Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: THOMAS TOAN PHAN
Interviewer: Winty Thoumaked
Date: November 15, 2012
Location: Westminster, California
Sub-Collection: Vietnamese American Experience Course, Fall 2012
Length of Interview: 01:06:50

Time Log

00:00:35  Mr. Phan introduces himself.
00:01:36  Mr. Phan discusses his living situation with regards to his parents.
00:06:02  Mr. Phan talks about the existing conditions and his life in the last years of the war between the French and the Vietnamese when he was 9 or 10 years old.
00:07:32  Mr. Phan explained about his family and their special circumstances, he elaborates on their circumstances.
00:09:28  He speaks about his service in the military and studying in the U.S. He is fluent in a few languages.
00:13:43  Mr. Phan begins speaking about the battles, the beginnings of the communist invasions, and his philosophy and patriotism for Vietnam.
00:18:01  Mr. Phan discusses about his re-education camp experience.
00:22:00  It was difficult for Mr. Phan to practice his faith of Christianity. Mr. Phan was constantly being followed and watched after he was released from re-education camp.
00:24:30  He had attempted to escape Vietnam several times before and finally succeeded in 1986.
00:27:03  His marriage was meant to keep him away from any risky business of escaping Vietnam. It was difficult leaving his family and young children.
00:29:38  His escape was one of the most difficult events he had ever experienced. His journey at sea was filled with hardships, however, the pirates along the way actually ended up helping him and those on board.
00:31:01  Upon landing, he is faced with some of his greatest fears. The dark skinned mountain Thai tribes were brutal to the women and wives onboard, and they held all the boat people as captives in an oxen barn.
00:37:15  Mr. Phan was able to communicate with a representative from the United Nations with regard to their living circumstances in the area. Eventually, Mr. Phan and
his group were transported on a bus to the Northern region of Thailand, and admitted in a refugee camp.

00:39:55 Mr. Phan discusses his time at Panatikhom refugees camp, and how fortunate he and his group were considering the situation.

00:41:52 As a Christian, Mr. Phan felt very comfortable living with and being among Americans, as well as at his arrival in the U.S.

00:43:25 He regrets going into the computer programming profession, but he persevered. It was job security and the compensation was worth the grinding as Mr. Phan had to support his family in Vietnam.

00:47:05 He feels blessed for what God has given him, with his two adult children who now have families of their own.

00:49:33 After leaving his job as a computer programmer, Mr. Phan returned to the workforce after one-year break by doing several odd jobs to maintain occupied for the sake of his health.

00:50:45 He is happy with his life and occupation now. He gets to work with people, which is his passion. He elaborates on the different roles he takes on in participation in the Vietnamese community.

00:56:25 Mr. Phan talks about his wife’s occupation, and her employer.

00:58:36 Although he has not lived a satisfied life, he is at peace with all his decisions. He has many wishes to do right by those that he loves, to give his relationships closure. He has a great sense of autonomy and is a provider.

01:02:26 Mr. Phan explains that he is not content because he cannot change some of the events of the past. He wishes he could do more, especially for his country.

01:05:31 Mr. Phan discusses his hopes for the future of Vietnam.

01:06:31 Conclusion.