TVD: This is Thuy Vo Dang with the Vietnamese American Oral History Project of UC Irvine. Today is December 13, 2012. I will be interviewing Mr. Clarence Dung Taylor in Westminster, California.

TVD: Mr. Clarence, please introduce your name, age, and your date of birth.

CDT: My name is Clarence Dung Taylor and my birthday is May 8, 1968

TVD: What city were you born?

CDT: I was born in Vũng Tàu, Việt Nam

TVD: Do you remember anything about Vũng Tàu?

CDT: Very much, the beach is very beautiful. I used to go to the beach when I was little and I brought some spoons to dig in the sand catching the clams and picked up the shells at shore.

TVD: Do you live at Vũng Tàu until when?

CDT: Until I was 6 years old and left Vũng Tàu to live with my mother in Saigon.

TVD: Can you tell more about your mother and your family?

CDT: My mother was from Bửu Long, Biên Hòa, Đồng Nai. My mother grew up in a family of five brothers and sisters, and she was the fourth one. My grandfather was a refugee from China, and my grandmother was from Biên Hòa. My mother was born in the time of the French war, so she could not go to school for higher grade, she only finished the third grade. She had to take care of her younger family members because we must evacuate during war time. One of the things she said
that she wanted me to go to school to learn more, and that made me love her very much until now. So whenever I wanted to be successful or I was into difficulties, I always remember what she said and tried harder so that I was not disappointed her.

**TVD:** So do you have any sisters or brothers in your family?

**CDT:** I have one step brother, same mother different father. My mother married a Vietnamese man when she was 19 years old and had one son about 10 years older than me. My mother met my father at Vũng Tàu after that, so I became a younger step brother.

**TVD:** Can you tell a little about your father?

**CDT:** My father was an American officer station at Vũng Tàu from 1966 to 1970. I was born in 1968, and two years later my father returned to America. I did not see him until I came to America, and I had only pictures and the name that had been kept until that time. My father passed away in 2003 at Syracuse city in New York. My name now actually had to be Clarence Taylor III because my father was Clarence Taylor Jr., but it was shorten to make it easy to add my Vietnamese name in the middle. So when I came to the U.S. many people asked me why I had the stranged name. Usually people had first name as American, last name as Vietnamese, but I had it backward.

**TVD:** Can you or did you know about your father background?

**CDT:** My father was half black and half Indian. My grandmother was Indian and my grandfather was Africa-American. My mom was half Vietnamese and half Chinese, so you could say I was ¼ of all that. People used to tease me that I was walking united nations (laughing.)

**TVD:** (laughing) Ok. You are an American-Vietnamese to live there at that time, do you have any difficulty?

**CDT:** Uhmm, before 1975 American-Vietnamese was one of the best lives that had been specially treated because American was there at that time. Families had American-Vietnamese member lived very well, but after 1975 this was reversed. Normal South people already had a hard life, but American-Vietnamese life was double hard, Black-Vietnamese life was triple hard. The White-Vietnamese was ok to cover up, but the Black-Vietnamese could not avoid it, so there was discriminated in Vietnam society for that outside look as people with light skin
naturally better than the people with dark skin whether your skin was from mix or origin, it made you distinguish from people among you even from family members. So I was an American-Vietnamese and had dark skin too, so my life had been triple whelming. That meant my life had been harder, I had to working hard not to advance but to fight for my existence. I struggled to work three times harder than any other people.

TVD: When your father returned to America, you live with your mother and with…

CDT: I lived with my mother since I was a little, my father after came back to America he still continued to send letters because I was the only son in his family side. All aunts and uncles’ families had all daughters. My mother was the breadwinner of her family, so she got lots of responsibilities like other Vietnamese women. She was afraid that if she left Vietnam, nobody would take care of the family. She did not think for my future but only for her family’s responsibilities, so she stayed back, then after 1975 we started losing contact with my father.

TVD: As you said until you were 6 years old, your family moved to Saigon. Why was until that time to move to Saigon?

CDT: By that time my mother owned a restaurant at Vũng Tàu and met my father, but when my father came back to America, her business started going down, so she sold everything until I was 6 years old, we had nothing left. We were financially trouble and could not stay at Vũng Tàu anymore. We moved to other places for business, so Saigon was where we started business again and lived there.

TVD: Then you both were living together or…

CDT: We lived together since that time at a small house in the fifth county of Saigon, near An Đòng market. My mother was working and I went to school. Life was not that hard at first because I was only 6 years old, and before that in 1974, I started to know a little bit of life, and I turned 7 in 1975, I started hearing the gun sound and the war. On April 30, 1975 I witnessed a combat airplane from Republican Vietnamese right at where I lived. I was so scary because the house was shaking; I heard lots of the gun sound but did not know what happening. My mother hugged me in the house and said if people died, we all died and if they lived, we all lived. We only knew that we were witness the Vietnam war, but we did not know what happening by that time. I was so little to know the matter between the North and South, American soldiers and even what was an American-
Vietnamese like me? What I only knew by that time was the war was going on. After 1975 when the life suddenly changed since the regime of the North Communist Vietnamese took over the South, I started to taste what the hard life was. Every night they reminded us that they were the winner of the war and your father in America was the cause of the war, so you had to pay the price for your father. Not only me but my mother had to suffer that, too. Every night they called her up for town meeting, and they made sure to brain wash her. They said that she had to be a model woman for others because she had a son related to people who caused the war and bad society in the country. So she needed to change her thoughts and forced both of us to do things that others did not have to do. For example: collected the trash from the pipe here and there or preventing and fixing the fire, or forced my mother to go on meeting. Even I had to be forced by the security guard to cook pig’s food or did miscellaneous things for them at their station. Of course children always wanted to play, but I always forced by the security guards more than other kids, so I kind of understood my background a little bit. Day by day in life I was getting closer and closer to my mother and loved her more and more because other families with the same situation, they were abandon kids like me to avoid trouble and that was the time that we needed them the most. Those families tried to get off the responsibility toward their own children which was so hostile situation by the judgement of the society at that time. They sent them out of the city to where their grandparent was. They did not dare to accept their own children, so American-Vietnamese children started separated from their real mother. They suffered the most in life and most of them were around my age… 1967, 1968, 1969, 1970… The majority of that age was during Vietnam War. Until 1975 they were about 5,6,7 years old which they would need their mothers the most, but got separated from them, so they became so pessimistic since that time.

TVD: Uh ha, so you continued to live with your mother…

CDT: That was my blessing which I lived with my mother until now. When I saw my mother, my tear just came out because I knew she gave up a lot to raise me and she did not choose an easy way like other people, taking me to the suburb to live with my grandparent or my uncle whoever to avoid the responsibility, but she took me everywhere she went and we both were sharing our shabby life together.

TVD: Did you continue your school during that time?

CDT: I still went to school because my mother said she did not have an opportunity to learn a lot since she lived during the war time, so she wanted me to
study. It was difficult for me that I had to help my mother prepare her business before I went to school, then after school I continued to work with her in the afternoon, but we just barely made our living. I always tried to go to school until the day I left Vietnam.

TVD: Did you have any special memory about the time you went to school in Saigon?

CDT: Going to school in Vietnam gave me the best memory about the struggled time. I could eat something that I really wondered how I could do that. Did you know about the pineapple core? I couldn’t even eat the outside, only the cone, but I felt very happy or what I ate I was question in my mind that how was I able to eat that. When I remembered that, it made me stronger and appreciated more in life. I thought children here were different from Vietnam because they were born with many things without even earn it. So they were not appreciated their life, they only wanted for more and more like I, I, I, in title, gave me this and that instead of working to earn it. Our childhood did not complain a lot, and it helped us to become a stronger person. When I was in school, everybody knew I was an American-Vietnamese, and I got a harder life because of that, but it helped me to study harder and better than others. I wanted to share that I could see the discrimination right at school. After 1975 people came from the North getting more priority or if they related to the communist party, they would have the first priority. Normal people already treated as second class, so American-Vietnamese like me got below the second class, but I never let those facts bringing me down. I had to raise myself up to be better than others.

TVD: Could you tell a little about your activities that time like going out with friends, what kind of sports, and what did you do for fun?

CDT: Going out with friends is out of the question, uhm that was my childhood. I was so poor, how could I go out while I was not having enough to eat. If I had any activity with friends that would be a plastic ball playing with 11 or 12 players with no shoe, using bared foot, playing on the concrete in a hot summer, once in a while we had a chance to play on the sand. We did not have any play ground like nowsaday. Shower in the rain on the street was in my childhood, as you knew Vietnam had only two seasons, hot and rain, so the raining season was for showering and saved raining water to a big container for family to use for our needs. The other activities of poor family were throwing can and flip flop. That was my childhood and going out with friends was my blessing, unfortunately it was not a case.
TVD: Out of all subjects you learned in school, which subject did you like best?

CDT: Everybody loved soccer sport in Vietnam, but since I was a little I knew that I liked music very much. Music was in my blood, maybe because Vietnamese ophra put lot of people feelings in it, so when I listened, it was deepen in me more than others. Since I was a little, I had an opportunity to live nearby the show companies when they came to Hung Vuong Theater near the fifth county, I always attended to the Saigon 1 and Saigon 2. I was fastinated with their productions, my neighbors heard me sing almost everynight, and everybody knew my voice because I was a mix Indian-Vietnamese. They called me “Cha Da” which applied to India people, and they used to say “That was Cha Da who sang again!” I always sang Vietnamese ophra around the neighbors, so when I came back to Vietnam after 20 years, the neighbors still remembered me “Cha Da” who used to sing Vietnamese ophra around the neighbor a lot. That was very much my memory.

TVD: Did anybody in your family sing Vietnamese Opera or know a lot about music?

CDT: No, I did not have a chance to study about that because I grew up with my mother. I only knew there were people whom their souls were hurt, so they wanted to use music to soften their hearts. Since I was a little, I obviously saw my background in the eyes of the society and people around me, and that was the same ways the Vietnamese Ophra play expressed. They used to play the sad ones which were about the real situations and feelings in life, so I liked that very much, more than the comedy play. Sometimes I felt that the play was telling about my own self or even sadder things than my situations, and that made me feel better to know that there were people who were in the worst situations than me in life.

TVD: Uhm, Did you live in Saigon since 1975 to 1981?

CDT: I lived with my mother from 1975 to 1981 until the day I left Saigon. It looked like I lived with the communist about 6, 7 years, and tasted a lot from life. That was the peek time of difficulties for most Vietnamese 1975-1985, after 1985 life started to get a bit better in Vietnam. The first decade after the changing of Vietnam regime was the hardest for the South people to cope with.

TVD: What did your mother do at that time?
CDT: My mother had her business right on the street in the morning, I bought supplies and prepared for her then after school I helped her to bring everything home. My additional work was construction and carpenter to earn extra income. There were constructors and carpenters in the neighborhood, and I worked with them to learn new skills and for my daily meals. They would teach me how to do things as needed, so I picked up different skills besides going to school. Even I always studied in school, but I also worked to improve my skills to have something to back it up. I did not have pay for my work, they only fed me daily.

TVD: Work for food?

CDT: I was lucky and very good to get that job, they called work for food only, but I had to be disciplined enough to be at the job. There were 10 people to compete for this job, and I had to be outstanding to get the job of working for food.

TVD: Could you tell me that why did your mother decide to leave Vietnam?

CDT: My mother saw life was getting harder and harder after that, she started to think about my future, and she said that she was wrong not to listen to my father before. So she thought at that time if we still lived here, I did not have future. She did not think about the responsibility of her family any more, she only thought about my future and her. If she died who was going to care of me, I had no relatives here, and other Vietnamese could not care of anyone. She was worry for me and my future, and there were an ODP program to take care of French-Vietnamese and not European-Vietnamese or American-Vietnamese, her friend applied for her French-Vietnamese and told my mother also applied, so they went to apply together. My mother did that but not putting her hope too high, and one beautiful day I remembered that the mailman came to my house and said that my mother and I had VISA to leave the country. Everybody thought that we were so poor and the government wanted us to go to Russia for labor, it was no way that we could go to America. My mother said that our life was so hard here and that was ok if we could go to Russia to do any kind of work.

TVD: Was that in 1981?

CDT: in May 1981

TVD: Could you remember how was the process and how long did it take when the letter arrived to your house?
CDT: The time when I left was very fast because that was the first wave of immigration, so it was very easy. From the time I received the letter until the day I went on to airplane was only 28 days, around 4 weeks. They received the letter and went on to the interview. The interviewer was an American officer who spoke both languages, they separated both of us, each in a different side to make sure we were real family. As I said that many mothers left their children, and when they heard their children could go to America, they bought them back, so the interview officer was responsible of making sure about the orientation of the children and mother. They separated mother/child to ask about their memory together, what each of them knew. After that I had to get immunization shots, and getting airplane tickets. Everything prepared this and that for 3 weeks, the fourth week, we already on the airplane.

TVD: Then you go from Vietnam?

CDT: From Vietnam to Thailand, I stayed at Phannat Nikhom camp in Thailand for one week. That was the transit process and that place was like Alice Island from old time. The Phannat Nikhom camp was a temporary place for refugee or people who cross over from other country. There was a separated space in the middle of the camp for American-Vietnamese children to stay because that time was too early for that process to be done better, so they had to let them stayed there for a week to finish before going to America. The first city I arrived was San Francisco, and I remembered I came to San Francisco right on my birthday. I left Vietnam on April 28 and stayed in Thailand’s camp one week, and arrived to San Francisco on May 8. I remembered when we arrived in San Francisco I had to stay at the hospital which became a holding place for our group. The first time I know my birthday when a few people worked for ICM program came that night and gave me 2 Coke cans with a cake and said Happy Birthday to me, I never knew my birthday before.

TVD: Where did you go after arrived to San Francisco?

CDT: That was the processing place and they started dividing for us from different cities in the U.S. I only stayed there for 2 days and flied to upstate New York at Utica city in New York after that.

TVD: Did you know why you went to New York?

CDT: There was a big Lutheran organization to sponsor refugee. I went there followed to a church named LIRS, Lutheran Immigration Refugee Service, that
was the city they welcomed a lot of Vietnamese-American there, not only me, they had from 10 to 15 mix Vietnamese-American almost everymonth. Utica city in New York was one of the cities which had the most Vietnamese-American later.

TVD: Did you remember your first reaction when you arrived to America?

CDT: It was very scary because I arrived on May, and that month in upstate New York still had snow, not much but still some you could see it from the airplane. I told myself what a scary feeling to go to America! The airport was so empty and very cold when I looked out from the window. I felt cold and empty when thinking maybe people back home were right, I might go to Russia not America, but when I saw my mother was crying so hard. She started getting scary too while thinking about her situation, she was in the fifty at that time and she had to leave the country to an unknown place and started everything over, so that was the most scary. I gave her a hug and promised her that from now on I would not let her worry for me any more. I told her not to cry because I would try my best to study and take good care of her. When the airplane landed I saw America flags among with the church organization which sponsored and welcomed us. I felt at ease when I saw America flags and the first time came to the house where food was pack inside the refrigrator, full of it! I felt I was living the real life at that time. My life actually changed for the better, I stepped into another chapter of my life. My mother was smile and it seemed like we were ready to start our new life.

TVD: How old were you at that time?

CDT: I was 13 years old.

TVD: 13 years old, so did you learn English yet?

CDT: Not yet, not knowing anything yet, only my mother spoke English. She talked to our sponsor there, and there was an interpreter who was Cambodian and Malaysian, he knew a little Vietnamese. He worked for that organization long ago and there were a few Khome-Americans came before, so he was one of them, and worked for Lutheran organization since that time.

TVD: So you did not know English, but your mother knew. Did she study before or she knew it when she was with your father?

CDT: No, my mother had a restaurant at Vùng Tàu before, and that restaurant used to have American soldiers so my mother must have some English. She also spoke
English after lived with my father about 4 years. Those English she learned and remembered like learning how to drive a bike, if you don’t use it, you gonna loose it. She started using it again after practiced a few time, and most of time, she understood when people spoke. Her English was essential in the first year like going to immunization shots, registered for school and there was a translator who just let her took over that part. We adapted with American life very fast because there was not any Vietnamese around, so I had friends and started speaking English within 6 months.

TVD: Did you reconnect with your father at that time?

CDT: Not yet, I was mad at that time, too. I thought why he was not looking for both of us, and I was not yet reconnect with him. Coincidentally there was an American Veteran Organization, they were looking for their children. Some knew about Lutheran organization and came to look for their kids. I was sad while seeing lot of fathers looking for children but my father did not look for me. After my English was very much improving, I was searching for my father, and what a small world! Surprisingly, my father lived not too far from where I lived; the city where he lived was only a few hours drive. I found him, but he was married and he did not have any children; his wife did not have children, so even though our relationship was father and son, but it did not show as heartfelt like before since I lived with my mother more through lot of hardship in life together. I still wanted to keep in touch with my father but we did not share any feelings.

TVD: How old were you when you reconnecte with your father?

CDT: I was 16 years old at that time. I remembered the first time my father took me out for shopping and bought for me a set of clothes for my 16th birthday. I still kept that picture. I officially became US citizen when I was 17 years old, and I took his name by that time. Before that my name still Nguyễn Anh Dũng, the name that my parent gave me in Vietnam. I remembered when I was in school, my friends used to joke about my name’s pronunciation as ON (Anh) Everybody called me ON (the switch) Sometimes they called out “Hey On (Anh), are you ON or OFF today?” (TVD: laugh) When I graduated from high school after that, all my highschool yearbooks still had my name Nguyễn Anh Dũng, my friends only called that named short as Anh. All my teachers and friends signed my yearbook under that name. Until 1987 I officially took my father name when I became US citizen, and that name was Clarence Taylor III.

TVD: Why did you take your father name?
CDT: As I said my father did not have children, and everybody needed to have their own root. I thought that my fate to meet my father again, so I needed to take his name to follow my origin for my children later if they asked about that they should know where they from. I still kept my Vietnamese name as the middle name as my root was Vietnamese, I never forgot that. My father did not have any son, and his happiness was that he had a son to carry on his name. I was very happy to think about that.

TVD: Could you tell me about your study in America? You came to America that time…

CDT: I came to school in my 8\textsuperscript{th} grade on May, so I did not learn enough when summer started. I studied for a month and they took me to a Columbus Junior High for ESL program. The teacher named Snyder, and there were students from Russia, Laos, Cambodian and I was the first Vietnamese student, so she did not know how to teach me without Vietnamese dictionary. She spoke English and put up a picture, for example, if she said chicken, she put up the chicken picture.

TVD: Ok, you were telling me about study ESL…

CDT: Mrs. Snyder, why I remembered her name from that time until now because when came into the class, we always said Good Morning Mrs. Snyder. When we went home, we said Good Bye Mrs. Snyder. She was very strict because there were more than ten different languages, and everybody wanted to speak his/her own language, so she had to be very strict to manage all of them.

TVD: You were still going on about study ESL.

CDT: Nothing yet when talking about Mrs. Snyder, I had a lot of memories because those were my good days. I had childhood experience with no value, so my student life here was not judge by anyone and I could enjoy the classroom. When study in Vietnam, I used to learn what I should know so I had to digest an insult to survive through time. When I studied in this class in America, I was very happy. Everyday I studied 8 hours in school, but I spent 3-4 hours per day for ESL program in Mrs. Snyder classroom. Later on I learned that was a supplemental program for international students to catch up with normal school. After six months I started to speak English and did not need my mother any more. The interpreter job of the Cambodian was not necessary any more. I became a translator of that city and I did not need to study in ESL program any longer. Mrs.
Snyder gave me a test, and she determined that I could go to the normal classroom. I graduated from the ESL class and became a translator for Mrs. Snyder for other coming Vietnamese-American. I sat down with Mrs. Snyder to do the cards (35:38), she wrote chicken and I wrote ‘con ga’ in the back. She was to be fond of me, Jonny Carson was a popular talk show, and she called me her psychic.

TVD: You studied the 8th grade to be continued on…

CDT: After the 8th grade, I did not have a break that summer, but continued the supplement program, so after the summer I went to the 9th grade at Porter High School. I graduated High School after 4 years, and I continued study engineering at Utica College in the branch of Syracuse University like the UC system here which had branches in every city as UCI, so my school was in Utica city, closed to home because I wanted to live with my mother and did not want to be far from home. I studied two majors: I graduated in 1992 in both BS of EE and BS of Telecom. I had three job offers that time: one was British for Telecom and worked at Montreal, the second one was MCI which was a telephone company at New York and the third one was UBS of New Jersey. I accepted the MCI job and the reason I chose that job because it was closed to my home. So started in 1992, I moved to New York to work for MCI company as a technical engineering.

TVD: What did your mother do?

CDT: My mother worked as assembly of medical supply for a pharmacy company by that time. All Vietnamese came to work for that company. They had a training program and a contract agreement with the sponsor organization to hire most
people when they arrived. My mother was in the retired period that time, so she just worked to bypass the time. I worked additional jobs as delivery newspapers and shoveled the snow for houses. There was lot of things to do, every house needed to clean up the snow, I only needed to carry a shovel and worked in each house around the year and earned lot of money. I bought my first car which was a Cherry Nova 1972 for $300.00 and it lasted for 4 years in high school. One of the things I liked my Cherry Nova that it ran like the top, no matter how cold outside, just put in the key the engine was good to go, but the gas tank was leaked so I could not put more than $3.00 of gas because it would leak to the outside. I always put only $3.00 to get gas everytime, so the gas attendant told me that “you are Mr. $3.00 guy” that was my best memory about that. After I graduated I bought another car, that time I liked the car Chevy Camaro very much because it was from the movie Knight Rider with Michael Knigh, and K.I.T.T. They looked very fashion. I dreamed that I would buy that car if I had enough money. I bought that car Chevy Camaro while listening to the music from Michael Jackson everyday, and Thriller, Beattle, Madonna… a lot of memories.

TVD: Could you tell me a little bit about your social life? You said that you had many friends after you came to America… How about dating?
CDT: I helped the organization a lot as a translator. I established the English class to teach English for seniors. I gave back a lot to the organization that sponsored me and my mother before. Since 1987 to 1992, I spent time to teach math, physics, chemistry for people who needed in that organization or for adults who were seniors and wanted to learn how to adapt to a new culture and new life. Even for people who did not know how to use toilet, so after they graduated from that class, they were eligible for work. I became DJ while working in the organization from 1987-1992. I did all the DJs for all weddings, birthdays and everything. My life was having so much fun that time during the 4 years in High School. I wished I could go back to that time and keep that time still. I went to soccer and fishing because upstate New York had a lot of lakes and fishes. Fishing was very cool. I thought that if I lived in other city, I might not concentrated on my study, but I lived in upstate New York where it was so quiet so it allowed me time to concentrate on my school. Part of it, I was blessed when I lived in this city.

TVD: Did you say there were many Vietnamese-American in that area?

CDT: They were pouring into this city to date among our people. I did not think about dating since I was busy with school and dating was my secondary because I did not want to go back where I was before as someone was drowning and tried to keep the head above the water. That was my first priority and my mother was old by that time, so I tried really hard not to fail in school, worked and helped out
worker and that organization. All my daily time went by so fast with no more time left. Now when I look back, I wish I had spent time to enjoy my childhood, but that was still my good memories. There was a professor that time interviewed me for his book about Vietnamese-American. I worked with him during the time he wrote the book “Coming Home”. His name was Thomas Bass, and he was a professor in Hamilton College. He put me as a co-author of his book because the whole story was about my life and the life of all mix Americans there and he understood more about Vietnamese-American life through my own story. I also had many memories about Thomas Bass whenever people reminded me about him. He advanced the life of immigration and I wish I did more work with Thomas back then.

TVD: Talking about the experiences of Vietnamese-American. Did you say after 1975, there were many difficulties about the discrimination, so came to a place in America was it so wide and demographic?

CDT: Haha, nothing was wider than upstate New York because that was the region of Italian. They had a saying that “you can’t swing a dead cat without hitting pizzarev.” Pizzarev was everywhere people ate pizza and called that tomato pie and pizza was an upgrade! If they ever discriminated us there just because they innocently did and not in despite of us, but when they knew us they were very supportive. That was actually different from the discrimination I experienced in Vietnam. Vietnamese discriminated us out of despite, they were jealous with
Americans without doing anything about that so they vent all their angers on
ourself, I could feel that. Unlike American friends, of course they had some
discrimination but only out of innocent. They feared what they were unknown,
unlike in Vietnam, they truly hated us. So people here convinced us that they were
only joking around nothing serious could happen.

TVD: When you moved to California later, were you still working at New York
that time?

CDT: I was working at New York that time from 1992-1996. I got promotion from
engineer position to technical director at Boston, still engineer but I was no longer
an engineer. I became engineer director that meant I was in charge of a group of
engineers at Boston, and my mother also moved to Boston with her friends there
before while I still worked in New York. Utica city was no fun, but Boston had a
big Vietnamese community and it was just 4 hours of driving, so many friends who
moved from Utica to Boston to settle, and they asked my mother to move over
there to have more fun within Vietnamese community. My mother lived in Boston
about 4 or 5 years before I got the job promotion there. I decided to take that job
because that was where my mom lived. We both reunited again at Boston in 1996
after 4 years that I worked in New York. Totally I lived in New York for 15 years.
I moved to Boston for work and bought the house there.

TVD: Where did you live? In the Gloucester province
CDT: No, I lived in Chelsea. Gloucester was where many Vietnamese lived, and I lived in Chelsea across the river, East Boston, Chelsea.

TVD: Ok. Did you have any different in New York compared to Boston?

CDT: In New York I only concentrated on my work, a single guy with a condo there. I rented a condo nearby my work and worked out like crazy. I was in very good shape. I went right to the gym after work. My goal was to make the most money that I could, so I took all the overtime in the company. They never had to ask anybody else because I got pay double for overtime. When I graduated, I got the job offered of $37,500.00. I was “WOW” that was a lot of money and then I moved up slowly from a delivery newspapers guy earning few hundreds which was a lot, I even saved enough to buy my first car within 4 years. I also got promoted 3 times within 4 years, then I got the job offered in Boston and I took it. One encouragement for me when I moved to Boston was I could concentrate on my life with my mom more than my life in New York. I was getting more relationship to many people, so I started my first step to establish the D&D Entertainment. My company began from Boston city to start many shows on the weekend beside my regular job to satisfy my love of the music. I also found out about my passion which was the music that I still have until now. I worked with American people and they saw it clearly, between me and another Vietnamese promoter just like day
and night, since that time D&D Entertainment created and organized shows for casinos on the weekend, but my full time job still engineer.

TVD: Could you tell…why you named D&D?

CDT: My partner that time, the one who gave the idea, named Đặng, too. So we took the name D&D. There was a company named Anna Travel from Mr. Toan and Mrs. Nga who introduced me to the first casino and the first casino I worked with also went through this couple. They had a brother named Đặng, he always wanted to have fun so that couple advised us to create a company, D&D, so that I could guide him and D&D had created by that time.

TVD: Did you continue on with that partnership?

CDT: The other Đặng was the same, when he worked with me he was having more fun than work. After a year, he told his brother, the couple, that he could not keep up with it, but the name was already there so I kept that name, but the partnership was gone. The brand name in America was very important because D&D was known by many people since that time.

TVD: Did you still continue with this company?

CDT: Still that company and the website still D&D Entertainment.

TVD: Why did you move to California?
CDT: Pretty simple that when I worked at Boston, there was another job promotion came up at the end of 1999. There was an offer for a job from Hong Kong Telecom named PCCW, the main work of Hong Kong was in Asia, and they expanded new offices to San Francisco. They needed people with IT background major in engineering especially in telecom. I actually wanted to find a new work because I was getting bored with engineering work, so when I heard about the job open which was Regional Technical Director, that meant to manage all the branches in America for Hong Kong Telecom. I took the job and that time I could basically write down my own salary numbers. They looked for me and told me whatever made me happy, so I wrote down the numbers without thinking, and they matched it and said “OK! When can you move? “I did not seriously thinking about San Francisco, but I wanted to advance my career to see how high I could go with this current job. My work at Boston was very slow to move up, around 2 years to raise the pay rates, so I could take the job that went up as the same 5 years to stay back at the current company, so why not. I was single too so it was easy to take the job and they paid for all my relocation expenses.

TVD: For you alone? How about your mother?

CDT: It was only me my mom still lived in the house I bought in Boston. My mom lived on the second floor and first floor I rented out. I worked in the 40th floor over look the Bay Bridge of San Francisco, and I commuted every month. I flew back
every 2 weeks to see my mom. The work was very easy because it was a new company and did not have a lot of customers yet, and my job was to deal with customers over 500 companies. Before they got an office here, customers used to contact Hong Kong for services. So they opened a branch here and I became their representative to contact directly with customers. It was an easy job and in new transition about technical, but I was more like customers services. I went out to eat with customers a lot, so my background helped me until when I worked with radio everybody knew I could take care of everything. They asked that I was only in charge of the show how did I have those skills, and that was because I worked with customers services before.

TVD: Did you do this after that work?

CDT: My work in San Francisco was very fun I learned and had many friends. I made friend with Thu Phuong through a friend while I was working as engineer and organized shows. I met many people over the show business, but when I met Thu Phuong I related to her by many situations, we both were getting closed together and became fond of each other over circumstances. We talked every night, I was in San Francisco and she was in Orange County, but we talked 4-5 hours nightly. I finally made a move from San Francisco to Orange County at the end of 2006.
TVD: What is your main work now?

CDT: My main work is show promoting, and manage Thu Phuong. I am her manager, so I do all the production for her, deal with all her contracts, and work full time show promoter. That means I organize show for all states and programs D&D Entertainment here. To Orange County, D&D Entertainment was a familiar name to many people, clients and audiences.

TVD: Do you work with TV besides promoting and talkshow? I don’t know exactly.

CDT: I do not like to work with TV as much as Radio, let me tell you, because Vietnamese people used to look at the outside, for example: my co-workers here tell me before I go to the VNCR channel to work that even if they heard of the name and they are afraid of seeing me not approachable from the outlook. American people used to say “Don’t judge the book by the cover.” But Vietnamese people are opposite like you should not work for TV channel without a good outside looking to attract people. So to work for Radio, people can’t see you, only listen to the voice or the work from the character, that’s why I like it. From time to time the audiences will get used to your way of talking as I say I work to learn, and giving out a thought of the young generation. Of course the older generation lived here for long time, they had their own thoughts. No right or wrong, but for my
thoughts, I gave out my objectives for them to see. Once we considered America is our own country, we have to adapt the good things. We should retain what is good in the Asian culture and drop the ones that not so good, and it is the same as learning the good things from American culture.

TVD: Can you describe for me what subjects or topics you used to do for your shows or what title of the shows?

CDT: Ah it’s used to base on the holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year, Lunar New Year, uhm there is Autumn Festival, and Mother’s Day, Valentine. Usually it has programs about the fall, autumn leaves, sing about the fall, and programs for casino. They are there for entertainment. Some outside people are picky than others, and those are really music lovers. It is actually diversity and you can vote for it. You can be a businessman, truly a businessman when you do a show for casino, and then when you do the show for outsiders, it allows the ability to be an artist. You will be more creative and truly follow your passion. So both opportunities are really needed to support one another since you are not making any money if you only follow your passion.

TVD: What are you working on the Radio about VNCR as your side job?

CDT: Something just happened 5 months ago, I attended to a birthday party of my friend’s friend who was the president of Vietnamese Radio, Mr. Son, I only heard
about him and his successful family and business and I coincidently met him on that day. I went up to him to say happy birthday, and he invited me to work with his radio unexpectingly. I talked to him about how my objective and Mr. Son also had his own objective. I learned a lot since the day was working there compared to now. The audiences listened to us and we had the words to call it “khan thinh gia” even though a lot of people listened to the radio and told me about “thinh gia” and not “khan thinh gia” My first day at work, the audience was not used to the way I talked and mostly the people who listened were elders, they did not want me to talk too fast and too loud. I told them I would try to convey and conduct with the new audiences. There were young people who lost the culture, they saw the typical traditional way of the anchor was too old and had nothing suitable to their life. We would slowly lose that young generation. I hoped that my voice would be reasonable enough with them to keep them interested because those were needed to maintain our culture when the old generation was gone. We could not lose our culture. The old ones were not all bad but still had something good. I came to the radio station to voice our voices and my new vision.

TVD: Thinking about the Vietnamese Oral History Project, collecting and keeping our country and community’s history, do you have any legacy to leave for the next generation?
CDT: I have two wishes that I used to tell my children. I am 44 years old now and in my lifetime, I wish to see the first Asian American President, it doesn’t matter where their roots or origins, I want to see them succeed or the manner of Vietnam political party changed to multiforms instead of only one party. They are not actually changed the whole generation but at least to multiparty that means allowing the third power and gives people the rights to truly voice their concerns as the same to the world. Soviet Union had also changed to the same capitalism but allowed multiparty Relch Republic. I hope that Vietnam will also change from their inside, not only one party anymore. That the wish I want in my lifetime. I came to VNCR with the goals to let people dissect and see the problems. We learn what good for us and drop what bad for us and apply the main problem about power in Vietnam. No regime is perfect. There is no profession even in a big and wealthy country like the United States of America, they are pretty good but they still have to learn everyday. We do whatever good for our country and the Vietnamese people, so one day when we lay down we still have Vietnamese blood in our body and our children still have the Vietnamese blood wherever we live, we always think about our Vietnam country. I don’t want people whenever they think about our country, Vietnam, they think about the war, but I want them to think about the people and the country instead. For example, when talking about Japanese, we think about good electronic stuffs, Korean is cheap electronic stuffs,
Chinese is good public cities. So it has to be changed from the government and then down to the whole country.

TVD: Thank you very much for sharing many things with me today.

CDT: Thank You, you too!