Vietnamese Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: THACH NGOC TRAN
Interviewer: Michael Kevin Chow
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Transcript

MKC: So, today is Monday November 12, 2012. This is Michael Chow with the Vietnamese American Oral History Project and I’m interviewing Mr. Thach Ngoc Tran and we are at his home in Garden Grove, California. Could you state your full name please?

TNT: My name is Thach Ngoc Tran.

MC: Where and when were you born?

TNT: I was born in Vietnam and in 1961 January 2nd.

MKC: Do you remember the city?

TNT: Saigon, that is where I was born. Saigon

MKC: What are your parents’ names?

TNT: My father’s name is Lac Van Tran and my mother’s name is Nghiep Thi Ngo.

MKC: Can you describe them? Your father and your mother?

TNT: My father when I was old enough what I know is that my father was a passenger driver and he drive a minivan to support the family and my mom. My mom, she was a self-worker, worked selling fish.

MKC: Where have you lived in Vietnam?

TNT: Lived in Đà Nẵng.

MKC: Is that near Saigon?

TNT: The city is in the middle of Vietnam.

MKC: Could you describe your hometown, what was it like?
TNT: My hometown was kind of big, big city, lots of people, we near the ocean, nice, pretty. The time I left the country I was kind of young, so I did not pay that much attention. But it was overall nice.

MKC: Did you ever go in the water? Like fishing?

TNT: Yeah, we went in the water, swimming across the river. Couple times go fishing.

MKC: What were the major industries there? Fishing?

TNT: A lot of fishing near my area and some kind of local selling things. Business. Small business.

MKC: Do you remember what your neighbors were like?

TNT: My hometown was kind of quiet. Neighbors nice. I think most of them, the major business was fishing.

MKC: Do you remember your schooling growing up? Going to school?

TNT: Yeah, when I was young, the kindergarten, and the elementary school, then high school.

MKC: What was it like?

TNT: I think it was fun, yeah.

MKC: Lots of friends.

TNT: Yeah, lots of friends.

MKC: Do you have any specific childhood memories growing up? With friends, at your home?

TNT: I don’t think I have that much thing but just like go to school, with friends, go out, play with them, run around.

MKC: What did you do in your free time?

TNT: Free time we normally play some kind of games.

MKC: What kind of games?

TNT: Play wood, you throw wood. You play chasing, catching each other. Play some kind of ball. Soccer. Play soccer a lot.

MKC: Swimming you said?

TNT: Yes, swimming.
MKC: How many siblings did you have, brothers and sisters?

TNT: My family had a total of 14, we had 7 boys and 7 girls.

MKC: How old is the oldest one? Compared to yourself?

TNT: He’s, let’s see, about 8 years older than me. The youngest right now, she 13 younger than me.

MKC: What was that like growing up, with a large family?

TNT: We very friendly family together. We respect each other. With big family it’s kind of tough. We together, we fine.

MKC: Who were you closest to? What was the sibling you were closest to you would say?

TNT: I would say my second older brother. We very close. Many I talked to, but we were very close.

MKC: Still today?

TNT: Still today.

MKC: As a child, do you have any memory with just you and him?

TNT: I remember when I small, and he’s a little bit bigger, I remember he worked, and I didn’t work. So when he got home, and get tired, and he need something. Good memories. He had white hairs. So I helped pick his white hair.

MKC: Did he repay you, give you food?

TNT: No, that’s Vietnamese tradition, the young are supposed to do for the old, when the old asks.

MKC: Very good. How did your family celebrate Tet?

TNT: Yes, that is when you were small you really enjoyed that holiday.

MKC: What was your favorite part about it?

TNT: Favorite part at that time was new clothes. I got li xi. You get money from old people, they give it to you. A lot of fun. Play a lot of games. That holiday, people play games, go out, eating. That’s really fun.

MKC: Like all a bunch of families too?

TNT: Yeah together. On the first day all together.
MKC: What’s it like outside in the city?

TNT: Outside, people decorating, and people go to visit each other. Go out, walking a lot outside, play a lot of games, eating. A lot of activities, events that people go and gather and enjoy.

MKC: Do you have a specific memory that you have during that time, that stands out even today?

TNT: I think every year, because I was young, still dependent, so every year we wait for the new year and have fun and together with friends. And sometimes drinking when I’m a little old enough. Like 18, 16 I drink a little drink and get a little drunk. That’s a little memories. Not much.

MKC: So your whole family enjoyed that time?

TNT: Every new year, we gather and everybody enjoy. Couldn’t wait for the new year.

MKC: When was your first job?

TNT: In Vietnam I didn’t really have a job. Just go helping the family. Go to get some kind of work, but not really a real job.

MKC: Do you remember your grandparents?

TNT: I remember my grandmother. By that time I was still young, but I remember her. When she die, I was only 10 years old, so I really have no good memory. I still remember her, but not much to tell about her. My grandfather died when I like 1 or 2 years old.

MKC: Did your parents ever tell you how they met?

TNT: Maybe they told me but I forgot.

MKC: Any stories that they told you?

TNT: Maybe they told me, but I forgot. Or maybe I didn’t ask. Maybe that’s one I should have asked. I think they met somewhere, I don’t remember. I should ask.

MKC: You said your mom drove a truck and your dad?

TNT: My dad drove a passenger van. And my mom, when my father was alive, my mom didn’t work, just like a housewife. When my father died, my mom started working.

MKC: Did your parents influence you in any way?
TNT: They influence me like a really good person. My dad is a really good person and respectable man. So I look at him. I always think of that and I try to be like him. My mom is really nice. She’s a lovely mother. Mother’s always nice. She’s a really good mom.

MKC: How did the war in Vietnam affect you personally, or your family?

TNT: I think, I remember before 1975 which was when the Communists took over the south?

MKC: How old were you at that time?

TNT: I was 15 years old. And I remember during the war, they were coming and fighting and bombing. You have to escape, you have to go under the bunker to hide. Sometimes the bombs so close, you have to run away, go to another city to just get away from that.

MKC: Did this affect your family?

TNT: Yes, affect the whole family. And nervous. You hear bombing. Every time you hear bombing you nervous. That’s all you do, you young, you just go and hide. You’re afraid but you’re not like your mom or your parents, they more serious about that. So you just follow.

MKC: What was their reaction? Trying to protect you guys…

TNT: Yeah, they try to protect us, prepare, see what’s going on with the war. See how to prepare and make us safe. Deep bunker, make sure we have a good bunker when the bombs come. They try to be prepared.

MKC: Where did you live during this time?

TNT: Đanang.

MKC: What was your first memory of it?

TNT: A couple times I remember, they really have a big bomb. 1972 or so. 1968, they bombed a lot in our area. We have to run, and one time the bomb hit the roof, my house. I was sleeping and one of the big cabinets fell down and hit my leg. I had pain at that time.

MKC: Did you guys have to move at that time?

TNT: We had to move, and run to the bunker because they bombed at night. You hear a lot of sirens. When you hear sirens you know they’re bombing, so you run and hide.

MKC: Do you remember any of your friends and neighbors around you and how they were affected?

TNT: I think they did the same thing. Every time they heard the siren, they ran to their bunkers and hide. After that because we were young, back to normal.
MKC: What were the bunkers like? Could you describe it.

TNT: Not big, long. I would say 3 yards. Maybe 10 yards. It’s deep enough for you to stand, so it’s about 4 feet deep.

MKC: How long did you have to stay in there?

TNT: Sometimes you have to stay all night. Sleep there and be safe.

MKC: Was it cold?

TNT: Not really cold, back in my country, not that cold. Only thing was you don’t have enough air.

MKC: I know you were around 15 or so?

TNT: At this time, 1968, I was about 8 or 9 years old.

MKC: So how was that as a child, or almost as a kid?

TNT: As a kid, you just hear it and run and hide.

MKC: You of course with your brothers and sisters also?

TNT: Mhmm, yeah. You know every time you know you hear a siren or bombing, all your family run to the bunker.

MKC: How long did this go on for?

TNT: I think it go on for, since I know, probably go on until ’75. For like 10 years on and off, on and off.

MKC: Were you or any of your family members involved in the war?

TNT: My two brothers in the military. South soldiers. After school, everybody has to go. During the war, they demand that everybody has to go when you reach the age. My two brothers were in the military.

MKC: What was your parents, were they worried for them?

TNT: Yeah, they worry. Yeah. They want them to pick a safe camp, or ranch they want. Yeah they worry.

MKC: Did they tell you any stories?
TNT: Yeah, my second older brother, he was fighting and got some injury. He rode the tank. He was in the army. He ran over a bomb and it exploded the tank. And the tank push him, and he fly outside the tank. He had an injury in his leg. He told stories about that.

MKC: Was he okay?

TNT: Yeah he’s okay. He had to go back to the hospital. Had a few days off, and went back home. He’s okay.

MKC: Any other injuries of your family?

TNT: No, the other brother, he luckily didn’t go out fighting. He stayed local.

MKC: Were you ever involved in the war?

TNT: No. But after the communists took over, they put me to the military for a couple months.

MKC: Oh wow.

TNT: They forced me to do it. I didn’t want Communists side. I didn’t want to get involved in that.

MKC: How did they force you?

TNT: They came to my place.

MKC: Your house?

TNT: Yeah, they came and just take you. Have you join the military for the Communists side. 1975. Everyone, entire country was under Communist rule.

MKC: Then what happened?

TNT: They took me three months and during the training I escape.

MKC: Oh. How was the three months? That’s kind of a long time.

TNT: Camp and training. Every day you go and military training. Crawling, running, learn how to fire a gun. And luckily, after a month…luckily I had a little bit of skill in music. So they had a contest. So they pick me, so I involved in that music group. In that training camp, they picked training people together to practice so they can perform in the big event.

MKC: What was the event called, do you remember?

TNT: I think the event was the day that they took over. The Independence Day for them. So I was involved in that, so I practiced singing. They liked me so they put me in the group so I didn’t
have to train hard. Just perform, just train, just practice with music. We had a couple of performances and the last thing they had was a big event, and during the practicing, I escaped.

MKC: Oh, wow.

TNT: I escaped, not to home but to my cousin.

MKC: How exactly did you escape, can you describe?

TNT: Because, during the practicing, they let us kind of free.

MKC: Was it your plan the entire time to escape?

TNT: I didn’t want to be involved in that. One time I escaped, they caught me back. Before I join the band, the music band. Before I joined that, I tried to escape and they caught me put me in camp for 2 weeks. I tried to escape. Me and my two friends try to escape because the camp was in the mountains. Try to escape, we run a couple miles and the guards, they run, use a gun, and chase. They chase, they saw us and fired, randomly fired and almost hit us. Then they bring us back.

MKC: Was that at the music place, was it like enclosed? How did you get out?

TNT: The music place?

MKC: Did you just run out?

TNT: Before joining the music, I was normal, military training guy in the camp. So, during that time I escape and they caught me back and then they have some kind of punishment.

MKC: Music was the punishment?

TNT: No, not the music. That was before I joined the music. This is like the military, normal training. Then, they caught me back and some kind of punishment for me.

MKC: What did they have you do?

TNT: They had me standing, stand against the wall without peeing, nothing. Food, water, peeing. Then they talk to you about you know, some kind of teaching. You shouldn’t do that. But you just quiet and listen, cause you don’t want them to hit you. Hit you up.

MKC: Did they?

TNT: At first, a couple hits, but that’s it. Because they caught you, a couple hit after that. Then after that then they bring you to have a contest to have people rejoin.

MKC: Can anyone join the contest?
TNT: They pick. They have some kind of music and pick, see who can sing. Have the voice. They pick. That’s what I joined, luckily so I didn’t have to have a hard training.

MKC: Yeah, exactly.

TNT: Then it easier. They make easier. They let you just train and eat. It’s better.

MKC: So, you were caught back once and at the music, then you decided?

TNT: Yeah, at the music I decided to escape again. So, I try to take the opportunity, see when is a good opportunity to escape.

MKC: When was a good opportunity?

TNT: A good opportunity yeah.

MKC: When was it? How did you know when?

TNT: At the time, I think cause it was easier to go out. Go outside where the local residents. I can go back and forth, back and forth without searching for me.

MKC: So they gave you like some free time?

TNT: Free time, so at that free time I go out there and I escaped. I go out on the main street and I…

MKC: You and your friends?

TNT: Yeah, my two. My friends.

MKC: What was his name, do you remember?

TNT: I forgot, long time. I forgot his name.

MKC: Yeah.

TNT: So yeah, we go out street and we get the passenger van. So we come up and we go to a city called Pleiku City, and we stay there.

MKC: Oh, okay.

TNT: Stay there a couple days. And a couple days later and we go back with another family. I have to pretend I am involved in that family, like one of the members.

MKC: Is it just a random family or…?

TNT: It’s a friend that I know, a family up there that I know. So I back, try to go back Đà Nẵng, where I live. I pretend to be that member. So we go together so they don’t…
MKC: Try to catch?

TNT: Yeah, catch you. If you go by yourself they think you escape so you join a family. So they say, “oh because you in family so you might not be in the military”. Cause they searching.

MKC: So they searched for the people that escaped?

TNT: Yeah, the area that I escaped near there, they have a place to search people. Stop all the vans, come stop and search. So I was lucky.

MKC: Oh, at the van?

TNT: When you a passenger, like in a bus, they stop everyone. Everyone has to stop and they search. They didn’t search me because they think I was with the family, not escape, in the military and escape. When civilians are close. Yeah, so I was lucky to escape. Then back to Đà Nẵng. I couldn’t go back to my house because if I go back there, they know I escape and catch me again. So I have to stay in my relative’s house.

MKC: Oh, okay.

TNT: Stay there. Stay a couple weeks. Then my family, my mom try to get me to escape Vietnam.

MKC: How, when you were at your cousins, were they worried about you?

TNT: My mom yeah, when I get back to my cousins, my mom know, my parents know. Because when I get back, we kind of…

MKC: Oh, they were at your house still? After you escaped, where were your parents at?

TNT: I get back to Đà Nẵng, but I live at my relative’s house. And I ask my relatives to tell my mom that I was back here. Then my mom try to organize the thing, so I can escape Vietnam.

MKC: Where were your siblings at this time?

TNT: At that time, my young, all youngsters, still in Vietnam. But my couple older brothers, they left Vietnam and escaped in 1977.

MKC: Do you know how they escaped?

TNT: They escapes, they had some kind of friend that had a boat, so they go together.

MKC: But then the younger ones were still?

TNT: At that time, the older ones. We lived together, but at that time, only worry about the old people. The young, under 18 years old, don’t have to worry yet.
MKC: Because at 18 they get you?

TNT: Yeah, they get you in the military. So my older brother, in the military. So they don’t want to live with the Communists. They don’t have futures.

MKC: How many older siblings did you have?

TNT: I have 3 older, and all younger.

MKC: So like 10 younger than you?

TNT: I have one older sister, but she died, so two older brothers. Then the younger sisters and brothers.

MKC: What happened after you went to your relative’s house?

TNT: I just stayed there and try to hide from them. Hide from the government because they know I escaped.

MKC: At that point you decided?

TNT: I didn’t always want to escape, when you have opportunity, but at that time, you more serious to get out of there because I escaped from the military. If they catch me I’d be in trouble. Big trouble.

MKC: So, how did you go about it? Or, what was the last memories you have of the war then?

TNT: The last memory was when the Communists try to start coming into our hometown. At the time I was too young, 15, so I’m not really much. Didn’t know much about it. So just like a normal kid. But after that, then I start knowing that the Communists were no good.

MKC: So after the fall of Saigon, on April 30th, 1975. Around after that they caught you?

TNT: At that time I’m still young, still 15, 14, years old. Still going to school. But after though, I was 18, then they put me in the labor and military.

MKC: So, what year was it when you were at your relative’s house after you escaped?

TNT: That was around 1970, I think 1979.

MKC: So how did you eventually leave your country?

TNT: I hide in my relative’s house and then my mom was kind of organized with her sister. Her older sister had a boat.

MKC: Oh, okay.
TNT: So she kind of talked with her. So let me get in the boat and I escaped. Then when they leave, they call me at night time.

MKC: Just by yourself?

TNT: Yeah, hide in the boat. With other people, but of my family, only me.

MKC: Was that a very tough time?

TNT: Yeah when you try to escape at nighttime, it was really scary.

MKC: Yeah.

TNT: You, you don’t want them to know. You don’t want the guard to know.

MKC: At that time you were 19?

TNT: Yeah, at that time 19. I think I was 20.

MKC: Could you describe the boat? Was it…

TNT: The boat was about, let me see, 20, 30 feet long. About 10 feet wide.

MKC: Mhmm. How many people on it?

TNT: The boat can carry. Normally if you go fishing, they have 5, 6 people when they go fishing, business fishing. At that night, we escaped, so a lot of families hope. So about 40 people at that time. And they all hiding inside.

MKC: Oh, inside?

TNT: Inside. They make some kind of, put some in both sides, so people go in and hide.

MKC: Where were you?

TNT: I was hiding underneath the boat. Inside, so inside, so when they look they don’t see us.

MKC: What was your memories, like after you were hiding?

TNT: We hiding, we struggling, and we have to pass at the stop also.

MKC: They stopped?

TNT: They stopped when you go out in the ocean, they have to stop to search.

MKC: Oh okay.

TNT: So I remember, when they searching, and luckily they don’t see us.
MKC: They don’t see you?
TNT: Yeah, they don’t see you, they don’t see us…
MKC: Who do they see then?
TNT: 4 or 5 people on the top, normal, go fishing.
MKC: Oh, go fishing.
TNT: Just like normal fishing, so they talk to them. And they go down the water and go searching, but we so quiet and they don’t see it.
MKC: What did you guys do for food?
TNT: After that we go out there and drive. They bring some food and drink. They prepare for fishing for 5, 6 days, so you have to have food and water. So they bring more extra.
MKC: Oh, extra?
TNT: We only go there like a week to get to where we wanted. So try to bring enough food and water for a week.
MKC: So who was your sisters friend on the..? Or your mothers sister?
TNT: Her older sister, she had a boat. She tried to organize for her family to escape.
MKC: So them and you were on that?
TNT: Yeah, I was on that at that time.
MKC: So after that, at all the stops, where were the stops to, do you know?
TNT: Then after stops, they let us go. So we just look at the boat captain. They have a map, and they know where we supposed to go. And we go, and then we got a storm. We got a big storm and we stop in the middle. They called it Hai Nam. China. The China thing. So we stopped there for a couple days for the storm to get by, and then we start going again. We start going and we keep going the way we want to go to Hong Kong. So close to Hong Kong, and we see a big boat.
MKC: Mhmm.
TNT: And they saw us, and they help. They pull the…
MKC: Pull the boat?
TNT: Pull the boat for a while.
MKC: Oh.
TNT: Before they see the Hong Kong, they say, “Okay, you guys can go your own”.

MKC: And where did the boat go?

TNT: And the boat go to think it was Hong Kong too. So the boat go.

MKC: So where did you guys go?

TNT: We go to Hong Kong, we stop at Hong Kong.

MKC: Then what’d you guys do?

TNT: Then all the boat people go in to the area. All the boat people escape.

MKC: Yeah.

TNT: Boat people go to Hong Kong and have to go to one area. So we go there and from there, we start doing all the documentation, paperwork, interview.

MKC: So how long were you at Hong Kong?

TNT: I lived in Hong Kong seven months.

MKC: Oh, okay.

TNT: After they interview you, they get to know where you came from, if you have family, get all your history.

MKC: Mhmm.

TNT: And then you wait for a sponsor.

MKC: Oh.

TNT: So it happen to be my brother. My two older brothers came here first.

MKC: Oh, they were already here?

TNT: Yeah, all the way in California. The sponsor, so I was in Hong Kong, a total of 7 months.

MKC: So they were in California?

TNT: Yeah in California. The time I come to Hong Kong, they were…

MKC: And they sponsor you?

TNT: Yeah they sponsor me.

MKC: So how did you move to California?
TNT: Yeah, they sponsor me from Hong Kong to California.

MKC: How did you get over here?

TNT: By airplane.

MKC: Oh.

TNT: So every few months, every day they have a schedule.

MKC: Oh, okay.

TNT: They have a schedule and bring a lot of people. Like a whole airplane. All kinds of people from different places. Different camps, few camps were together. Big airplane.

MKC: So, seven months, then you went to California?

TNT: Yeah, went to California.

MKC: Why, so you went to California basically based on your brothers? Do you know why they wanted or chose to go here? Or were they forced to go there?

TNT: Where?

MKC: California.

TNT: No, my brothers, they came first to Hong Kong also. They came to Hong Kong and they got sponsored from one of the organization things.

MKC: So another person.

TNT: Yeah I think they wanted to come to the United States, wanted to come to California.

MKC: Oh.

TNT: I think at that time, somebody from California sponsor, so they come here. They come here and then they have to sponsor me to California. Family together.

MKC: So, after you got to California, what was it like?

TNT: It was new, look like a big country and all. Pretty things. You kind of expecting like really nice place. You just prepare and try to be…

MKC: Where did you live?


MKC: Who did you live with?
TNT: I lived with my older brothers, the one’s that came first.

MKC: Oh, okay. Was it kind of, a sad time? Were you excited?

TNT: Yeah, we were excited to come and meet my brothers.

MKC: Oh, okay yeah.

TNT: We haven’t meet for a while.

MKC: For a while yeah.

TNT: Yeah.

MKC: Cause you were by yourself for almost a year?

TNT: Yeah, it was like a year. Yeah, and then they escaped ’77, and I was leaving in ’81. About 4 years we don’t see each other. When I left my country, I just left to come and see them. See your older brother, so you can have a base there. They can support you and help you.

MKC: So there was a time where you have you family in Vietnam…

TNT: You escape and by myself…

MKC: And then you…?

TNT: Reunited with family. Very happy. When we see each other we very happy.

MKC: So, once you came to California, what were some of the first things you did?

TNT: The first thing I did was…The first thing I was supposed to do was to learn English and go to school.

MKC: Mhmm.

TNT: So I came here only a few weeks, a few weeks or a month, I try to get used to it, and go to school.

MKC: Where did you go?

TNT: We went to adult school for a few months to and learn English. Went to the local Hawthorne school. Learn basic English. Then I attended College. Started going to College.

MKC: So, how today, or how would you describe your decision, or your coming to America today?
TNT: I think it… of course I think it was a great choice to leave the country. Get out of a Communist country and come to United States. There are a lot of opportunities, free country. Mhmm.

MKC: How about the rest of your family? After you came here, I know you and your older brothers…

TNT: The youngsters, then after that my brother sponsor. He start sponsor, and ten years later they come.

MKC: Oh, okay.

TNT: They came ten years after I come. Ten year later. I think like ’91. The come. All come.

MKC: Okay.

TNT: All come.

MKC: Come to California. Oh.

TNT: First they come to California, then because of job and business, they move to other states.

MKC: But originally…

TNT: Originally, all in California.

MKC: Mmm, wow. I think we’ll take a break.

(15 Minute Break)

MKC: Okay, so after coming over to America, what are some similarities or differences between your old community in Vietnam, and say here? Very different?

TNT: I would say there is a big difference, country wise. The daily living things, like people over here are more advanced, more civilized. For example, the bathrooms are better, showers are better. Streets are better, cleaner. Talk about over here and back there is like talking about heaven and hell. Big difference from a Communist country.

MKC: When you first came to like Los Angeles, or California, was there a funny or memorable experience, culture shock, or you were really surprised, or they did something in American you were totally not used to?

TNT: Hmm..

MKC: Like you just went out to the city and you were like “oh wow”?
TNT: Not really, when I’m coming I’m kind of aware of you know different country, and you have to be aware, and you have to adopt it, even though you see some things different. But it’s not really surprising, cause you know of course it’s different.

MKC: Did your brothers tell you about stuff.

TNT: Yeah also, my brothers came here. They kind of just tell you a little bit, what here was like and how you do and behave and you talk to people.

MKC: So, today do you keep in touch with a lot of your family?

TNT: Yeah, we’re all here, mostly here, and we talking like eight people close. We talk like maybe couple days, talking, phone. Farther then we call, phone, every week. We keep in touch.

MKC: Then like parties, celebration.

TNT: Parties, or some special events. Some kind of party, birthday, or graduation, things like that. Whoever is close, come. Coming together.

MKC: Have you ever gone back to visit Vietnam?

TNT: No, have not.

MKC: Would you like to, or have you been meaning to?

TNT: Ugh, not really have to go, but just go just to go back and know a little bit. Memories. But don’t have to go. Very much depends on the timing.

MKC: Would you like to someday, maybe?

TNT: Yeah, someday. I might like to go someday. Whole family visit, just see the country.

MKC: Do you have any family still there?

TNT: One brother that couldn’t come. My mom is here, but she goes back there very often. When she goes back she stays like a year. She want to live back there. Better for her. She can walk, socialize better for her.

MKC: Have you ever encountered any racism, when you got here, or growing up?

TNT: Of course you see some people, but that’s the minority, not the majority. And you kind of know it, when you hear, and you know there’s a lot of different culture here. And this is American country, so, of course those people. You know, the whites here, and of course some of them racist. But the majority are good, you see some racist but actually its only minor. You expect that you have to understand that. It’s not really a big thing.

MKC: How was finding your first job? What was your first job when you got here?
TNT: When I came here, first few years, I go to school.

MKC: Mhmm.

TNT: I got my AA degree. Because I single, I have to help myself. Stay by myself independently. I work. After I graduate 2 years in college, I with the electronic degree, so I get a job. My first job was with an electronic company.

MKC: How was that experience?

TNT: First job was good. You first got a job. Working. Get money. And first job you can always save a lot of money when you have a first job. When you work and have money, so spend lots.

MKC: After that, where did you move? Did you move anywhere? This was in LA…

TNT: I lived in Hawthorne about 7 years. Go to school for a couple years. I worked for a couple years, then I went to Hawaii. At that time I single, so I went to Hawaii and visit my cousins. I was there for a while. What happened was I interview a job for Sony company, and I got a job offer. At the time I was single, so I didn’t care that much where I live. Wherever I got a job, so I just stayed in Hawaii, and worked for Sony company.

MKC: How long?

TNT: I stayed there for about 3 years. ’89 to like ’92, yeah. About 3 years. I met my wife there.

MKC: okay. How did you meet your spouse?

TNT: I met my wife. I lived in my cousins house and my cousin happened to be my wife’s friend, so my wife come to my cousins house. So we met there. Then we get married.

MKC: How long after did you get married?

TNT: We know each other about 6, 7 months. At that time, I was old enough, so the thing is, was time to settle.

MKC: You were around…?

TNT: Around 30, time to settle. We get married, and because we a little bit rushing to get married. But not really rushing, but because my wife family move to California. Her family move to California. My wife would want to move over here with them, so that’s why I tried to get married so she could stay.

MKC: Move over here?

TNT: My wife family move to California and she stay with me in Hawaii after we got married. Because they going to move, that’s why we wanted to get married fast.
MKC: So a lot of your family was?
TNT: My wife’s family here. There all together, when they come together.
MKC: So there all in Hawaii?
TNT: Hawaii, and then they move to California.
MKC: Oh, after, okay, I see. Do you have any children?
TNT: Yeah, I have two. Tien, one girl and one boy. Tien my girl, she born in Hawaii. When we got married, she born in Hawaii.
MKC: Do you talk to them about your history and your past?
TNT: Once in a while.
MKC: Do they ask you lots of questions?
TNT: Yeah, sometimes they ask, sometimes I tell stories, yeah.
MKC: Do you tell them everything usually?
TNT: Sometimes, because I don’t have the opportunity from the beginning, because whatever questions come up, and I answer.
MKC: I see, are there any Vietnamese traditions or customs that you or your family have preserved, like since the time when you were over there?
TNT: No, not really. I think my family, we all adopted the change very well.
MKC: Oh, okay.
TNT: So you of course have different culture, but you know that your culture, you live with your culture, but you have to adopt a new culture. Don’t compare. Keep the things that are good.
MKC: Are there little things?
TNT: Yeah, little things. Keep your culture. Like always try to respect people, things like that. The older always be…the younger, always have to look after the older.
MKC: Like certain traditions within your family you still do?
TNT: Yeah you still do, within the family, you still do.
MKC: What are your opinions of Vietnamese culture in America today?
TNT: The Vietnamese people who live here?
MKC: Yeah.

TNT: I think they try, especially the old people. They try to keep the culture, the Vietnamese culture as much as possible, and try to teach the youngsters, to keep the good things. You learn new things, good new things but different countries. But you keep your culture. I think that’s all the old people want to do. Some people really, you know strict their own culture, but some are open minded. I’m considered one of the open minded.

MKC: So, you live near Little Saigon?

TNT: Yeah, I live near little Saigon, just a few minutes.

MKC: Mhmm. Do you visit it a lot?

TNT: Not visiting, but like shopping, we stop by a lot.

MKC: What do you think of that area? That specific area?

TNT: It’s very very convenient. Talk about like shopping, and food, and like you live in all your… like a second Vietnam. Of course, it’s easy for you. Cause you see the same culture things. So, of course it’s easier, convenient.

MKC: Oh yeah, recently there were the 2012 presidential elections. Did you vote?

TNT: Yeah, I did you vote.

MKC: What are your thoughts about some of the U.S. culture, like voting and stuff?

TNT: I think the voting, the thing good about America, the election, you get to pick whoever you want, whoever you choose. You have freedom to talk about the person you like or dislike that person. Openly, and there’s really free speech. And to have some policies, electoral votes, which is sometimes not fair, but of both parties, there has to be one winner. That’s the good thing about America people. American country is really free, and every country look after them so they must be really good.

MKC: What are the most important things you think future Vietnamese American’s should remember about the past?

TNT: I think they have to keep the root, the root that they came from. Keep raising, and don’t forget their root, even though they live here. Like American people, they try to serve the country but don’t forget their own root, and always try to be a good member here in the society.

MKC: How did you end up living in where you reside today? How long have you resided here?

TNT: I have resided here since like ’92. Yeah ’93, so almost 20, 19 years. I think this is… first there’s always my wife’s family moved here. The like it here. So we from Hawaii, so we back to
California, we want to live close to them. So we all gather here and so since here is a really convenient place, nice weather, and all the business, Vietnamese, you know food, everything is so convenient over here. And when I move here I got a job. You know when you get a job, and then a convenient place, so you want to keep it up.

MKC: Perfect.

TNT: Perfect, everything is good unless you don’t have a job.

MKC: Then, currently, where is the rest of your siblings, the rest of your brother and sisters.

TNT: I have two brothers here, close by, like 25 minutes. Then I have a few brothers and sisters in Omaha. So both places, California, and Omaha.

MKC: Do you have sure to visit them every once in a while? Or do they visit down here?

TNT: Yeah, they visit here once in a while. And I myself, just a couple times go over there for the weddings. But lately, I haven’t gone there yet. But we visit each other. They come here, when they wanna come here. Or have fun and visit.

MKC: What do you want most for you kids?

TNT: I want most for my kids is… first of all, they have to try and finish school. Get a good education. Good for them so they can get a good job. Wish them, that after that they can settle and have a good family. Just try and be a good citizen. Try and help people as much as they can. Try to be a really good people. You know, helpful people.

MKC: Are you involved with the Vietnamese community in any way?

TNT: Not really, but sometimes I join some event, special events. Go there and cheer with them.

MKC: Around here, the Tet festival.

TNT: The Tet festival, I’m not a member, but every time they have an event there, I go and… enjoy.

MKC: And celebrate?

TNT: Yeah, celebrate.

MKC: What do you like to do in your free time?

TNT: In my free time I like to play tennis, and play music.

MKC: How did you get into Tennis? Was it growing up?
TNT: In college, when I was in college here, I happened to take some P.E. class. So I take tennis. I start out with tennis and I like it. I really like it and from there, I really love it.

MKC: Do you play often?

TNT: Before I used to play very often. Yeah, before I play like all day after work, and weekends. But nowadays, busy, and I don’t play that often, but try and do few times a week.

MKC: And you said about singing, singing, did it start ever since the camp?

TNT: Yeah, I think I loved music since I was like 15, 16 years. And that time we kids, and I try and make a really funny guitar. Put all the strings together, and try to learn myself. I loved music, and try to learn, but stop and go, stop and go, and not really continuously, just stop and go, and I don’t go to school so I just learn myself…

MKC: Just do for fun.

TNT: Yeah, for fun. Sometimes I stopped for a few years, I don’t touch the guitar. But lately, for the last 6,7, years I start playing.

MKC: Are there any, or was music important or anything like that within your family? Was music important, or something you guys did together, or like cooking together?

TNT: Yeah music, mostly we together, mostly from my father down. My father music, and my mom too, liked music. And my brother music. We like music. So yeah. That’s the thing we gather, and play together when we were young.

MKC: Does your family have any special like food traditions? Or …

TNT: Food, like Vietnamese food, most Vietnamese food was tradition, all the good ones, like, Phở, Bún, Cha giò. So yeah, we love all those foods.

MKC: Do you have currently, any mementos, or pictures that you keep with you that have been passed down? Family pictures or anything?

TNT: Yeah we have a couple family pictures, when we were young, together, and only like a few, first few childs. We have some together, all family.

MKC: So overall, your experience after coming to the U.S., how would you describe it?

TNT: I think this is a country of opportunities and I think I’m really happy to be here. If I’m not be here, I don’t know what I end up being in Vietnam. Because Vietnam is a Communist country and they never give you opportunity. And you’d probably end up with no job. Just going around and do nothing, and your future nothing. If your future is nothing and you cannot have a good family.
MKC: Mhmm.

TNT: I think I am really happy to be one of the member of the United States America. I try to be my own good. I try to support myself and together to keep the American people strong. And everybody is helping you know, with their hands on, and build the country.

MKC: Is there anything I have not asked you, that you think is important to add at this time.

TNT: Umm, no I think you’ve asked a lot already.

MKC: Okay, thank you for your time.

TNT: Yeah, sure.