HJK: Okay. Today is March 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2013. This is Hye Jin Kim with the Vietnamese American Oral History Project and I’m interviewing Mr. Lee Brandt. We’re at the University of California, Irvine, in a room at the Courtyard Study Lounge, located inside the Student Center. Good morning, sir. Could you please state and spell out your name?

LB: Lee Brandt. It’s spelled L-E-E, and Brandt is spelled B-R-A-N-D-T.

HJK: Thank you. Could you please tell me when and where you were born?

LB: I was born in Vietnam, 1964.

HJK: Okay. Were you raised in Vietnam, and if not, could you tell me the different places you grew up in?

LB: I was raised in Vietnam until I was 10…

HJK: Mh-huh.

LB: And then I came to the U.S. in 1975…

HJK: Uh-huh.

LB: I lived here in the U.S., Northeast, until 1979. Then we left the U.S.; we went to Switzerland and I lived there until 1995. Then I left Switzerland; I went to live in Singapore for four years, came back to Switzerland in 1999, I think. And then I came back to the U.S. in 2009.

HJK: Could you tell me some of your best childhood memories at these places? Like some in Switzerland and Vietnam?

LB: Best childhood memories?
HJK: Uh-huh. Or…

LB: In Vietnam, a memory that would consider to be a good memory would be, I guess, hanging around the house. Yeah, it was… that’s when… you know, at that age, we played a lot around the house and that would be a good memory. When I came to the U.S. I was… I lived in Bost-Brooklyn from ten to fifteen, and the good memories there were being with my friends. Yeah… and after that, in Switzerland, of course it was a big part of my life, and there were many memories. So growing up there, at first it was about… about just being in, in a new country; learning the language… going to school there. Afterwards, when I was independent, of course, more of the past times… you know, Switzerland is great for going skiing; its’ winter sports. It’s all about appreciating the beauty of nature in Switzerland. So that would be considered, I would consider that to be good memories. And then Singapore… I went there for professional reasons so… Singapore is a great place to be in Asia. It was a hub for me. So it was… it was very nice because it was very clean, it is still very clean, and it’s very convenient. And, yeah. So those were the good memories.

HJK: So what age did you move out from Vietnam?

LB: I left Vietnam when I was ten.

HJK: Okay. How did you end up leaving Vietnam?

LB: It was through adoption and the program that got us out of Vietnam is called Baby Lift. Kay, and that’s when, I suppose, that, that during that operation, there were, I don’t know how many hundreds, but there were many kids who left Vietnam through that program. And on my arrival to the U.S., of course we were… the logical thing to do was to… go for adoption. We were very young so I think most of the kids were, went through, adoption.

HJK: Was there a particular reason why you were adopted? Or why your parents decided to
adopt you out?

LB: My adoptive parents wanted to adopt me... because they lost an adopted child. During one of the flights that left Vietnam, it crashed. It was, I don’t know how many planes that left Vietnam. One of these flights crashed and there were about, I don’t know how many hundreds of kids on the plane, and my mother, had an adoptive child on that plane and... it didn’t work out, so... I was not adopted yet when I came to the U.S., and since she was working with that organization, FCVN, Friends of Children of Vietnam, and... I think... she took the opportunity to adopt me.

HJK: Kay, how did you or... how did you get to that phase? I guess how did you get to know about the adoptions?

LB: It was not my decision. It was my Vietnamese mother’s decision. And I guess she found out about this program when we were in Vietnam, and when she was, when, I think, we were in Vietnam, the Operation Baby Lift was not known. It was more of the adoption that was better known. So she found out about that through her friends, or through... her, our relatives; I don’t know how she knew about that, but the... for, I think from her perspective, it was about adoption, yeah. But then, I learned that behind that whole... that whole... process, there was an operation called Baby Lift.

HJK: Do you think you were sent for adoption because of the war? Or do you think the war had anything to do with you being adopted out?

LB: I think the adoption was a byproduct of that operation. The operation was to get, to get the kids out of Vietnam, and of course, because we were kids, the only way for us to survive or to, to continue our lives, after leaving Vietnam was through adoption, so it was part of that process, I think.
HJK: Okay, so because you were so young, you didn’t realize what was happening?

LB: No.

HJK: No?

LB: No. I had no idea.

HJK: So how did you feel after, I guess, that you were leaving your home in Vietnam for a different life? Or… sorry; if… how did you feel when you realized that you were leaving your family?

LB: Of course, I was very sad…

HJK: Uh-huh…

LB: …to be separated from my family, but my mother, my Vietnamese mother, explained that it was for my future.

HJK: Uh-huh.

LB: And so I had to accept that… Yeah. It was a sad time for me to leave Vietnam, yeah.

HJK: How was life with your adoptive parents?

LB: It was… good, in a sense that I was not the only adoptive child in the house. We were three or four, so… The reason why I say three or four because my brother is… is my mother’s child, but he was adopted by my father, yeah…

HJK: Oh…

LB: …So he was her second husband, right… So anyways, that’s a side story. But because we were many kids to be adopted in the family, I felt that we got along very well, and that, that made my adoption easier, I supposed, my integration to the family easier.

HJK: What were some of the challenges, I guess, you faced during your life with your adoptive parents, or adoptive family?
LB: I, I… looking back at it, from, from now, I think my difficulties were culture. It was a big
culture… shock for me. At… but, I didn’t realize it at the time, yeah; now I know. So that was
what, I think, that was one of the biggest challenges for me. And of course, second was English,
because when I arrived, I didn’t speak a word of English, and so I had to… to be; I had to learn
very quickly, yeah. So, that’s number two… and other than that, I don’t think we had much
difficulties. It was just… yeah; I just had to deal with the culture… shift.

HJK: Well, can you give me some examples of like, the cultural shock you felt?

LB: It was about the relationship between parents and … child. You know, in Vietnam, the
relationship; that relationship is very different from what we know in the U.S. And how…how…
how the… my Vietnamese mother express her love to her kids or to me is very different from
how my American mother express her love to me. And sometimes, it’s… it was difficult for me
to get used to that. That difference, and…

HJK: Would it be okay for you to share maybe some of the differences?

LB: Like for example, if a Vietnamese mother loves her kid, she would want to… to… assist her
child to grow, to mature, and that assistance is more or less what we would call pampering. Yes,
so you would do a lot of things for your kids… And in the U.S., I believe that’s not the case. The
way to, to raise a child, to become a responsible person, is to give that child, or to, to, yet, to the
child, some number of responsibilities to get him or her to be independent as early as possible so
that, in a way, to prepare for the future. That’s how my mother raised me, my American mother.
And it was a, it’s a big difference for me, going from a place where I was well… protected, to a
place where, to a family where I was supposed to be more or less, uh, independent as early as
possible. Yeah. So I guess, from that perspective, it was a big step for me. Of course, they’re
both love, but, just, that it’s very different.
HJK: Okay, since I’ve learned a little bit about your adoptive family, would you be able to tell me about your biological family and I guess what you remember before you were adopted?

LB: My biological family… in Vietnam… what would you like to know about it?

HJK: Maybe, some… the number of siblings you had and I guess maybe your parents’ occupation?

LB: Okay… my father passed away when we were, or when I was four. Yeah… and that made, or that had a big impact on family. We were four- brothers and sisters, with my father. And then my mother remarried and then we had three more sisters and brother. So that together made seven. It was a big family, and she had to support all of that structure on her own, more or less. And it was very difficult for her, so we understood that, and we tried our best to help her as much as we could. So… Yeah. It was a big family.

HJK: What kind of things did your mother do after your father’s death, to I guess, support the family?

LB: She, I… I… I think one of the major events in her life during that period of time was that she had a pharmacy. And so we… we kind of… went through that… that period with her, and she was very successful, but she, for some economical reasons, I think she, she didn’t maintain that. And that was very difficult, because being a woman in Vietnam, and not having a profession in her hands, it was very difficult to make ends meet. So I think she tried her best. She had a lot of help from her father, our grandfather, and she had couple homes in Vietnam that she rented out to… to get some income. That worked out well and… other than that, yeah, I think it was those, just those two occupations. Well, she rented one of her properties, and then, I think she, she had multiple times tried to set up the pharmacy, and I think that worked out quite well for her.
HJK: What… you mentioned previously that you also helped out with the family or the siblings helped out? What kind of things did you guys do?

LB: We didn’t help financially, we just, you know, cause she, she had to work and then, so therefore, I took care of my brothers and sisters. As… to help out, yeah, but nothing worked.

HJK: We talked about both sets, I guess, both families, and could you maybe elaborate on how they influenced your life? And in what ways?

LB: My Vietnamese family? How, how, my, my, how my Vietnamese family influenced my life?

HJK: Mh-hm. And your adoptive family.

LB: Yeah. Okay. My Vietnamese family… I’m not sure how they influenced my… of course I grew up with them, and… it was, it’s my cultural background, and so that kind of… Oh, my, I had a good education when I was in Vietnam. I had, I think, it was a very good education, education because my math skills was very much superior to my… My friends when I arrived in the U.S. So from that perspective, and I, I could write very well also. So that kind of prepared me for the schooling in the U.S., and that was very good. So yeah, that was the good preparation. And then my American family, of course, we continued the schooling and… and because I was adopted and I was in an American family structure, that kind of facilitated my life in the U.S. Yeah, I imagine if I were with a Vietnamese family in the U.S., of course I would feel more comfortable but that would have prepared me… differently for the life in the U.S. So I kind of like being adopted from that perspective, because it was a soft passage to… to…. the U.S.

HJK: Okay. Were you able to contact your biological family frequently after you were adopted?

LB: I… I contacted my sister who is two years younger than I am, and that was my only contact when I was in the U.S. Then afterwards, when I went to Switzerland, I maintained that contact,
and I was able to also send letters to my Vietnamese mother while I was in Switzerland. Of course, back then it was very difficult to get any mails in and out of Vietnam, but we managed to do, to do that and it was; that kind of maintained our connection… and that allow us to… to come together afterwards when she arrived in the U.S.

HJK: Could you elaborate on why it was difficult to get mail in and out of Vietnam?

LB: Because it was a country after war and Vietnam kind of closed its doors to, to… foreign contacts. And therefore communication to and from Vietnam was very restricted.

HJK: You said you contacted your sister, instead. Was she living outside of Vietnam then, at that time?

LB: Yes, she was adopted as I… am, and she lived in Oregon, at that time… yeah.

HJK: How did you know she was there?

LB: Through FCVN.

HJK: So, you said you maintained contact with your biological family. At what age and how were you able to meet up with them, if you ever did?

LB: I think my sister helped out with the… immigration, or yeah, of my brother. He arrived in the U.S. and he kind of lived near her. I think back then, she was in Texas, and when my mother arrived in the U.S., she also, of course, lived nearby. So therefore, if I… I kept contact with my sister, and that’s how I, I came together; I, I, I got together with my Vietnamese mother and my older Vietnamese brother.

HJK: How did you feel when you met up with your brother and your mother for the first time in ages?

LB: It was a mixed feeling, because, of course… I, I’ve been away from them for a very long time and of course; and I couldn’t speak Vietnamese very well back then so there was a barrier.
It was the language barrier and… and it also was a… mental barrier, because I had to survive; I have to detach myself from that family structure so that I can move on with my life… and… but however, on the emotional side, I felt also attached to my Vietnamese family, because we were exchanging mails and so on. And so therefore, finding them again, meeting up with them back then, I had mixed emotions.

HJK: I guess, when you met up with them, where did you… in what kind of environment did you meet up with them?

LB: It was a visit from Switzerland to the U.S.

HJK: Oh..

LB: Yeah. So I came for vacation… and, so and… it was also my sister’s wedding, and therefore, there were lots of things going on.

HJK: So you still keep in touch with both families?

LB: Yes. Yeah. My… my American family kind of got split up. My mother passed away, my father moved from Switzerland back to the U.S.-I’m still in contact with him right now. My American brothers and sisters are still in Switzerland…so yeah, I, I see both my mother; my Vietnamese mother, and I also exchange emails and call-phone calls- with my brothers and sisters in Switzerland as well as my father who is now in Minnesota.

HJK: So after you met up with your Vietnamese family, do you have any, I guess, special holidays that you celebrate together?

LB: My Vietnamese family?

HJK: Uh-huh.

LB: The Vietnamese New Year.

HJK: Can you elaborate more on that?
LB: Well, they're... they're... they're... they live near by here so I see them almost like every other week. And we get together for many things including the Vietnamese New Year. Christmas also and of course Thanksgiving, so all of the holidays we get together, but yeah, I see them every other week so it's nothing special that we celebrate the holidays... but it's still a big celebration.

HJK: So can you tell me more about the Vietnamese New Year? Is it similar to the Chinese New Year or the American New Year that we celebrate here?

LB: The Vietnamese New Year lasts three days and in Vietnam, it's considered to be very big event. In the U.S., it's less but it's still celebrated within the Vietnamese community. And we still keep traditions like, you know, there's the younger kids kind of wish the older generation health and all, and then the parents or the grandparents kind of give money to their kids and grandchildren as a gesture of, I don't know...of a gift, I suppose... yeah.

HJK: Do you have a spouse and how and when did you, I guess, meet and get married?

LB: We-I have-I'm married to my wife who I met in Switzerland. It was through a friend that we met, and we've been together since 1990, so it's been a long time. But, we-yeah, we spend most of our time together in Switzerland, then we moved to Singapore and then we came back to Switzerland and here we are in the U.S. so she's been doing a lot of travelling with me. Yeah.

HJK: What's the reason why you moved around a lot?

LB: To experience the world.

HJK: What were some of your favorite experiences? I guess going about?

LB: Well, when we moved to Switzerland, it was not my choice. It was my American parents' choice to go to Europe and they-I guess they wanted us to have a little bit of a European culture in us, so that's... And also they wanted to experience European life and that's why we left the U.S. and so we went to Europe. Then afterwards, I wanted to experi- make the same experience
but for Asia, that's why I went to live in Singapore. So it's all about wanting to experience the lifestyle that we moved around a lot.

HJK: What are some of the differences in the cultures, I guess?

LB: Well... in Europe, I don't know... if, if you ask somebody you know why do you like to live in Europe it would be a very difficult question to answer because it's nothing like... nothing tangible. They’re all intangibles. The values of Europe and so I; but I guess, you know, it's, it's very... it's just the older cities have a character of their own and when you live there, you feel like you are a part of that environment, and so that's, that's a very special feeling. And I, I still like to, I still like; I... and I remember Switzerland and Europe as such. I still have lots of friends over there, and... And whenever I get the chance to talk with them, it's all... all those memories come back and I, I, I remember that. It's all about... the being there and of course we go to places; we go skiing, we do a lot of picnics, we do a lot of sports... activities, but it's all about being with friends and family and... and how... how we felt when we go to places... yes, that's, that's the, that's the intangible side of things. And in, in, in Singapore it's, for me, it was a business trip and or business event, and we lived there for four years, and it was a good experience for me to-because I, I travel a lot when I was working in Singapore and that was a good way for me to discover Asia. And that was one of the questions I had when I grew up, you know, was... I, I lived in the U.S.; I, I knew more or less what life was about and I had a taste of the... of the lifestyle in the U.S. I, I, I lived in Europe, so I wanted to discover Asia, and that's one of the reasons why I, I went to Singapore and also because at that time, Asia was booming and was a good career move. Yeah, so both of those reasons I went to Singapore... Afterwards, we wanted to have a family, and so we thought that we should stop this moving around and then get settled down and, and build a family, and that's why we, we had our, our boy... in Switzerland.
HJK: What... other than the places that you lived in, where there any places that you travelled to for fun?

LB: Oh yeah. We've travelled all over Europe when we were there. All of Western Europe and when we were in Singapore, we, we travelled less for pleasure, cause I had to travel a lot for business. And, so we also went to many countries in Asia; yeah. But in, in, in Europe, to answer your question, in Europe we travelled a lot for, for pleasure, more than for business.

HJK: Do you have any children?

LB: One boy.

HJK: -And-Okay. Do you ever share your history with them?

LB: Not yet. He's still young. He's only six so maybe when he gets older and he's- if he's interested, then I can tell him about...This story.

HJK: Okay.

LB: Or he can read it online! (Laughs)

HJK: (Laughs) About your travelling; did you ever get to travel back to Vietnam?

LB: Yes. I used to go to Vietnam once a year. Recently, yeah.

HJK: What; what were; was your experience when you, I guess, first went back?

LB: Oh, the first trip back to Vietnam was in 1994 and it was very difficult for me because in 1994, Vietnam was still very much underdeveloped; it is still an underdeveloped country but it was the, the life over there was so harsh, that it... it, it was very difficult for me to be there. And so my first trip back there, I remember that- first of all, it was physically, it was very challenging but the... from, from the emotional point of view, it was, it was revealing because, after all those years, I imagined how I would feel if I met my relatives, and when I did... see them again, I, I guess it was, it was a discovery for me. On a positive side, more so than the... yeah, I think it was
very positive when I, when I... when I came back to Vietnam in '94, other than the physical aspect of life.

HJK: How long did you stay during your first visit?

LB: We went there for three weeks. Yeah, Three weeks. Three weeks visit.

HJK: What-what are some memories that you remember from that trip, other than, I guess, meeting with your relatives?

LB: I discovered parts of Vietnam. We went the-we tour around a lot, and one of the- so that's one thing, is the, the... the visiting of, of the...Vietnam, the country and the other memory was the... how difficult it was to speak Vietnamese for me. I have Vietnamese friends in, in Switzerland and because I lacked the vocabulary in Vietnamese, I, I, I used to speak half and half; half Vietnamese, and for whatever vocabularies I don't have in Vietnamese, I would fill it in-my sentences with, with French words. Yeah. So when I went back to Vietnam, I couldn't do that and I, I found it very hard to speak Vietnamese when I was in Vietnam. There are- that was, that was the other memory I had going back to Vietnam the first time. Other than that, the fruits were great; I couldn't eat much of the food because of, of hygiene reasons, but the fruit was... were very good.

HJK: Okay. You said that you, I guess, forgot most of your Vietnamese? And in all the different places that you've travelled to and that you lived in, how did you get past that language barrier?

LB: Well, the- from the language barrier perspective, the first barrier I had was when I came to the U.S. I couldn't speak English and- I, I was young, so it was easy for me to pick up English and because I lived in my adoptive family with my siblings, I picked up English relatively quickly and easily. After, after like six months, nine months, I was, I was pretty much... I could express myself easily. Yeah. When we went to Switzerland, it was very different because we
were Americans and it-French is a very hard language to learn, so it took me a long time. Took me years; two, three years, and so the language barrier there was even greater than what I had in the U.S. And Vietnam, it just... I just have to learn it over time and-because I was not exposed to the Vietnamese language on a day-to-day basis so I learned Vietnamese from my trips to Vietnam; I learned Vietnamese when I visit my mother here in the U.S., and I learn my Vietnamese from my friends; yeah so it's... it's a long process-it was a long process for me over time. So I, I, I guess, I just have-I just have to pay attention when I speak to people in, in Vietnamese. I still have lots of difficulties; I don't... I don't know as much of the language that I would like to, but it's enough for me to get by.

HJK: So you're able to communicate with your Vietnamese mother and brother?

LB: Yes. Yeah, I guess, I... Since I've been here, I, I learned more Vietnamese than, than I did anything else.

HJK: Where did you go to college?

LB: College? Well my, I went to my engineering school in Switzerland, and I did my master's in London, in the U.K.

HJK: What were those experiences like?

LB: In Switzerland I had lots of fun. It was engineering, it was up my alley; I was very at ease with it and I had a great time in school, although it was during that time that I had the most difficulties with French... because it was, it was... engineering, it was all about... technical stuff, so I didn't have any problems there. It was... and I did my MBA in London and part-time... and, and... Yeah. So I- no. I didn't have any special memories of that event because I was working and I was travelling a lot so I was trying to, to, to... finish my, my studies because I started it and I, I, liked to finish it; but then again, during that time, I moved to Singapore, so I had to do a
remote studies and... It took me five years (laughs), instead of two, yeah. I, I'm glad I, I, I finished it and yeah, just that-that's what I, that's what I remember of it-is that it took me a long time, yeah. But in the undergrad, I had a great time.

HJK: Was there a particular reason why you decided to, I guess, go out of the country after you had your bachelor's? To go study in London was there a particular... reason that led up to that?

LB: Yeah; because in Switzerland, the management studies is not very... developed. And... so, short of coming back to the U.S. to... to finish the, or to do the MBA program, I, I decided to go to, to the U.K. It was shorter, it was a, it was, it was... nearer to my home and it was... probably easier for me to... it was easier access, yeah.

HJK: What were some of your first impressions of the United States?

LB: I suppose you... you're referring to 1995? Or...?

HJK: Yes.

LB: My first impression of the U.S. when I arrived here was that it's-everything is big. And... It was very modern and... And... It was my first exposure to... to non-Vietnamese people and... So it was a lot of learning during that time, yeah. I, I, I don't think I... I had much time to... to experi- to appreciate my experience back then cause I was struggling with a lot of things at the same time; like many things and I, I, I had to, of course, continue my schooling, I had to learn English, I had to adapt to lifestyle, I had to adapt to the culture, and at the same time, I had to detach myself from my Vietnamese family, so it was a lot of things happening at that time, yeah.

HJK: Did you first-when you first came here, did you come to California or was it a different state?

LB: Massachusetts. We arrived-I lived in Massachusetts.

HJK: Okay, at what... I guess, what made you settle in California, right now?
LB: My mother lived here and... My brother moved down to California from Washington state, so I-and being in Switzerland, it was a nice place to be-I mean, California is a nice place to be because we kind of missed the beach and so... Southern California with its beaches and its' palm trees and its' great weather, we thought 'this is where we wanted to be'.

HJK: When did you come to California and decided to live here? I guess, what year?

LB: ...Of course we moved to...to the U.S. in 2008. But when we decided to come here, it was during... 2008.

HJK: Can you tell me some differences from between, I guess, life in Massachusetts and life in Southern California?

LB: Well, when I was in Massachusetts, I was a, I was a young kid and... And I, and I was with my adoptive family so life over there for me was about going to school; it was about... getting along with my family; it was about... adapting to the lifestyle and of course, I had many friends when I was there and it's easier for me to; it was easier for me to, to... to integrate myself when I was in Boston, believe it or not-when I was in Massachusetts, then it is for me in Southern California. It is more difficult for me to integrate myself... here because I am... I have, I have one foot in the Vietnamese community, and I have the other foot in the...the American society and I'm still struggling with that because... because of-I, I would, I... I guess you would call it an identity issue. And also because of, of, of the difference in mindset, yeah. I find it very difficult to... to be a part of a Vietnamese conversation or gathering just because I, I, I can't; I, I, I don't know the culture very well, I don't know half of the jokes they, they... they tell and I find myself to be very quiet when I'm, I'm with the-within the Vietnamese community. And... I feel a little bit less oppressed when I'm with my American friends, yeah. And it's closer to my, in, in that atmosphere with, when I'm with my American friends, it's closer to my, my culture is closer to...
the way how I feel, so therefore I express myself freely and also because of English. When I'm with the Vietnamese... when I'm in the Vietnamese… millier, it's kind of hard for me because of the language barrier and because of the culture barrier, believe or not, right now.

HJK: You said that life was easier in Massa-Massachusetts but did you ever feel any racism back then and ...

LB: Oh yeah.

HJK: ...maybe right now?

LB: Right, yeah. Of course. Massachusetts, it's...90... back in the 70s, there was compared to California, racism is, for me it was everyday life, yeah. I had to deal with that when I was in school, I had to deal with that... almost everywhere I went. Not openly racism but... I guess also because I was a minor-I, I, I was a minority... in Brookline... it-I felt like... I was some... I... I stuck out, you know, very... strongly, yeah. And... But I had lots of friends so that made it easier, but still, I felt that when I was in school, when I was with-when I met other kids, etcetera.

HJK: Okay. What were some of the occupations that you had?

LB: Occupations. In terms of professional career you mean?

HJK: I just, I guess... maybe... part time jobs or professional jobs-anything that you remember or that had a big impact on your life?

LB: My... my social life, my private life, or my professional life?

HJK: Maybe...

LB: You want to talk about... what kind of life? (Laughs)

HJK: Let's talk about your professional life, then.

LB: My professional life.

HJK: Uh-huh.
LB: Okay. What occupation I had that impacted my professional life? Oh, I started out as an engineer. When I finished my undergrad and I worked in Switzerland. And... That was my first step into the Swiss life, believe it or not, because when I was in school, I was at home, I was studying, I didn't have much contact with... with Switzerland and when I worked as an engineer, I was independent-I moved out; I had lots of friends at work and I went out with them. It was, my social life was more... I had more... Swiss friends socially than there-when I was in school. So that was; that had a big impact and that's, that's how I learned about the Swiss culture, yeah... of course to them- then I went to work for an American company in the U- in, in... Switzerland. And that had a big impact too because it was more or less one step back to the U.S. and so... and you know, working for an American company in Switzerland felt very differently than working for a Swiss company in Switzerland. So I... I had a different experience there. And then when I went to Switzerland for the same company, I-sorry; I went to Singapore. It was about working in Asia and that also had a big impact because it was very demanding to, to... to work in those Asian countries because of the language barrier again, yeah. So yeah. Big step forward for me.

HJK: Are you still in, I guess, that company right now?

LB: No, I'm not.

HJK: Okay. What are you, I guess, doing right now?

LB: Right now, I... I work on contracts rather than having a permanent job and I guess that's because it's due to my... my profession. I'm a project manager and people don't hire project staff on a permanent basis. But you know, when projects started, you hire people. When the project is done then... you di- disperse the team. You don't keep the people on... on your payroll because that's the nature of project.
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HJK: Okay. We already talked about some differences between your; the communities that you lived in but would you say there are any similarities?

LB: Similarities? ...(Laughs) I think my family, my American family, has a- had a, a... it's a, it's a special case. Yeah, I mean, you know, when we arrived in Switzerland, for example, when we arrived in Switzerland, we were an American family with many adoptive children and... and from that perspective, people took interest in our family because they are- they were interested in our story. Then...and I, I, I, I guess the commonality among all those communities is my story. They want to know who I am, they want to know my story, they want to know my background and a lot of my friends became friends with me because they wanted to... to know, they wanted to, to... of course, they, you know, they, they... of course wanted to be friends with me, but more they wanted to experience or I- I don't know- know about my story.

HJK: You previously mentioned that you were involved with the Vietnamese community, community here. In what ways, I guess, would you say you are involved?

LB: Involved? I don't know if I would say involved, but I would say, exposed, yeah. So... You know. My Vietnamese family, they, they... they have lots of- they have many friends and I guess relatives here, and also they are my relatives, and whenever we get together, I meet more and more relatives, and... so... I... I... there's a relationship that gets built over time. So yeah. It's through families and friends that... that I, I... I integrate with the Vietnamese community here. They are not my friends; for example, I know a few guys but they're all my brother's friends, so...

I don't think I know of a... I do know a couple of people on my own because I met them on my own... but most of my.... my contacts are through my family and through my brother's contacts.

HJK: What do you think are the most important things that future generations of Vietnamese Americans should remember about their past?
LB: The most important thing I think that they should know is the Vietnamese culture, for example. A lot of kids you know, I think when they grow older they—because they don't practice their Vietnamese, for example, they tend to forget it. And... Afterwards, they do forget it and it's a... and they—later on in life, they find out that, you know, 'oh I'- they could have kept the language alive if they had practiced enough a bit and, and they would like to learn it later, but it's much harder to relearn the language and so they feel that though; they could feel that they have missed out on something; whole culture, whole world that they could have access to. So... from that perspective, I try to speak Vietnamese with my boy and so that... that part of the world is not closed to him. So I think... yeah, just to keep that door open is important.

HJK: Do you think... what you just said; do you think that it kind of stems from your own experiences?

LB: Yes, definitely, definitely. I... Just because I can go back to Vietnam right now and I could talk to people and every, every time I go back there, I learn something about Vietnam and the Vietnamese and... I'm glad that I can keep that relationship open. Every time.

HJK: Do you... so would you say that you kind of regret not being... I guess, exposed to the Vietnamese language as much as a child?

LB: I'm not sure if regret is the, the term because I had to give it up to be able to learn English and to integrate myself with the Western life. Yeah. I guess in a way, I, I wish I, I, I, I could speak the language better, but that's okay, I'm, I'm still learning and I'm still making progress, so I think I'm doing okay.

HJK: Okay, last question. Are there any other memories or stories that you would like to share?

LB: ...Stories. Nothing comes to mind.

HJK: Okay, Mr. Brandt, thank you so much for participating.
LB: You're welcome.