Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: STEVE PHAM
Interviewer: David Liu
Date: February 23, 2013
Location: Garden Grove, California
Sub-collection: Linda Vo Class Oral Histories 2013
Length of Interview: 01:52:53

FIELD NOTES

The interview was conducted in Steve Pham’s home in Garden Grove on February 23, 2013 at 10 AM. When I entered the driveway of his home, I went up his porch and rang his door bell. Steve answered the door and welcomed me into his home. Steve Pham was wearing a blue striped polo with a track jacket and a pair of exercise sweats. He was also wearing white socks and sandals. Steve is a middle aged man with slicked back hair and a big smile. He was very welcoming and offered me a cup of coffee or tea. As I was about to take off my shoes, Steve said it was unnecessary and directed me to his dining table. We started off with short introductions and exchanged general information about each other such as what we did over the weekend, our plans and how New Years was for us while we were filling out the paper work. We followed protocol and signed all the consent and release forms prior to conducting the interview. I took photos of the narrator after the entire recording process was over.

We conducted the interview in his dining room which was adjacent to his living room. He had a glass dining table and we sat on cushioned metal chairs. I started the interview with very basic questions such as biographical information. When I asked about his parent’s names, Steve then began to go into deep detail about his biography. He was very open and didn’t seem to hold back on anything. Steve talked about many topics. The first and most prominent topic he passionately and openly talked about was the Vietnam War. He went into great detail about his family history and how the Communist takeover affected his living situation which eventually prompted him to leave. Steve discussed his experience in Malaysia in a refugee camp and how his duration was really short and he was immediately transferred. Steve then talked about 9/11 and how that impacted him. He seemed really hurt and saddened as he recalled 9/11 because he stated that someone was hurting the country he loved so much. From that moment, there were a few moments of quietness as we both reflected on the tragedy on 9/11.

Based on his experiences with assimilation, Steve stated the importance of civic and community engagement. From his experience in wanting to be involved in law enforcement, Steve sounded very indebted and obligated to fulfill his civic duty and to repay society. Then he articulated and translated his volunteering experience to what he calls the burden of the current generation. On multiple occasions, he stated that being humble, compassionate and resilient are key qualities he
wants the future of society to embody. A society that is cognizant of their history and their communities and dedicated to making their communities a better place.

During this whole time, we were locked in eye contact which was something that we actually also discussed in our conversation. He talked about his entire history and philosophy of life from a single question in about an hour and a half. From his interview, Steve made it clear that he was very humble and selfless, dedicating his time and energy to improving the lives of others. During the entire time of the interview, I never felt so engaged and invested in somebody. His story really touched me because he was able to open up to a complete and random stranger but speak with so much dedication and passion.

After we concluded the interview and turned off the recorder, Steve seemed somewhat exhausted. He did talk for literally almost two hours straight and I was extremely thankful that he could provide and offer me with such rich and deep information. Steve started asking about my own personal goals. He assured me that even though the job market is rough that it is still possible to be happy because I am doing what I love to do and that I am in college and have an education. Even though we lived and grew up in different countries, situations, cultures and time frame, he lessons he gave me during that day could still be applied to my life. I was extremely thankful and honored that he was able to share these stories.

Present during the recorded interview was the narrator Steve Pham with a cameo appearance by Vanna, his wife. Vanna was wearing scrubs and either was leaving for work or coming back from work. Off the record and after the interview, I met his daughter Emily.