

My Viet Nam War: Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: DIÊU TRANG VO

Interviewers: Faith Lam and Cynthia Brown

Date: November 12, 2021

Location: Irvine, California

Sub-collection: My Viet Nam War: Oral History Project

Length of interview: 1:43:59

Transcript

Faith [00:00:03] This is Faith Yee Shun Lam and Cynthia Brown. Today is Friday, November 12th, 2021. We will be interviewing for the first time, Mrs. Lise Vo. This interview is taking place at the Gateway Study Center on UCI Campus in Irvine, California. This interview is part of my Viet Nam War Oral History Project at UC Irvine. Would you state and spell your name?

Narrator [00:00:28] Yes, my name is Lise, L-I-S-E. Vietnamese name is Dieu Trang, D-I-E-U T-R-A-N-G, last name is Vo, VO.

Faith [00:00:39] Great? When and where were you born?

Narrator [00:00:43] I was born in Saigon in 1957.

Faith [00:00:47] OK, so let's start with a little bit about your background, can you talk? Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood?

Narrator [00:00:55] Yes. Both my parents were abroad. They were in Paris doing their their studies, and they came back to Vietnam in 1955 and two years after I was born. So I was born to parents that have had the French education. That's why when I was able to attend school, I was attending the. What do you call it before the first grade?

Faith [00:01:37] Preschool?

Narrator [00:01:40] Preschool. Preschool was at my mom's school because she opened up the school and I was going to her preschool. And in Vietnam, the way education was going, you have to take tests in order to qualify, to go to the next level and you have to compete in order to go to the better school. So my mom, even though it's just the preschool, it was pretty competitive because we have to take exams in order to go further with the first grade. Yeah.

Faith [00:02:27] So what were your parents occupations?

Narrator [00:02:31] My mom, like I said, is the director of the preschool. And my dad came back to Vietnam because he was invited by the then first president of Vietnam, Ngo Dinh Diem is the first president. They call it, "The intellect that love and care about the country." So he was they both were invited back to Vietnam under President Ngo Dinh Diem in order to work to rebuild Vietnam.

Faith [00:03:20] Great. You mentioned in your bio a little bit about your Buddhist upbringing. Can you talk a little bit about that?

Narrator [00:03:28] Yes, both. Both my mom's family and my dad's family, they are devout Buddhists. Both grandparents have. Been credited to building pagodas and schools for the Buddhist temple.

Faith [00:03:52] Yeah. OK, so talk a little bit about your schooling experiences. You mentioned that you went to school in middle, you went to middle school in Dalat.

Narrator [00:04:08] Mm-Hmm.

Faith [00:04:10] And you spent most of your other time in Saigon.

Narrator [00:04:13] Yeah, yeah. After school, after preschool, I went into a school that was taught by French nuns, so it's like a convent, but they have classes for us to go to school to. It was very strict and the curriculum is really good so that the students are very well-taught academically. And then after that, when I was about to go to sixth grade, the Vietnamese government changed from because I was going to school and it was taught in French. Everything was taught in French and then the government--- So at the time, you have two parallel system going on at the same time. One is French because of the existing French colony that we were under. And one is Vietnamese with French as like the first, the first foreign language, the first foreign language or call it the second foreign language, or English as a second language. So I was going to a school where everything was taught in French. And when I was in sixth grade, the government wants to abolish everything that has to do with the French civilization because I guess we're getting ready to invite the U.S. into the country, so it was abolished. So instead of staying with that school, then I would have to transfer to the Vietnamese system. So my mom had to let me go to Dalat because there we still have a school run by the French government, and it's called the [00:06:30] **De Se Ya San??**. [0.4s] So it was run by the French government, so they still have the French system. So I went there for sixth, seventh and eighth and eighth grade, and then after that for ninth grade, I went back to Saigon. And at that time, it is also another French school run by the French government. But when it was sixth grade, so many people wanted to go into that school, that it would just, it was just like almost impossible. That's why I have to take a detour and go to Dalat and then after that came back to Saigon

Faith [00:07:17] Just for a reference. Can you tell me what year approximately you were in Saigon for schooling

Narrator [00:07:24] Saigon 1957? So I guess 1962. I go to school in Saigon. I. Let me figure this out, because we go the other round, you are the 12th grade. We start with the 12th. Oh, it's so so when we've done, it's number one and then it's called Dat Minh Nang, meaning the very last one. So we go backwards 12 10. Nine, eight, seven. So 1962 to like 1967 or '68 I was in Saigon and probably '68, '69 and '70 those three years, I was probably in Dalat.

Faith [00:08:31] And how would you, --- sorry go ahead

Narrator [00:08:33] And then after that, I was in Saigon until the fall of '75 and still stay there until 1977.

Faith [00:08:45] Can you describe a little bit about your experience in school differed in Saigon and in Dalat?

Narrator [00:08:55] Being raised and taught by the nuns. It's so much stricter the curriculum is harder. So when I was in Dalat is like, life is good. Yeah, it was. It was much easier. Yeah.

Faith [00:09:16] Mm-Hmm. Did you ever go out from school? I'm assuming it's like a boarding school, right?

Narrator [00:09:22] No, actually, I stay with my grandmother's family and I go to school with my auntie and my uncle. I have an auntie my age and my uncle is like two or three years older. So we were dressed to school together every day. Yeah. Mm-Hmm.

Faith [00:09:42] And outside of school, did you do anything in Dalat or in Saigon?

Narrator [00:09:49] Um, like I said, because we were in Dalat and in Saigon. Life, we were very sheltered from the war. We heard about it, we know it's there, but we never experienced it firsthand. And I guess our family were, we were lucky, so we didn't have too many people being drafted and. We're not not seeing fatalities in the family. So, like I said, we were pretty sheltered and and life is just normal life, you know, we uh, we go to school, we go home, we play, we go out to eat. Summer vacations, we go either to the mountain or to the seaside. So. It's just normal.

Faith [00:10:53] So were there any procedures in school preparing for the war in any way?

Narrator [00:10:58] No, no, no, I don't see it. I don't see. There was time and don't quote me for this because I don't remember the time. But there were times when, yes, there were times when we know more about the war, as in the North would. Well.

Patrick [00:11:25] The American troops came to Vietnam?

Narrator [00:11:27] No, no, no. I'm talking about the I'm sorry, I'm sorry, but the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese would with the ammunition from Soviet Union would especially from China. Really, I don't know what they do, but they have these things and they would shoot like these, these big. What they call it, I've got the name of it, but it's these, it's like under the water, you will call it a torpedo. But this is, you know, through the air. So there were a time when we have to like and in the middle of the night when there is. What is it called? Um. So when they would do that, then we have to have like a barricade with sandbags and everything on top and then us as children? Yeah. Now I recall. As a children, we have to get underneath it so that if those hits our home, then at least they were sheltered. And we won't suffer from that. Yeah.

Faith [00:12:50] And how did that make you feel? Do you have any feelings during that time?

Narrator [00:12:55] You know, as being kids? We play all day and we just think that is an inconvenience to be waking up in the middle of the night and get underneath there. And you know, it's not as good to smell the the the sand and everything. But I was I was very young then, so it's more like an inconvenience. But like I said, we we don't see it. We just hear it. And I've never experienced it firsthand.

Faith [00:13:29] Do you remember how old you were when that happened?

Narrator [00:13:33] Oh. I would think maybe. Nine, ten, nine, ten.

Cynthia [00:13:46] So you mentioned in your bio, kind of some of the suppression of the Buddhist religion under President Ngo Dinh Diem. Ngo Dinh Diem. Ngo Dinh Dium, right. So if you could elaborate a little further on that and how your family was?

Narrator [00:14:06] Yeah, the funny thing is my father was invited back by the President Ngo Dinh Diem. And he was working in the in the government as being pretty high ranking in the government. But one day, you know, I found out that he was being jailed. It's because he was with his friends, had written a letter asking for the stopping of the bombarding of the North Vietnam. It's because although he's from the south, he was thinking that he came back to help rebuild the country and. He's from the south but don't think that there is no reason to bombard and to kill Vietnamese people living in the North. So he was one of the people who signed that letter to ask President Diem to stop the bombarding and he was jailed. So that's the first one. That's the first time when I understood what being in jail is. And then just a little bit after that, it was my mom's sister and the younger generations like my aunts, uncles, they are pretty much against President Diem because from what I learn, he is a good person, so good that he would let his family kind of took over and do the things that they wanted to and he couldn't stop them. And it was his. It was his brother and his brothers. He has one brother who's very much like the vice president of Vietnam. And he has a brother that is like, I think a Colonel and some very high ranking priest and especially the the I think he's like the vice president or prime minister, but he has a wife and she is very, very into religion and would think that there must be just one religion and no other religion in Vietnam. And when most of us come from the background of being Buddhist, more than anything else we learn of Christianity is through the taking over of the French civilization. And a little bit before that, when there was some Spanish priests who came to the country to spread their Christianity. Yeah, but the sister in law, it's really a dictator more or less and President Ngo Dinh Diem just could not stop her and she was doing things. I don't know if it's behind his back, but she was not being fair to the rest of the population who are not Christian.

Cynthia [00:18:14] So you said it was your mother's sister, was it?

Narrator [00:18:20] Oh yeah, sorry, I'm sorry. So my mother's sister was in prison just like my dad. I remember that it is my poor mother, you know, being pregnant and having to go in and out of prison to take care of her husband. And then after that, of her sister because they were in the movement of asking for other religions to be accepted in the country. My mom even have a cousin who has been in and out of prison. She was 16 when she got out of high school, very smart and talented young woman that she was in the movement and she was in and out of the prison. So much that the last time when she was released, the one of the high ranking officials said, "Okay, next time, I don't think I can save your life anymore. So what I can do for you is I can send you away abroad so that you won't get back into the situation where you are in the movement again and being in prison again. So she was sent to. So at the time is like. French is with our we were a colony of the French for a long time, and then we were having the U.S. coming in. But then my mom's cousin was asking to go to Germany and to us at the time is like Germany is something so far away, so foreign because we don't speak German and German is totally different from, you know, English or French. So but yes, she went there and she became a professor at the

Munich University for Asian Studies and Buddhist Philosophy. Yeah. So it's really a big movement for the young people at the time who are not Christian. Yeah, they really have to fight in order to be free to worship Buddhism.

Cynthia [00:20:57] So the year this was approximately what?

Narrator [00:21:01] I think, like 1963, 1960, '62, '63 in the early 60s. Right? Okay.

Cynthia [00:21:15] Another event that you mentioned in your bio that was very important is this self immolation of a Buddhist monk

Narrator [00:21:28] There was this one Buddhist monk that is that was very, very famous because I think at the time it was President Kennedy and he set fire to himself and he sat there and is because with Buddhism, you do a lot of Zen Buddhism, you do a lot of meditation. So he was able to sit through the whole thing in meditation and being able to. And he passed away. So that was a very big throwback for Mrs. Nhu, is the name of the [Ngo Dinh Diem's] sister in law. So it was a big cry that finally came out of the country and that President Kennedy was really, you know, being bothered by that. I think and with the the when you set something on fire like that with the Buddhists, it's a very peaceful, it's a very peaceful religion. We don't go to war in order to have more territories and everything. But this is just to show people that they could sacrifice their life just to have a voice and to save. You know, are the Buddhists and Buddhism to be in the country? And it's not about violence. It is an act of sacrifice and of how do I say it, that you devote yourself to the to the to the right of the people. So and I did not witness that one, but after that there were others and it's because I was there with another one that happens just in front of the House of the Parliament. I was too young, but I'm not sure if they saved him, but I don't think so. But it wasn't as famous as the first one that President Kennedy and everybody talked about, and Mrs. Nhu at the time would just say, "Oh, he just barbecued himself." That's how she took this. Yeah.

Faith [00:24:12] How did you end up at the self-immolation?

Narrator [00:24:15] Oh, my aunt has a pharmacy and it's just right in front of the House of Parliament. So in the front, they have this really nice park, and the monk was doing some of the motions right in front, right in the park, in front of the House of Parliament. So so what I have witnessed is the tear gas because at the time, that's how the police would suppress anybody. So they threw tear gas. So yeah, I have many times experienced tear gas because we have like a pharmacy right there in front of the House of Parliament. So whenever they have a demonstration, we'll always get tear gas because they would use that in order to send everybody away.

Cynthia [00:25:13] Do you remember what what time of day the event took place? Was it in the morning?

Narrator [00:25:19] I think it was in the afternoon. I was in the afternoon, I would say about 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. Yeah, it is not that easy to even do a self-immolation because the police will always be there to stop those things from happening because they don't want to have that. You know. These kind of news coming out, so.

Faith [00:25:46] Do you remember how it felt? Do you have any feelings about that?

Narrator [00:25:50] Oh, I guess I remember I was crying because I was thinking, it is so hard for somebody to have to go through that. It's uh, you know, I saw like somebody, a alive person in a torch, and it was really hard.

Cynthia [00:26:26] So I'm moving on. In your response, you said you get asked about the Americans that said, you remember the first time that you remember when the American armies came. So could you describe maybe the first time you met some Americans coming abroad?

Narrator [00:26:49] And yeah, it's really funny. You know, now that I'm grown up, I probably would not think the same way. I think is discriminating, but it's because I was raised with the French civilization. So and like I said, we have a storefront right in front of the House of Parliament, so it's like it's in the center of everything. So we were so used to the finesse of the French and you know how the French are because of all the colonies and everything, and the French always have their way of handling things and and then, you know, it's like they have their elegance to it. And then here comes t the young soldiers from the US. They I guess they have been in the forest where they are fighting a fight that they probably don't really know why they're here. And, you know, they don't really see the reason for them to sacrifice their life for it. And so the once in a while, they get to come back to the city. So you will see all these Hawaiian, you know, these colorful Hawaiian shirts and the Bermuda shorts, you know, which is just the total opposite of, you know, the French with their, you know, white shirts and, well ironed pants and jackets and everything. And, you know, all the nice ladies and everything. And so we saw a lot of, I would say, male Americans because before with the French, you see the husband, wife, the family, the kids and things like that. And then when the soldiers, the American soldiers came, it's pretty much it's just themselves. And is this a clash in the in the in the two, I guess, you know, there was no transition and then you just wonder, you see this and then later on, you just see a totally different, you know, transition.

Cynthia [00:29:40] So you would say it was mostly soldiers that you were meeting, right?

Narrator [00:29:44] I think so. I think so. I think so. With the French before because they were colony so they have all these set things in the government and everything for them to be there. But when the American came, it's more like a lot of soldiers and soldiers and probably, you know, advisors, but I think that's about it.

Cynthia [00:30:16] Yeah. And is there any particular, is there any particularly memorable event that you had, like an interaction with a soldier?

Narrator [00:30:28] Actually, I have to add something that I forgot. They're very friendly. They're very friendly. They're very joyful. It's the opposite of French where they're so, you know, stuck up. And so the American soldiers are much more friendly or, you know, with the kids the than they meet outside and everything. And plus, like I said, I guess it's because they don't have a family and they really do miss their family. So you do see a lot of Americans or young soldiers outside and, you know, trying to talk to the Vietnamese kids and, you know, they would probably try to sell them something cigarettes or something like that, but they're very friendly. Yeah. So that's the other difference.

Faith [00:31:28] Once the Americans kind of stepped into Vietnam, did your life and schooling or did your family dynamic change in any way because of their occupation in Vietnam?

Narrator [00:31:45] I guess I don't see much of that, because although my father is came from a French background and French schooling and everything, but he's very avant garde, so he doesn't think that French is the way to go. But he always think that the United States it's better, would offer our country a better future. And he always think that although America is a younger country, it would be a country that would evolve for the better. So with my father, because although he has French schooling, his English is very good. So I guess in our house, we didn't see much of a transition. But I think for the rest of population, I think when the American came, I think life is easier for them. You know, it's not like the French that would just consider you as their subordinates and servants and because we were their colony, with American is so much more open minded. And I think although, like I said at the beginning, there was a clash of seeing the two culture, we eventually enjoy having the Americans in our country.

Faith [00:33:38] So, we're talk about a little bit about you talked about in your bio. That's a lot of talked about. You talked about in your bio that you were there for Tet Mau Than. Yes. For us, it would be Tet Offensive in America. Can you describe a little bit about your experience there in Dalat?.

Narrator [00:34:07] Yeah. So every every year during the Tet to us, the Tet is very important and we would always have a big break from school. So my father's family is we're all come from the center and my mom and my dad. But my dad's family settled in Nha Trang. Nha Trang is a seaside important town and Dalat is an important town up in the mountains. So my maternal family is in Dalat, but my paternal family's in Nha Trang. So dad would usually go to Nha Trang first to be with grandma. And then after that, just right after the first of the year, then he would travel to Dalat to be with us. But during Tet Mau Than, it's like everything was, we were just disconnected, you know, phone lines. The streets are being barricaded. And you know, there was the war going on and and the north come in and they destroy a lot of the infrastructure. So we were pretty much isolated, so we didn't know. Afterwards, we knew that from Nha Trang, since he couldn't go to Dalat, went back to Saigon. But at the time, we didn't know because the line was jammed to Saigon, we just couldn't communicate. But you know, and then at the time, at the time there was we were on the third floor and there was a battle going on right in front of us. So a lot of people that live like a little bit outside of Dalat would have to, you know, just evacuate and come and stay at my mom's family. My grandmother's house. So that's when we kids love it so much because for cousins that we don't, we don't know them that well, there were time when we all lived together in the same house. And, you know, the adults would worry about the war and worry about, you know, will we have enough food for who knows how long anything like that with us kids is like, it's a great, you know, instead of having to eat the same healthy food all the time, we get to eat something like a cup of noodle or something like that. We love it. But the adult, you know, it's just like the emergency thing. But you know, to us, we love it. We didn't have to go to school. You know, everybody at home with us, you know, is usually people. Our parents will have to go to work because this the time when everybody's at home and in the house instead of being like 20 is like 200. And it's just to us kids. It's it's oh, we didn't know much. So it was a fun time for us. But on that, on that year, I mean, we literally see fights going on and there'll be time when you know, there was crossfire, right, right on, on the street and we've seen dead bodies, and that's the first time, and I've witness like somebody that was killed in the middle of the street and nobody would pull that person on. And every time you move, you will see jets of blood coming up. And that's the first time. And I guess the only time I really see the war going on right in front of me.

Faith [00:38:21] So were you inside the house?

Narrator [00:38:22] Yeah, we were. We were. Yeah, we were up on the third floor. That's when we saw all that and it was New Year. So, you know, we were ready to take pictures and things like that. So my uncle took a lot of pictures from what he saw. And then at the time, because we took color, color pictures, it could not be developed in Vietnam. So it's always like you bring it to Sears, and then Sears would develop it and give it back to you. And he was so afraid of selling those off because he was. He has a feeling that he would never see them back because it's such and such, I guess lively things that we see. It's the war and everything. So sure enough, it was like 20 some of the, you know, 36 exposures that he sent away, and he sent it a different time because he didn't want to, you know, put our eggs in one basket and we never would get them back. Yeah, those pictures, we never get them back.

Faith [00:39:40] So they're sending it to Sears. As in to where?

Narrator [00:39:45] All right. I guess it's like, it's not like even Sears. I think it's like a PX [Post Exchange] Because we're in Vietnam at the time, we couldn't develop. We don't have colored TV. It's black and white. And for those pictures we develop, it has to go to the PX and then we'll get them back. But we never get them back.

Cynthia [00:40:09] Yeah. Do you remember how many days you were like stuck in the house?

Narrator [00:40:18] Oh, I would say maybe two weeks, two weeks or three weeks or something like that. I mean, we had fun and I will be playing cards and things like that. And, you know, it's just that the grown up will have to find things for us to do so that we don't, you know, break down the house. So. To us, you know, it was scary, but it was a fun time.

Faith [00:40:49] I want to go back just a little further from Tet Offensive and talk a little bit more about the American armies. Do you remember there are like specific American goods or anything that came in because you were talking about Cup O' Noodles --

Narrator [00:41:03] Oh yes

Faith [00:41:05] that we have when their occupation came to Viet Nam--

Narrator [00:41:08] Oh yes. Oh yes. That's why I said that life is good because we have, you know, in Vietnam, we have PX [Post Exchange]. So I like I said, that the American soldiers are very friendly. And you know, and like the French were there, there is like a class thing. The American soldiers are very friendly. And like I said, they are. Now that I think back, they were really young and actually they have to face life and death whenever they're outside of Saigon. And I guess they didn't know why they have to do this, and they really didn't know why if there is another chance for them to come back to civilization once they are in those, you know, those troubles everyday. So whenever they come back, they're really wild and they're really friendly. So, you know, little kids won't get to smoke cigarettes because they would buy it and give it to them. Everybody would be chewing gum with something that the French will never do because they're so stuck up, you know, so when you see people with, you know, chewing gums and and you know, people get to

eat hot dogs and, you know, with the cheese on top and things like that. So. So that's one like I said, like, life is good because for us to be privileged with the French and we still get to eat all these imported stuff. But for most of the people, it was hard under the French time in order for them to afford those things. And when it comes, the American people, you know, they think the soldiers will buy things from the PX and go out, even either give it to the kids or sell it to make a little bit of profit. But life is totally different. It wasn't just the local market. They even have a market where all they sell is, you know, dry food like Ritz or the crackers and things like that. But there's like little rations so that they can go in the jungle and still survive their food ration. And they would either give it or sell it. You know, you see those things or the most of the Vietnamese would get to see something different than what they used to see before. Mm-Hmm. So I think the impact is pretty. It's pretty wide and it's pretty pleasant.

Faith [00:44:13] Mm-Hmm. You referenced PX [Post Exchange] as PX like a convenience store?---

Narrator [00:44:18] It is. I wonder what they call. You see you all grow up here and you don't even know that. You know, it's even like we have. We have a military. What is it? It's let me see, it's up in, near Santa Anita. You know, near Santa Anita. And there is like a big military, a fort, like a fort. But here in California, you don't see too many of that. And inside of that, there is a PX [Post Exchange], a PX is like a market where they sell everything to the military. So usually you buy things from there. There is no tax, like prices better. So it's better than a Costco. It's smaller than a Costco, but is better than a Costco because they have all these privileges and everything. Mm-Hmm. Mm-Hmm. Yeah. Oh.

Faith [00:45:45] Do you remember if you still have contact with any American veterans or have you met one since?

Narrator [00:45:53] You know, actually my aunt, the one who sponsor me here from because I was a boat person. So my aunt, I have to need a sponsor in order to get out of Malaysia, and my aunt was the one who sponsored me. And she actually got married with one of those soldiers because she was. Before that, she was a teacher, a middle school teacher, but she had studied English a long time ago. So when the American came on, her other job is to teach Vietnamese to English. It's not a soldier, its higher that what you call it. The---

Cynthia [00:46:56] The officers?

Narrator [00:46:58] The officers, yeah. So she was teaching Vietnamese to the officers. That's when she met her future husband. You know, he served in Vietnam, and then he went back. And then if you volunteer again, you get to go for another round, but it's like you always get a chance to come back. You don't have to do it. You don't want to do it a second time. But I think he came back three times because they were in love. So he went back three times and then after that, she went to America and they got married. Mm-Hmm. Yeah. You know, it was not easy for her to get permission from my grandmother because even if you marry a French or an American, that's even worse. You know, but they did. They don't, they don't favor that. Yeah.

Faith [00:47:57] You mentioned a little bit about you being part of the boat people. So could you elaborate a little bit more about how you came to the US. Your journey from leaving?

Narrator [00:48:08] Yeah. Like I said, you know, I grew up being sheltered and pretty much everything in my life was all planned by my parents. So my dad, his dream has always to help the country, his whole family. They're all very smart. And grandpa has always taught them to not to serve any party, but just to serve your people, your country, [00:48:52] nothing(??). [0.0s] His grandpa is like, there's no party. It's not like communists or whatnot. But he said, You know, you just serve your people, you serve your country, but you don't go into any parties. So dad was living in the south, but was still be thinking of Vietnam as the whole, you know, north and south. Not just the south only. So when came 1975, we were very privileged. So my mom had all the passports and the visa for us to get out of Vietnam and to go to France. But at the last minute, dad said that, no, that's it. You know, actually, you can go with the kids, but I'm going to stay. And his excuse at the time was that grandma is home alone and he can't just leave her and she's too old to travel. So that was his excuse. But deep down it's because he was thinking, it doesn't matter that, you know, the South or the North. He has always been there to serve the country and to serve the people. So he wanted to stay. He has been abroad and he thought that with his education, it's the value of his life is to be able to help the country, to rebuild the country. They always talk about rebuilding the country because the country has been torn by the war. So many times, you know, we have the Chinese and then we have the French, and then we have the Japanese, and then we have the French. And then now it's the Americans. So, you know, that was his thinking. So he's so mom knew, mom knew it was just an excuse because mom knew that that wouldn't leave his country. So mom then decided none of us are going. And at the time, we were still hoping that, you know, whatever dad think is the right thing, and we were just hoping that all of us. You know, we were thinking we didn't do anything wrong, we didn't kill anybody. We, dad wasn't in any party, so we thought that, you know, we're just going to stay and serve the country and everything should be OK. So we stay. And there was this one time my dad is very, he's such a wise man and he's very philosophical. So he has a brother who is a high ranking officer in the North, in the North party, in the Communist Party. And there was one time when we would just, you know. Just kind of cooking together. You know, it's like we're barbecuing together and everything. And I remember his brother looking at him and said in a very in the very small, the nice voice. But he asked my dad, he said, "Why didn't you take your family and escape?". He was using the word escape in the fall of Saigon, and then my dad was very quiet. And just the three of us and my dad was very quiet. He said, You know, sometimes you just missed the boat. That's all, that's all they say, you know, nothing more than that. But then I knew that from my dad saying that he did see that what he was hoping is not coming it's not clear. It's not there. So he said, you know, sometimes you just missed the boat. That's the only time I hear my dad, you know, saying something like that and we never discussed about it. But then I have a brother. He's three years. He's three years younger than I. And at the time I was 19, you know, '75, I was 18. And when I was 19, he was 16. And, you know, we thought that we stay and the war is over. It's going to be a peaceful life. Finally, we can, you know, live a good life. But no, the North was under the leadership of China, was fighting with Cambodia, so they would take the young people from the south and would use them as the new army to fight Cambodia. And when my brother reached 16, that's when he has to be drafted. They would never call drafting. They call it [00:54:26] "Than Men Xon Font"?? [0.0s] meaning that you by your own will, would want to get into this to save your country. But it's actually it's not a choice, they just draft them and you can't get out of it. So mom knew that my brother is going to die if he has to go. So mom had come together with other people to build a boat so that we can escape. So that was the real reason. And, you know, things is really bad, but that's business. But if it was some because my brother is going to risk his life, that mom decided,

you know, dad, let mom decide that we're going to try to get out. So on the day that it was supposed to be for my brother only. And then because dad won't let me go because I'm the only girl and knowing that, you know, boys are easier because they can take care of themselves. So girls isn't that easy. So Dad didn't want to let me go. But just the night before the boat left, my mom said to my dad, my mom said, You know what? I would rather let her die looking for freedom than let her stay here and die because of all the oppression that we're going through. So just the night before the boat, the boat left. That's when my dad decided to let me go. So it was me and my brother. And the reason why is because we cannot go together. Grandpa's house is really big. So when the communists came, they took over your land, your house. They surrounded you, they watch you, they you know, they will never let you be free. So we live in the house with 175 North Vietnamese soldiers, so we cannot just altogether go because we live with them. They would know right away that we tried to escape. So my brother went first, saying that he's going away to college and that on that day I just left and that my mom later on was saying that, you know, grandma in Dalat was sick, so I have to go there to take care of grandma. But that's when we, my brother and I, we escaped. Life was really hard. After the Communists took over, I have to say that we thought that is going to be peace and everything. No, it was just another fight. You know? A fight that we can't win. I have to say that. The North Vietnamese was very, very, very, because of the war. So they didn't have a chance, the people that didn't have a chance to know what technology is. They, they don't have a chance for anything. So that's why when like when we lived with those soldiers, 175 of them. I mean, we could hate them saying that, you know, they took over the country and now they're not letting us live in our own home and everything. But it is hard to hate them because when you live with them and you know what they went through and you know what they have been, how they have been brainwashed to fight this fight because they thought that, you know, South Vietnam is like we are under oppression. You know, they chain us, they kill us. They don't. You know we were left to die with no food and things like that. But actually, life is good, life is really good. So when like when I get to live with them, it is so hard to hate them. Because when you know what they went through and what the government had fed them, all the news and everything, and you just feel sorry for them because they were just like other people being duped into fighting this war. Yeah, they I mean, we, they are the winner. They live with us. But, you know, every day what they eat it's going to be, if they're lucky, if they get rice. But the rice that is not molded and what they do is they eat it with the water lily, the on choy. And they don't even have soy sauce or fish sauce to dip it in. The only thing they were given is salt. So, you know, dirty, muddy salt. And then they just take the water from the rice and put it into salt and later on they would dip the vegetable into it. So it's just for you to see that, although they're winners, it's the top people that are having all the good stuff and the soldiers are still the one that have left, you know? Carrying all the burdens and getting nothing out of it.

Faith [01:00:33] Yeah. Do you remember your experiences of when the North Vietnamese took over your grandfather's house?

Narrator [01:00:41] 1975, April and I would say I would say like two weeks after. Two or three weeks after, you know, when they kind of know where things are and anything. And the North Vietnamese win is because they have a lot of infiltration. So they have people who work for their living, you know, being the chauffeur, the maid or, you know, the guardian. And so that's why they pretty much know what's going on. Mm-Hmm.

Cynthia [01:01:15] And this was, to clarify this was your grandfather's house was in Saigon?

Narrator [01:01:20] In Saigon. In Saigon. Yes. So, you know, we would have air conditioner and the soldiers will go in and they'll open all the windows and they'll go in front of the air conditioner and flip their shirt up and because they don't know what the air conditioner is and they live in the house and we have, my parents have to pay for the. We still have to pay for the electricity bill and that's how it happens. And then, you know, it's like when and they live upstairs. We're downstairs and whenever the floor is dirty, they went out and they found a garden hose and they go into the bathroom and they'll hook up the hose and they'll just hose the floor. And, you know, one day we were just like hearing this, you know, waterfall cascade coming down. We didn't know what it was and it was them, you know, hosing down everything. They don't have houses to live. They don't know what it's like to live a civilized, civilized life. So actually, like I said at the beginning, we were, you know, I'm very unhappy about it. But the more we know what they have to go through, we kind of feel for them, but not for the whole system, but for them.

Faith [01:02:41] Yeah. Can you elaborate a little bit more about what your family was doing while the North Vietnamese was occupying---

Narrator [01:02:50] Oh, OK.

Faith [01:02:51] The house??---

Narrator [01:02:51] So dad is the CEO [Chief Executive Officer] of, it is a family business, and he's the CEO of. What is it? What you call it, I forgot. All of a sudden I forgot. He has like a steel mill where you make round things for construction. You know, the steel for construction those. Yeah. So it was taken over because with the Communists, no private party would own anything. So they took over. But of course, they don't know how to run it. So my dad is still running it, but they would have meetings. These are the things they're really good at. They're having meetings so that the workers would say, oh. With like with the Chinese Revolution, you know where, where they have people talking bad things about their owners, their boss and everything like that and would punish them. So that's what they're very good at. But with my father, like I said, because he's not into making money for himself. He's more into for the country. So they could never find fault for him. So but then he still had to crank out all the productions. And then at night, the big trucks that are really, they would put the, they would cover all the trucks and they would take all the productions and drive it to the north because the North doesn't have any. But they will never tell the South that we don't have any. They would also said, "Oh, we have plenty of things." But they would go in and they would take everything from the south and drive it to the north to rebuild the north. So dad don't have the production yet. He doesn't get paid. So when they take your thing, they would do an IOU, you know, but they don't pay you. But at least they gave you the gasoline. They give you the diesel. They give you the still in order for you to. After what is all done, then they have to give you the new stuff for you to make the steel. But they don't pay you. And then my mom would just have to sell everything we have. You know, it start with her jewelry and then it goes down to just anything we have in order to be able to pay the payroll because we have payroll. If we don't pay the people, then yes, they are going to go back and they will say that my dad is a bad person because they work for him, but he doesn't pay. So my mom would just have to borrow, just have to do anything just to have enough money to pay for the payroll every week. And mom, who I said used to have a pharmacy. So now she goes in and works as in the production line for her, for a laboratory. So now, instead of selling things at the drugstore, she is making those medicine. So she goes in and actually you are being

favored when you are a worker. So like, my dad is an owner, you know, ex-owner, that's no good. We will never be able to go to school if it wasn't for mom who now works at the factory. So life is, our life is a little bit better. Because of that. We get, you know, like by the bacon and because everything is a ration and you know, you don't have, you cannot just buy things anymore. Everything is at the. So, you don't have the regular market anymore. They have this big places where, you know, food is no good, but that's all we could get. And we're lucky to get some, you know, the vegetable and the oil and the salt and everything. Everything is the ration. So thanks to my mom working as a worker, we were able to, you know, have some to live on.

Faith [01:08:03] Do you remember anything about the fall of Saigon in 1975?

Narrator [01:08:09] Yes, because one of my aunt or uncle who was living with us was being picked up. So he works for the then president, Nguyen Van Thieu and he, his job is. He works at the, it's like at the White House, but he's like a press person. And he was lucky enough that his English and his French is pretty good. So what happened is when a foreign press person come into the country, he's the one that drives them around. You know, I guess the South, just like North, would want to show only what they want to show. So but he was better as in, he would tell the press if they want to go to somewhere that is not supposed to, he still helping them because he wants the truth to come out. So one of the Australian press person was very impressed with his work, so he said he would come and pick them up before the fall of Saigon. You know, we were there. We knew that the North Vietnamese troop is coming closer, but never in my mind. I would think that the North Vietnamese would really take over and that the Americans would just leave us like that. I mean, it's very surreal. So if you ask me what happened during those first days, it's like you live in a world where you were saying, "Oh, I'm going to wake up from this nightmare". It never, never, ever, ever dawn on us that this is going to be real. You know, we fought for so long and. I guess we were sheltered from the news outside in order to know what's going on. So we didn't know that the American is going to abandon us and you know, that's why what has happened lately with what was the country that---

Cynthia [01:10:56] Afghanistan.

Narrator [01:10:57] Afghanistan is exactly like it. It's exactly like it. I remember seeing a documentary done by one of President Kennedy's niece, and she was saying that the Americans is good at getting in, but they don't plan for their exit strategy. And during that whole, that whole documentary, that's the sentence that I think rings so true, it rings so true. We get in, but we never planned in advance. You know what to do if, if, if, if and if and. And I guess it's just at a certain moment. You know, we decide that's what it is, and I think I don't know. Number one is I don't think maybe it's not the right thing. Number two, I don't think it's a bad thing. Yeah. Just like my dad is in doing business, it's easier, but for the people who was involved in the war, just like Patrick, who was sitting here, he was in re-education camp. They hate it when you said, it's like the Vietnamese would say they wouldn't call it re-education camp. They have a very nice word for it and in order to lure them in, they said, "Oh, you're going to go for a week". And they'd pack things for a week. And it's like, him, I think it's like 10 or 13 years that he was in there. So I think for people like that, it's really unfair because they are the one who, you know, believe in a war and fought together with all the American soldiers. And, you know, last minute and I'm sure some American soldiers are being left there, too. But, you know, I wish we have a better exit strategy.

Faith [01:13:24] So do you remember when you realize that the Americans are just going to leave the country, just exit?

Narrator [01:13:33] You know, it's actually even when we, even when all of that happened, even before I left the country, like in 1977, that's two years after, we still think that somehow, you know. Other forces are going to come in and save us from this situation. I mean, it's really, really, really hard. So, you know, people would, like my parents and his and their friends, you know, they're working all day. But then all they're waiting for is, I think, at 8:30 at night when they can go in and clandestinely listen to "Voice of America" or the BBC [British Broadcasting Company]. Because they're still hoping that the situation will change. It's really surreal, really. So like when we see what happened to Afghanistan, we totally feel it and not myself, but I have a friend who actually sponsor, will sponsor or in the process of sponsor a family because she was saying, you know, we were in that boat before, so we were hoping for other people to help us. And so she said, you know, just pay it forward.

Cynthia [01:15:16] So you mentioned your time going up to the boat. Could you describe how the boat left? How the boat left and your time on the water?

Narrator [01:15:29] Yeah, like I said my my brother left like two or three weeks before to be on that fishing boat so that he'll be used to what it is and then be there so that the boat can leave when the good time comes because we have to bribe the North [01:15:54] American [Vietnamese??] [0.1s] soldiers so that they would just close their eyes when we get out of the river and go into high sea. So and then, you know, you bribe, but then you know this person, you bribe this person, but then you don't have enough money or facilities to bribe everybody along that river. So, my brother was there first and then. Like I said, dad decide to let me go with him just the day before. And on that day, I left thinking that mom and dad are going to be with me because mom knew that if she said that, you know, it's going to go out on your own-- So she said, why don't you get on the boat first? And then we'll eventually from different places and we merged together and then we'll go. And I remember so when we were driving down because dad's still have a car, we were driving down and mom would say, "Remember this church". Mom said, "Remember this church because it has a high tower". Mom said, "Remember this church, if you are not successful and the escape fail. Remember I will be, we will all wait for each other here. So mom kept saying, "Remember this church [01:17:26][inaudible 1:17:26]. [0.0s] But you know, I was crying so hard. Not because I know I'm not going to see my mom anymore because I thought she's going to go with me. But it's because I'm not going to see, you know, my nanny. I'm not going to see my friends, I'm not going to see my dog. And I was crying so hard that I don't think I saw which church it was. So when and then, you know, the Vietnamese people, they're very small. So it's like. And out of the range, I mean, totally. So the people that built the boat together with my mom, they said, you know, even if you give me the number one actress and that everybody knows I would take her down to the boat because I can make her ugly. I can put charcoal on her and mud on her and make her ugly. But I'm not going to take your daughter because nobody, everybody would know that she is from the big city and she's down here because we're going to try to escape on a boat because of my size. I'm so big and it's like my glasses are so thick that I cannot see without them. But, you know, in the countryside, nobody wear glasses, you know? So I had to take out my glasses and I have to wear, you know, peasants clothing that my mom every night I see her in in the balcony all the time. I didn't know why. And actually, every night she would because she would made out clothes for me. You like brown color, black color. And every night she'll put it up there so that it would show that its

new clothes so that when I wear it won't be so obvious that, you know, I'm wearing this for the first time. So anyway, they gave it to me and it's like the other family looked at me and the lady said, "No, there is no way she could go down there and people not know. So if she goes, everybody is going to be in prison because of it". So they went back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. So finally, they let me go, but without my glasses, so I just couldn't see anything. And you know, when you go on the boat, they have this little wooden planks that you have to go and the boat is moving like this [moving in waves] and you have to go another planks. It's like, [01:19:59]Oh my God, [0.3s] I was down on my four feet. So like, I couldn't see. But again, to me, at the time is more like sadness because you have to leave the country. I wasn't afraid just because the sadness just took over you and you forgot how it is to be afraid. And I was lucky. I mean, the boat went for seven days and and before that we were in Malaysia, but we didn't know we were in Malaysia. We looked in and they have sarong and they're dark skinned. So it could be Malaysia and Cambodia, but if it's Cambodia, then they cut our throat right away. So we didn't know. So anyway, so we went in finally because we think they are Malaysians. And after that, the, I think the mayor of that town and I think it's like a Coast Guard, the captain of the Coast Guard or something like that came to our boat and we were so happy. We thought that this is it, right? This is on the sixth, the fifth day, fifth, sixth day. And then they came out. So they gave us water, they filled up our tank, they gave us food. And then he said, "But you know what? Right now, the U.S. is not taking in any more refugees". And that changed all the time. This is like, this month is like this, and next month it's going to be something different and it's going to be for a couple of months and then they change all the time. So I guess it's the Congress decided they're going to give the budget or not. So they were saying that we can't take you in, so they're going to pull us out to the international water. And he said that, "You know what, the only place you can go to is Hong Kong, because Hong Kong is a hub where no matter what, they will take you in". See but we have a river boat and we can go along like the coast is like this [draws South Eastern Asia coastline on paper] and also our boat can go along the coast. But Hong Kong is over here [gestures Hong Kong location in relation to Malaysia]. It's all the way over here. There is no way that from here we will get out of the-- go on high sea and we're going to die. You're going to die for sure. And Hong Kong is up north and you have to go through high sea. So when--so we knew we were going to die because we knew that there is no way this boat is going to survive that. And so before he left, the officer before he left, he shook hands with everybody, and we was just saying, "Yeah, this is it. You know, he's saying the final goodbye because we're going to die". So I'll cry, you know me, I cried all the time and I cried so much that I fell asleep. So when I woke up, you know, I was, you know, cleaning my face and everything, and I see this piece of paper in my hand and it has it actually has a drawing of the coastal and it says that, you know, "You are here". You know, "if you go north one more day, you will reach Terengganu and there, the Red Crescent will take you in. So, the Americans are not going to take us in, but the Red Crescent is a different story, is an international thing. But the officer, I guess, I don't know if it's the officer. I just knew I had that piece of paper in my hand. I I couldn't remember who gave it to me. But then when you think about it, he's the only one who shook hands, so he probably gave it then. But I was so afraid that I don't even know it was there. So I said, "Go up one more day and then you will get to Trengganu and the Red Crescent will take you in. Do not go to Hong Kong. You will peril. That's what it says on the piece of paper. So I came and I gave it to the elders and they all said, "Don't believe her because she just want to go home to her parents. Don't believe her. She doesn't want to go. So that's why she said not to go to Hong Kong". But I have an uncle who actually is the engineer that built that boat and he, together with my father. My father was like the CEO [Chief Executive Officer], and it's like he's a CTO [Chief Technology Officer] because the technologies. So that's why he built

that boat. So he said, "No, actually, my--- my nieces cannot be that smart. If she says go to Trengganu and the Red Cross would take you, that is something she knows because with her education, she knows about the Red Cross. But there is no way that she would know that we land in Malaysia and the Malaysian is against anything to have to do with the [Red] Cross, and they don't call it the Red Cross and they call it the Red Crescent ." So my uncle was saying, "No, she can't be that smart. She's not faking it". So that's why even though they pull us out to the international waters, it's just right. [gestures to close distance to coast on drawn map] Not too far. And then we just go north. And sure enough, a day later, we end up in Trengganu. Yeah. So, you know, it's just like we can plan for everything, but faith, it's just happened. You know, somebody decide to help us. And we survived.

Faith [01:26:10] Was it just you you mentioned there was like somebody else on the boat was it just your brother--

Narrator [01:26:15] It's 24 people on the boat.

Faith [01:26:16] 24 people on the boat---

Narrator [01:26:19] 24 people-- actually that boat, I've seen others where they put 250 people on it and you know, the boat will have water inside all the time. But since my mom was doing this, she just want to make sure that there's security that we won't peril. So that's why it's just the people that has to be together. But we never let like strangers, even if they pay us and everything, to be together in that boat.

Faith [01:26:50] And how are you able to contact your uncle?

Narrator [01:26:53] Oh, so we were in Trengganu and then I was so lucky and unlucky. So Trengganu is so populated that they won't let us into onto the land, so we have to live in the boat. But thank God, we only have to do it like one day and one night. And then the next day they took us out to an island and it's called Pulau Tengah. Pulau, I think is for island, so Pulau Tengah. So we were out in Pulau Tengah. And then there they have, you know, American embassies. People come, the Red Crescent and they come to interview us. So if we tell them, you know where and of course we have all of the phone numbers and everything. Then they are the one who get us connected with my aunt so that she gets sponsors us.

Faith [01:27:50] I forgot to ask during the background, but it's just you and your brother, right? In terms of siblings?

Narrator [01:27:57] And my uncle and my uncle that who is like, takes care of the engine of the boat.

Faith [01:28:07] Okay. And once you reach the Red Crescent, how did you get your aunt to sponsor?

Narrator [01:28:16] We were being held by the U.S. Embassy and by the Red Crescent. So they the one that help us doing all those paperwork and everything. Yeah.

Faith [01:28:28] Um, from then on, how did you reach the United States? Did you fly here---

Narrator [01:28:35] Yeah, I flew in and it was February, you know? And you know, from Malaysia, where it's like a 100 degree or 98 degree and everything. So yeah, we came in and I look from up in the airplane, and I said, "Oh, this sand is really white". Actually, it was snow, it was February and it was so cold. It was so cold. But my aunt lived in a small town in Illinois, and it's where it's Eastern University. So it's Charleston and it's a very small town. So transition for me wasn't hard at all. You know, it's not like I landed in New York. Then I probably would see the difference between Vietnam and New York. But because I landed in Charleston, Illinois. It's just like, oh oh, sometime Vietnam is more fun than it's, you know, shopping wise is better and things like that. But yeah, I didn't have that feeling all. You know, being overwhelmed because I landed in a small town.

Faith [01:29:56] And then from there, how did you come to Orange County?

Narrator [01:30:00] From there, I stay there. I think for like half a year it was. There was nothing much to do there. So I moved to Washington, D.C., in Fairfax, Virginia. That's where I live with my mom's sister. The one who sponsor me is my mom--my dad's sister. And then I moved to Washington, D.C., to live with my mom's sister. And then I went to school there, and after that, I went to work for an insurance and investment company, and I learned that there is a much bigger Vietnamese community. And so I took the opportunity as a pilot program to go and start kind of help with the marketing here in Orange County. And it's supposed to be the pilot program, supposed to be a year. And then after that, it went on really well. So they renewed for another year and after two years, being here with, you know, the beautiful sunshine, great weather, you know, the beach and you can go to skiing in Bear?

Faith [01:31:25] Big Bear?

Narrator [01:31:26] Big Bear and then food is wonderful, you know, after two years, I'd stay.

Faith [01:31:37] And how long have you been in Orange County?

Narrator [01:31:39] Since 1989.

Faith [01:31:42] Quite sometime. Um, OK. You mentioned in your bio a little bit about your aspirations to help children in Vietnam get better education. Can you elaborate about that?

Narrator [01:32:00] You see, mom and dad did not get out of Vietnam until 1989, and that is through sponsoring, so we sponsor them after we got our American citizenship. So we sponsor them. So they came. It's because before that, dad and mom tried to escape four times and every time they almost died, they risk their lives. But they were not lucky like we were. So, you know, people take their money and then didn't hold their end of the bargain. They bought a boat and it wasn't the boat that is supposed to be, they just, you know, trick you into buying a piece of junk, things like that. And all four times they almost lost their lives and dad was in prison twice because whenever you were being caught, everybody goes to prison. But the wife and the kids get to go home because they want you to bring money back. It's like a ransom to get you, your husband. So. So that's what happened.

Patrick [01:33:15] I'm sorry, are you almost done?

Narrator [01:33:23] And so we. Where were we? We were talking about what?

Cynthia [01:33:33] Your father's---

Narrator [01:33:36] Oh, yeah, yeah. So my parents didn't come here until 1989, so after the last time when they tried to escape and they almost lost their lives, I begged them. I said, "Just don't try anymore. Why don't we just wait? And the time will come where I can sponsor you". So it's like, OK, peace of mind. They know that we're here and because my youngest brother get to escape too after me and my other brother. So they're kind of OK, we can stay back and we'll wait until the time we can leave, we will go. So during that time, my mom and my dad has devoted their time to Buddhism, to doing charity work. It's because since before we sent money home for them to build boats to leave the country. Now, we sent money home for them to help other people. So mom has established a lot of connections to do, you know, to help the children, help with education, to help with better quality of life. So even after she came here in 1989, she still keep those connections and she still remind us twice a year we all we have to pay our dues, you know, so that she can still continue to do the things that she has started when she was back in Vietnam. So my mom now is 94. The last two times I went back, she wasn't with me. But before that, she's always been with me, you know, with her connections and everything. So. So now, you know. Back then I thought, huh? We'll just have to pay our dues until, you know, mom passed away, then we'll be free. But now I guess eventually mom has found it, her really nice way to pass the baton to me. So I'm getting used to that and I'm going home and I know how to navigate my way around, and I'm really thankful that we were able to have all these connections to do the right thing and to be able to kind of extend the value of our money because of the people that are willing to help us.

Faith [01:36:17] Yeah, yeah. Quick question How did you keeping contact with your parents before they came here?---

Narrator [01:36:26] Oh God, it was really hard. It was really hard. So they would let us send packages home. And, you know, every time was like every pack is like you have like five yards of fabric or something like that. And you'll put that. And then you buy candy, M&M's and chewing gum and put it in there. And then when they go home, they actually are not going to use it. They're going to sell it because the fabrics that we buy this time either really, really bright red or pink or blue, because that's the color for the bride and the bridesmaid. And the people from the North love it. So actually, the people from the South are the people who have connections because their kids live abroad and then their kids were sent that home so that they can sell that to the people from the North that now has more money so that we can help the people here in the South. So when mom goes to the pagoda, she'll get addresses of everybody. And then I'll be sending those packages home. So in those packages, you'll be, you know, slipping in letters and things like that. But we can never say the real thing. Always said that, you know, "Uncle this". And actually, when I'm talking about my brother and say, "Uncle, this one is going through school". And we'll say, like instead of saying, go into M.I.T. [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], we'll say to a French school that is the equivalent of M.I.T. so that they would think that, oh, that person live in France when actually my father is going to M.I.T. over here. So things like that we can never say the truth. And sometimes I'll slip in, you know, \$20 or \$100 bill into the candies, the chewing gum. Mom and I would say in the letter thinking that she would understand. She doesn't understand it and she get those candies, either she sell it or she give it away to somebody. But when she didn't tell me that she received the money, I never tell her that I sent the money because, you know, that hurts. So, you know, it's. Yeah. So that's how we communicate. And it's because I'm lucky because like me and my cousins,

we work really hard and we save money. So, you know, we work during the summer, we work two or three jobs. When I was walking through over there [Ring Road on UCI campus] and I was telling Patrick that, I said, "You know what? When I was going to school, my dream is to one Friday afternoon being able to stay and go to the cafeteria and drink beer and eat a slice of pizza". But I can never do that. It's because, you know, before the end of the hour, I would pack all my stuff and ready, you know, as soon as the teacher let us out, I'll run out to my car because I have to go to my two other jobs, you know, one job and then after, I will go to another job. But it's like you asked us how we communicate. So we have to tell our parents that that's how we live over here. You know, we just send things home and mom and dad who thought life is really good. Money, you know, it's really easy to find. But actually, we don't want them to know that we have to, you know, work so hard in order to have money. So we just want them to enjoy. So that's why mom was being able to do a lot of charities. If she knew we had to work so hard, she probably wouldn't do that. But we never tell them because we were thinking, [01:40:31] You know, it doesn't matter how hard our life is, it's nothing compared to the people at home. [6.7s] So it's like I'm the banker. All my cousins would go to work and especially during summer would be rich because we all work, we all work. And then so they always sent me the money. So at first we were selling fabrics home, and then we were sending and then eventually I know how to send a motorcycle home, a Honda. A motorcycle Honda because we have connections in Japan and we now have more money, so we just, you know, send Honda's home and things like that, so. So I barely write letters to mom. I would just talk about this and that. And when mom came, I mean, she was, I think she hold a grudge on me because for not communicating more and everything and then until she held my hands and she started crying. Because she knew I worked really hard.

Faith [01:41:45] Thank you for telling us the story. That was very, very emotional.

Cynthia [01:41:55] So we're finishing up here. Is there anything we have not asked you that you'd want to tell us?

Narrator [01:42:02] Oh, I guess I talked too much today. I guess I talked too much today, so I guess that's pretty much it.

Cynthia [01:42:12] All right. Well, I'd like to thank you for allowing us to interview you.

Narrator [01:42:19] I'm, you know, I'm glad you all. I was saying, you know, so the North Vietnamese will have a chance to tell their side of the story. The Americans will have the chance to tell their side of the story. Unless we tell our side of the story, nobody would know. So I hope that your project is doing well, but I'm just saying that, you know, at least if somebody get to read it, then maybe history will get to be rewritten. I don't know, 30, 40, 50 years from now or and you know, it's somebody very famous was saying that we learn from history that we don't learn from history. You know, so I hope that one day we all will learn from history, you know, like the young people who listen to the old people. You know, when I was young, you know, when grandma or mom or dad say something and I said, just B.S. [...**...]. And now at this age, I'm starting to see how wise they are. And that I should have listened to them. So I hope somebody will learn from history.

Faith [01:43:53] Thank you so much for your moving testimony. And we're going to stop recording.