? You said you were going by boat but did you have to sign papers or anything like that?

HB: No I just left by boat. We, we sneak out of the country. Yeah my…one of my aunt’s worker organized a sneak out, to sneak people out, so I was one of those people.

KN: Did you bring anything with you?

HB: At that time?

KN: Yeah.

HB: I bring two pair of, two shirt, two pant, and some short, and some t-shirt and my album collection of Vietnamese money and that’s it.

KN: Were you scared when you were on the boat?

HB: At first, it’s not but when you go out, you don’t see anything except wave, water and wave for a while. For five days, yeah, we didn’t have water, we didn’t have food for five days. Not fun. [laugh]

KN: Was it hard?

HB: Yeah, we like starve for five days without water, without food. All we have was some piece of lemon to put on our tongue and that’s it.

KN: Was the boat big? Were there a lot of people?

HB: The boat was like 60 feet long but we had 250 people in the boat. And we stayed like a sardine and it’s tough, yeah.

KN: Did anybody die on the boat ride?

HB: Luckily no one didn’t.
KN: Oh okay, that’s good.

HB: Our boat was very lucky, one of the lucky ones. We stay on the boat for only five days and we got to go to Malaysia so we were one of the lucky ones.

KN: Did you go to a refugee camp in Malaysia?

HB: Oh yeah, I went to Pulau Bidong Island and we stayed there for five months and my grandparents is came to the United States in 1975 and they sponsored for us to come to Illinois?

KN: Your grandparents sponsored you?

HB: Yes.

KN: They came to America first?

HB: Yes in 1975 when the Vietnam, the South Vietnam fall.

KN: How was your experience in Malaysia? How was life like?

HB: Oh it was pretty easy, we don’t have to worry about anything. All we worry about is when we go to United States but when we stayed there it was pretty fun, we don’t do anything except fishing and swimming. And me and my uncle, about the same age, I think two years younger than me. I was 16 and he was 14. Everyday we go to the, in the morning we go to the jungle to chop down tree for the firewood and build the house in the afternoon. We go to fishing because over there, all you eat over there is chicken. Chicken and some vegetables. So we need some good food, so I have to go do fishing and that’s our diet.

KN: Was five months very quick to come to America?

HB: At that time it was very long because you want to go so time goes slow because you want to do something so you think that time is very slow but five months is very fast for family to go from refugee camp to the United States.

KN: Did you entire family go America or?
HB: At that time I went with my aunt, my aunt and my uncle from my mom’s side and their family is, came to the United States so I go with them.

KN: How is your first impression when you got to America?

HB: Everything is big. Yeah and everything is so nice, because you live three years under communist, everything backward so you came to United States and you see everything is so new to you and everything is so fun. Yeah.

KN: You were in Illinois?

HB: Yeah I went to high school in Illinois and when I graduate, I went four years in high school in Illinois.

KN: You were 16 when you got to America?

HB: Yeah I graduate when I was 21. [giggles]

KN: Oh. How did that happen?

HB: Oh because when I came there, I came to United States I didn’t know how to speak English at all. All I do is speak French and I don’t remember French now. But yeah, so my uncle is 14 years old and no my cousin. My cousin was 14 years old and my uncle said “why don’t you go to school with him” and we go to school with him. So I start with 8th grade and then I went to 9th grade and yeah I graduate when I was 21 years old and then I joined the Marine Corp. The U.S. Marine Corp.

KN: So, did your immigration force you to go to Illinois?

HB: No it’s not forced because my grandparents live in Illinois.

KN: Oh so you can pick where you can settle in America?

HB: After you stay there for a while, you can go anywhere you want.

KN: How did you come to Southern California?
HB: I joined the Marine Corp and I stayed…the first day I joined the Marine Corp, I go down to San Diego for boot camp, for training boot camp. First time I came to San Diego I said, no way I cam back to Illinois because the weather here is so nice.

KN: Why did you decide to join the military?

HB: Well at that time I joined the military to get money to go to school.

KN: How did you make a living after resettling?

HB: I go to school.

KN: Did the government give you money?

HB: Actually no. We, my sponsor, my grandparent’s sponsor in their neighborhood don’t let people get money from the government. They make my uncle go to work right away. So my grandparent’s family are very proud of it because they said they never lived on welfare.

KN: Were there any challenges when you were first in America?

HB: Oh yeah, English. I can’t speak it so it was very challenging, yeah.

KN: How did your peers in school think about you?

HB: They help me a lot, yeah they help me a lot because we were over there and we don’t have a lot of Vietnamese. We don’t have a lot of…we live in the city with 30,000 people. And they call it Pekin. And I go to Pekin High. It’s like ‘peeking’ with no ‘g.’ And we live in the city is 30,000 and mostly it was German. German, like you know, immigrant. So they are very, very prejudice against the other races, but I don’t know they didn’t prejudice against us. In the whole 30,000 people, that live in the city we don’t have a single black. None. So you think they are very, very prejudice. Very prejudice and they are ‘redneck.’ [laughs]

KN: Did you live with your grandparents when you were in Illinois?

HB: Yeah, while I was in high school I live with my grandparents.
KN: How long were you in the military?
HB: I was in the military four years, yeah.

KN: How was military life like?
HB: It was fun. I was in infantry, so I travel a lot. Every, every eighteen month I have to on the ship for six months. So I was in the military for four years. I was in, they call West Pike for twice so West Pike, every time we go we go six months and we travel from Korea to Taiwan to Thailand to Hong Kong to Singapore. Yeah we travel a lot for training and it was fun. Philippines. Yeah.

KN: Did you ever get into any warfare while you were in the military?
HB: No, no because I was in military in 1983 to 1987. The only thing is that at that time it is…I…I…while we were on the high sea, we pick up some people. Some Vietnamese boat people, yeah. We pick up two Vietnamese boat people and I was translator for them.

KN: Did you go back to school after you finished with the military?
HB: Yeah I went to technical school.

KN: Was that technical school in California?
HB: Yeah.

KN: Do you know the name of it?
HB: National Education Center.

KN: What type of study were you studying?
HB: Electronics, yeah. Electronics.

KN: Did you find a job after getting your degree in technical school?
HB: No while I go to school, I got a job that I work right now so.

KN: What is your occupation at this job?
HB: I am a technician, I fix copy machines.

KN: What is the organization, the company name?

HB: Ricoh.

KN: Do you like your job?

HB: Yeah, I love my job.

KN: How is the environment like?

HB: It's an easy job, so it's just mostly you work out on the field. You don't the boss to look over your shoulder and it's very, very, very easy and friendly job. Well you…any job is good job.

KN: Besides the military is that your first job?

HB: No, actually I work in a warehouse when I get out of military, while I go to school. I work for about a year and then I work some odd job when I go to school and I apply for this job and I got it.

KN: Do you see any similarities or differences between the communities that you lived in America to your community in Vietnam?

HB: Yeah, way different. In Vietnam it is, Vietnam is more close neighbor by neighbor. Because we can go to next door and we knock on the door and say “hey do you have some egg? Can I have some egg?” or you can borrow something. The neighbors help each other a lot. Over here, you know you live in a house that you know your house. You say hi to your neighbor but you not close to your neighbor. In America, in California, it is like that. But in…I heard that in somewhere in the United States they keep the neighbor like that but it depends. It depends. But yeah in Vietnam it is more, more. It is more close neighbor. You know your neighbor. You really know your neighbor like ten houses down, like whole neighborhood.
KN: Do you see any similarities between the two communities?

HB: Hmm similarities? A little bit. Well, a lot different. A lot different, yeah. A lot different. Only thing is…yeah a lot different. I don’t think they’re similar. They’re similar is in America it is…The similar is. Because over here we got everything and over there they don’t have anything. So it is totally different life. People look alike. You think it is the same but the culture, everything is a little bit different, yeah.

KN: Have you ever encountered racism towards you?

HB: Once, in Illinois. That’s it. And we beat the heck out of the guy.

KN: It wasn’t just you, was it your friends?

HB: No I didn’t beat the guy up but my uncle did.

KN: What was the experience like?

HB: Oh he just walk by and he just, we were speaking Vietnamese and he make fun of us and he about six feet three and my uncle is like five feet seven, six and my uncle just jump up and beat him up.

KN: How do you identify yourself in American society? Are you Asian, Asian American?


KN: Are you proud to be a Vietnamese American?

HB: Yeah I am.

KN: Are there any funny or memorable experiences while you were in America? Like the culture?

HB: Yes, yes. While I was learning English you know we talk like a silent language and it was fun, it was fun. It’s a good experience.

KN: While you were staying in America, have you become a citizen?
HB: Oh yeah, after I get out of military yeah.

KN: Have you ever voted?

HB: I vote every year that when I was become a citizen. I vote every year yeah.

KN: Do you still keep in touch with your family members in Vietnam?

HB: Because of my family is over here now, I sponsor for my mom and my dad and my brother. Only two older stepbrothers still in Vietnam. Yeah we still keep in touch.

KN: Do they all live in California?

HB: Yes my brother and my sister still in California.

KN: How about your mom and your dad?

HB: My mom, my dad passed away like three years, four, no five years ago. Yeah my mom still live in California with my sister.

KN: Have you gotten back to Vietnam?

HB: Not yet.

KN: Not yet?

HB: Not yet.

KN: Why so?

HB: Because I am an anti-communist. And they don’t let me. They will kick me out.

KN: Will you ever go back to Vietnam?

HB: Yeah I hope one day.

KN: They won’t let you go back to Vietnam because?

HB: Because I am a high profile anti-communist.

KN: How did you get that profile?
HB: Because I just hate communists. I just don’t like communists. Because communist ruined my country and communist is dying party in the world and they still hang onto it so I just want to change. I want change in Vietnam. So I support the people in Vietnam who want change and some of my friends come back to Vietnam and they got captured and they got released and when the communist interrogate them and they told me that I am one of those people. So they know me.

KN: So you are an activist?

HB: Yes I am an activist.

KN: Did you become an activist just recently or?

HB: No I become an activist like 1976, no 1986 until now.

KN: What do you do as an activist?

HB: We organize people to ask for human right and freedom in Vietnam. We don’t, we don’t use force. We don’t have force. We do peaceful demonstration. Teach people how to do it. Just like Martin Luther King. Mobilize people in Vietnam to do that.

HB: Has it been successful?

HB: So far we got a lot of people got captured by Vietnamese communist. But young people, they aren’t scared by what the communist say. They stand up and they ask for, demand for their right. Even though they got captured. Like revolution everywhere in the world, yeah at the beginning it is hard but the more people involved, the more the government will back up, somehow.

KN: Are there any songs or images that remind you of Vietnam.

HB: Oh yeah, there’s a lot of songs that remind me of Vietnam. Yeah.

KN: Can you provide an example?
HB: It’s like the song “Lang Thoi,” or “That’s My Village,” or what do you call it. I don’t remember the name but there are a lot of songs that remind me of Vietnam.

KN: Are there any images that remind you of Vietnam?

HB: Oh, nowadays we can go on Internet and download a whole bunch of image. Yeah, yeah the image in my mind is, remind me that the day I left Vietnam is when I see my mom’s eyes. Yeah.

KN: Do you have any photos that you carried over?

HB: Yeah…no, no. I don’t have any photo when I left Vietnam. Yeah.

KN: Did you get any photos when you were in America?

HB: Yeah when I was in America when my mom and dad send it over.

KN: Are there any traditions or customs that you try to persevere? Like Vietnamese customs?

HB: Yeah like New Year, Vietnamese Tet, and also the commemorate of the ancestors, yeah.

KN: Are there any, any customs that you made new while you were in America? Like any new things that become tradition?

HB: Tradition? Thanksgiving, yeah. Christmas, even though it is Catholic, Christmas is family, just like family dinner. Something like that. It is fun.

KN: Have you given up any tradition or changed anything?

HB: Yeah we change a lot, we change a lot. Usually in Vietnam, when we sit at the table to eat, we have to, what do you call it, “Moi.” I don’t know what it’s called.

KN: It’s greet.

HB: Yeah, everyone at the table from the oldest to the youngest. Not the youngest, the one older than you. But over here, yeah we just say “Come on, let’s eat.” Unless I have my mom there, I will greet my mom, my uncle.

KN: In your opinion, what will become of the Vietnamese culture in America?
HB: I think we will become very strong. And I hope younger generation that they keep our culture and also they can speak Vietnamese better so. Because I think, I always think that the more language you learn, the better it is to, better for your life. And when you are a kid, you know two or three more language, you usually excel better than the people who have only one language. That’s what I think and I think that the culture is we keep our language and we try to keep the tradition that we have. Nice tradition that we have.

KN: Did you teach your children Vietnamese?

HB: I try to speak Vietnamese with them and they speak English with me. Whenever I speak, yeah Vietnamese to them they try to. But they know how to speak Vietnamese.

KN: How has the Vietnamese community changed to you?

HB: The Vietnamese community change right now because a lot of young people activist. They become activists in the community and the older generation got older so we are organized better now than before because we try to reach, outreach to the older American group and to the government to know Vietnamese community. Because we got, let’s say we got almost 2-3 million people in the United States so I think we are one of the force. So we have to change.

KN: Besides the Vietnamese activist group you are in in the United States, are you in other groups that you were involved with?

HB: I was involved with Buddhist, Buddhist youth temple when I was young. And I was one of the organizer for Vietnamese youth for democracy for what they call Pham Dang Mien Phi Do Cho and they still active today. And hopefully they active more. They longer, they will exist longer.

KN: Do you visit Little Saigon often?

HB: I live in Little Saigon.
KN: What do you think about Little Saigon?

HB: I think we are growing and we are better usually. We used to look like China Town. Dirty, you know how dirty it is. Now Little Saigon is more cleaner so I’m very proud of it.

KN: Does it make you think of home when you go to Little Saigon?

HB: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Every New Year, you go out there and you think it’s just like Vietnam.

KN: What are the important things that future Vietnamese Americans should remember about their past?

HB: I think they have to know why we came to the United States. And, and they have to I think. I don’t think they have to but they…I teach my children is to think about the other and I told them to help each other. Same thing in Vietnam right now. There’s a lot of poor people, a lot of young kids like my kid or younger that don’t have an education. All they do is shoe shine, sell lottery ticket. They don’t have, they got no school. And the future in Vietnam, you look at those young children and if like that, in thirty more year, we go backwards. And that’s why I ask the younger generation to think about Vietnam and somehow they have to become activist to change the way the government govern Vietnam. And help the country to be a free society. That’s all.

KN: Is your entire family activist?

HB: I think it’s different way. Yeah different way. I’m more political activist. Like my son is activist, in the community but not in political. But in what do you call it, in culture. My daughter is activist different way. My wife is activist, like political activist too. But yeah we are all activist.

KN: Are there a lot of political activist that you talk to?

HB: A lot of my friends, yes.

KN: Are there any other memories or stories that you would like to share?
HB: Memories. Yeah one memory is that I left Vietnam in 1978 and the day that I left Vietnam, I see my mom right now but I...my mom is, I sit in the car to go to the, what do you call it, the boat. And my mom just sit under the curb of the street and I look at my mom’s eye and I could never forget it. Never, never forget it.

KN: How was your feelings about seeing that, seeing your mom?

HB: I was feeling, every time I think about it I want to cry. [laughs]

KN: Did you ever see your father?

HB: Yeah, my father came here and he passed away in the United States.

KN: Did you see your dad before you leave for the boat?

HB: No, just my mom.

KN: Where was your father at the time?

HB: I think my dad was working. Yeah. Just my mom.

KN: Is there any other stories that you would like to share?

HB: Stories that I would like to share…Yeah. I got a lot of stories to share but that’s the most I remember. But in the United States, I came to the United States, like you know. I got nothing and I see the helping, the people helping each other. Oh! I got one more thing I like to share is the memory is that my son when he was in kindergarten. No in first grade! And we went to the movie and one of the group, the group in the theater was asking for donation. I didn’t think about it I just walk by and didn’t see it and my dad just told me that, “Dad.” I said “what?” “I think you should donate.” I think he was just five or six years old. He said “you should donate.” I asked him “why?” To challenge him why. He said “Well,” I think this is Hoag, Hoag hospital I think. Yeah. “My teacher showed us the picture of the kid like us. They got cancer so this is raise money to help the kid.” And I was like “oh wow!” I said in America the education, they don’t
show the kid, they don’t teach the kid to know, to help but they show the kid how to do it. They
don’t just tell them what to do but they show them how to do it. It’s a difference. So I gave him
five dollars and he run down and put it in the box. That’s a memory and my kid showed me. I’m
very proud of it.

KN: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

HB: I think that’s it.

KN: Well, this concludes our interview.

HB: Alright.

KN: I interviewed Huy Bui and today is November 13, 2012. And we ended at 7:35PM.

HB: Yeah.

KN: I would like to thank Mr. Huy Bui for being my interviewee. And yeah, thank you.

HB: Alright. Okay. [laughs]