

**Name of Interviewer:** John Tran

**Method of Recording Interview:** Audio Recording

**Name of Person Interviewed:** Anh Quoc Chau (Sam Chau)

**Location of Interview:** Houston, TX

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**Relation to the interviewer, if any:** Brother in law to my Vovinam Master

<b>Name</b>	<b>Transcript</b>
<i>00:01</i> <b>John</b>	Ok, so I'm gonna go ahead and ask you a lot of questions about your experience with immigration.
<b>Anh</b>	Yes.
<b>John</b>	So I'm gonna kind of go through like different topics, so the first topic I'm gonna go through is general experiences.
<b>Anh</b>	Ok.
<b>John</b>	So my first question to you is, what was it like where you grew up?
<b>Anh</b>	I grew up, when I was born it was peaceful and I was born in the countryside, so I live in a peaceful life and there was no war then until 1945 before we experience the Japanese occupy Vietnam. That's when I start seeing the war.
<b>John</b>	Ok. So about how many years do you think, like how old were you when the Japanese first came?
<b>Anh</b>	Around six years old.
<b>John</b>	Around six years old?
<b>Anh</b>	Yea.
<b>John</b>	Ok. So what was your life like as a child, like school wise, or what did you do for fun and stuff?
<b>Anh</b>	You had the early part of my life when I was born until I grew up until six to seven years old it was peaceful, and I didn't see any war and we live in the countryside, and it's a very beautiful country in Vietnam.
<b>John</b>	Did you go to school?
<b>Anh</b>	Yes.

**John** How old were you when you first went to school?

**Anh** We start school kind of late, about six years old before I start first grade.

**John** What was the education system like for you?

**Anh** The Vietnamese, every village they have a elementary school in the village, which is always convened in the temple and where everybody gather, the villagers gather every year to worship for the rice grown, rice, prosperity. We will worship the god of the village and the ancestor. That is where the school is.

**John** So a typical day in Vietnam, can you tell me what it was like, like what did you do everyday? Was there a routine?

**Anh** Yea, the routine, the countryside like a, we have like the harvesting season and after the harvest season, and the villagers and the farmers have the resting days so they ready for the Tet, the Vietnamese New Years, and except that and the life is just almost the same. The just work in the fields and like the land owner grant the land to the farmer, and the farmer in turn pay about one third of their harvesting for the owner. And until the spring season, everybody can rest for the New Year occasion.

**John** So was your house like farm house?

**Anh** Yea, the house like a farm house.

**John** [Unintelligible]

**Anh** Yea a big house where we harvesting and they transport the rice by people on the buffalos. The buffalos carry them by boat to the landowner.

**John** So other than farm work, did you have any other kind of occupations? Any other kind of jobs?

**Anh** This is the early part of my life. My father was all they did was farming.

**John** Ok. Were you involved in any cultural organizations or any organizations in Vietnam?

**Anh** I joined the Vietnamese American Association to study English.

**John** How long were you in that for?

**Anh** I was for about six or seven years.

**John** So you said you were just learning English?

**Anh** Learn English and later I teach, I taught English for the beginners.

**John** For the beginners? For the beginners kids or adults?

**Anh** Kids and school kids, elementary school or high school.

*05:08*

**John** Did you need a certificate to teach these kids or did you just kind of come by?

**Anh** Yea they have a finished certificate and I had a certificate called Michigan Language Proficiency Certificate.

**John** That's good. So what kind of traditional arts did you practice? Did you practice any traditional arts?

**Anh** I like oil paint. And I paint portrait and some, some landscaping.

**John** Ok, so what about oil painting made you so interested?

**Anh** Oh, I love the scenery of Vietnam because it was so beautiful. I love to paint buffalo and bamboos, and [unintelligible] houses.

**John** Yea definitely much better than painting landscape out here. [laughs]

**Anh** [laughs] It's so concrete over here, steel and concrete.

**John** Yea just buildings everywhere. Ok that's good. I have a general idea of what your life was like and so, the next topic is wartime experiences. So your experiences of the wartime. So, where did you live during the war?

**Anh** I lived in Danang. It was central Vietnam.

**John** Danang, central Vietnam? That's D-E-N-A

**Anh** D-A-N-A-N-G

**John** Ok. So you stayed in central Vietnam, was that were you grew up too?

**Anh** I grew up near my, in the village and I moved with my dad moved to Danang.

**John** Why did he move to Danang?

**Anh** Why, it was a fighting between the French and the Communist Vietnam, it's called Viet Minh.

**John** Vietminh? Ok. What kind of occupations did you have during the war?

**Anh** During the war, I was [unintelligible], I passed the interpreter translator job to work for the U.S. army.

**John** Ok, ok, that's good. So kind of what you learned in the Vietnamese American Association knid of helped you get that...

**Anh** Yea, that one, yea. Also, I learned English in the church too.

**John** Oh, in the church too. What kind of religion did you practice?

**Anh** I was born a Buddhist, but I learned English in Vietnam in Catholic Church or the protestant Churches

**John** Ok, so they had those kind of religions in Vietnam during that time?

**Anh** Yea, they have it.

**John** Ok, I didn't know that. So were you involved in the war?

**Anh** Yea, I did. I was involved in the war.

**John** Like how were you involved in the war?

**Anh** Like when I joined as a field interpreter I help translate American military documents, military menus for the Vietnamese army. I help the U.S. military advisor to help train the military personnel.

**John** Ok. And did you have any other family members involved in the war as well?

**Anh** Yes, my brothers joined the army and one was killed.

**John** Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. Is your other brother here in the States?

**Anh** I have one younger brother in the United States in Houston.

**John** Does he live with you?

**Anh** He live in separate house in West Little York area.

**John** Oh, ok. I know where that is. That's kind of far from here, like North Houston.

**Anh** [laughs] Yea.

**John** So you said you helped translate documents. Did you get in contact with American soldiers too?

**Anh** Yea, yea. By both American advisors [unintelligible] soldier and the Vietnamese officers.

**John** So when you first met these American soldiers, what did you think of them?

**Anh** Yea, it was strange feeling, I never met them before. But they were very friendly and very helpful to the Vietnamese army.

**John** Were most of them really big?

**Anh** [laughs] It was them big, most of them big, they bigger size, yea. Very big.

**John** Was it mostly Caucasian?

**Anh** Mostly Caucasian and some African American.

10:01

**John** So how did the war affect your family?

**Anh** It affect in a way that um...oh when I remember, because a lot of my friends or family member, we lost people in the war. And I lost my best friend in the war and we are grown up with the war, so when we become in the civilian life, we didn't know anything except we were trained as a soldier in the war.

**John** So, were you ever captured by the enemy forces?

**Anh** Most of prisoner were captured during the fighting by American soldier or the Vietnamese soldier. I helped them to interpret during the interrogation.

**John** Did you know anyone that was ever in a reeducation camp?

**Anh** I know but I know that a lot of friend went to reeducation camp.

**John** What did they think about that, or how did they feel about that?

**Anh** They suffered a lot because the communist Vietnam, instead of educate them, they punish them, they retaliate them for what they believe was a crime to the Vietnamese people.

**John** So, how long were you actively involved with the interpretation job? Was it throughout the entire war?

**Anh** I was involved in the U.S. army since 1961 to 1968, and then since 1968 to 1975 I worked for United States Embassy.

**John** Were you working at the embassy in Vietnam?

**Anh** Yes I work at the embassy in Vietnam.

**John** So what was life like after the war?

**Anh** After the war, we very confused because when we got to the United States everything was strange. Like, we never experience like that in our life because everything so different. And even I spoke some English, but the life, the everyday life, something everything so different. Even the grocery store is different, and you know. Everybody was riding a bicycle over here and you have the automobile, you have a car. And just, you know it's so strange. Yea when you come over here, and everything so difficult to us. Very difficult at first. But the people, the united states people, they really helpful. They help us a lot. To settle down.

**John** When the war ended, were you in Vietnam for a certain amount of time before you went to the states?

**Anh** After the war, I knew that I was involved a lot with the American and Vietnamese government, so I tried to escape the last day when the Vietnam fall, the Fall of Saigon. Lot of my friends were recaptured and some of them went to the reeducation camp, and some of them were killed in [unintelligible], and some even cannot suffer the hard life they die.

**John** So do you think as a government, like someone working for the government, you think you were a target?

**Anh** Yea of course. We are target. They actually, they said that reeducation, but actually they supposed to eliminate us.

**John** Ok. So I think that's all the questions I have for your wartime experiences.

**Anh** Yea, very good.

15:01

**John** So I have a few questions for your immigration experiences. When did you leave Vietnam again?

**Anh** In 1975.

**John** And what was your reason for leaving?

**Anh** Because of the re[unintelligible] and because of the retaliation.

**John** So it wasn't a difficult choice then for you?

**Anh** Yea.

**John** And who did you leave Vietnam with?

**Anh** Ok good question. I, because I work for the United States Embassy, and my family was evacuate first and I was asked to volunteer to stay and help the other refugees. And the last moment everything was so confused and everybody was running for their lives and so I was [chuckles] left behind. I found my own transportation.

**John** That was really brave of you for staying after.

**Anh** So I left by myself.

**John** So most of your family left first and you followed them?

**Anh** Yea I followed them, yea.

**John** Ok. When you left, what kind of things did you bring with you?

**Anh** I brought only a pair of clothes, [chuckles] and one bottle of water. I didn't [unintelligible]

**John** Ok, so just clothes and water. And you didn't have any money?

**Anh** No money.

**John** So do you still have these pairs of clothes that you came with?

**Anh** Oh I'm sorry, [laughs] I lost that one. That's a good question.

**John** So where did you go, when you left? How did you leave? What was your mode of transportation?

**Anh** I leave, I jump on a ship and everything, I think lot of people tried to run for their life and they jump on the ship. And, you know, unfortunately, the ship was no good working condition. And we went to Singapore and then the Philippines and from and the Untied States flew us to California.

**John** So did anything, during this journey on the boat and the flight, what happened during this journey?

**Anh** In the boat, its small boat with over a thousand people. There was no food and we suffer hungry during the journey, hungry and thirsty for ten days.

**John** Did you say you had no food or just very little food?

**Anh** I think one bag of noodle for three person. But we survived.

**John** Which did you find more comfortable, the plane trip or the boat?

**Anh** Ok, we ride in the military transport, and its not comfortable, but we were very happy.

**John** Yea, compared to the conditions on the boat.

**Anh** Yea.

**John** When you came, were you allowed to come to the U.S? Were there any problems with you getting into the states?

**Anh** I think, I think they have a pre-arrangement, so when we went to every port, we would be treated cordially and nicely with food and clothes and everyday necessities. We got everything.

**John** Did your family also get the same kind of treatment?

**Anh** Yea they get same kind of treatment. They have movie for the children and plenty of food.

**John** Did you have any friends of family that came that had trouble getting into the states?

**Anh** Of course, the later part later of the refugees encounter a lot of difficulties. They have more trouble; they more trouble to get to the American port.

**John** Do you know why that was?

**Anh** I think at first, at first the people have a warmer heart. And later, so many people, they have less [unintelligible] than the first group come in.

20:11

**John** Were you required to have a health inspection when you crossed into the states?

**Anh** Yea, but not very hard. They just give shots.

**John** So you have that little bullet...

**Anh** [laughs] Big shot, yea.

**John** How do you feel about your decision to moving to the U.S.?

**Anh** Oh that's a good question because we make a good decision because when we compare the youths now in Vietnam with the young people grow up in United States, we see the difference. One side we have highly educated and more freedom and we have the freedom to express their own will and they express they have the field to improve and to improve for helping the other people. And one side have less education and everything was taught documentation, and just learn the policies of one side story.

**John** Ok, so the next topic of questions deals with your new home in the U.S. My first question is, what was the hardest thing about starting a new life in the U.S.?

**Anh** Like I say, we were not trained to have a career, a job in the United States. Everything was started from zero, and everybody was in the military, and to learn a different job is very hard.

**John** Who helped you find a home in the U.S.?

**Anh** Actually, you know the American people, the American organization they have lot of organization like the United States Charity and all the church, the church member, they volunteer to sponsor the Vietnamese family.

**John** So did they find you apartments?

**Anh** They found you a apartment and they try to help find you job.

**John** Did you live, was your first home a small apartment?

**Anh** Yea, a small apartment, yea.

**John** Was it complex with several other refugees?

**Anh** A apartment like a two room apartment with about nine person.

**John** How did you manage fitting everyone in?

**Anh** [chuckles] We try to [unintelligible] in.

**John** How did you find a job, your first job?

**Anh** The first job, the member of the church found me a delivery job and I do deliveries.

**John** What kind of deliveries?

**Anh** Like a now UPS, something like that. I have a hard time, yea, we look at the map.

**John** Do you know what city you were living in during the time?

**Anh** First time we landing in Columbus, Mississippi.

**John** Since your first delivery job, have you had any other jobs since then?

**Anh** And then I found it is, we didn't make enough for our family, we have a lot family, so I went to Texas, trying to looking for job with the U.S. charity, the catholic U.S. Charity. And I work for them.

**John** How did you hear about this?

**Anh** A friend call. And eventually I found job in Houston. A grocery store clerk, and I moving up to store manager.

25:05

**John** Do remember what the name of the Grocery store was?

**Anh** They call it Utotem(?)

**John** Since you've been here for a while, what are some similarities and differences do you see from your old community back in Vietnam and your new community here in the States?

**Anh** The community, so different, everything so different, like here everybody was keep to themselves. In Vietnam, everybody was together, they do everything, you know, in group. Yea. I think that's the difference. And one thing, the market is different, yea.

**John** So did you fell like the Americans were less friendly?

**Anh** In a ways, yea, because everybody keep to themselves. Like in Vietnam, you go out everyday your neighbor talking together and you just walking. Not like in United States, everybody have a car and when they go to work, they go home and they close the door and be themselves. In Vietnam, it's not like that. You go

home and you just talking with neighbor, everybody and friend. Yea, very different.

**John** Did you make a lot of friends when you first got here, or was it hard for you to make friends?

**Anh** Yea it's hard to make friends. At first when I just come to United States, when you see an Asian, no matter what nationality and you try to befriend them because they look alike.

**John** Do you have any funny or memorable experiences of a culture shock, like you didn't know what you were doing, or you really shocked at what the Americans were doing, like any kind of experience that you remember?

**Anh** Yea, so the Vietnamese and the American, we have lot of difference, like a Vietnamese try to call them, "Come here" [makes gestures]. And the American see, the American use I don't know, but the Vietnamese use the whole palm to call them to come, and the American see someone and they don't come. Like some very, very different, like the gestures are different. People in the United States, the American people, like they talk, they have to look at people's eyes. Vietnamese have to look down because they afraid this is not respect.

**John** So in Vietnam looking in someone else's eyes while talking to them...

**Anh** Like not with your own age, but because when you're younger, you have to look down, you cannot look at the older people's face.

**John** Is it kind of like tradition?

**Anh** Tradition different. And then a student, when they see a teacher, they have to nod their head down and fold their hand.

**John** Are you a citizen?

**Anh** Yea I'm a citizen. I am proud of that.

**John** When did you become a citizen?

**Anh** In 1985.

**John** Did you find it hard becoming a citizen?

**Anh** Fortunately, I studied and I can read English so I pass easily.

**John** You live in Texas, but you also live in the U.S. Do you consider yourself as an American or as a Texan?

**Anh** I consider myself a Vietnamese American.

**John** Did you like Texas more than Missouri?

**Anh** I do like Texas, yea.

30:04

**John** Did you see any major differences when you were living in Missouri? How long did you live in Missouri for?

**Anh** I lived in Mississippi.

**John** Oh you said Mississippi. Oh, Columbus, Mississippi. So living in Mississippi, how different was it compared to living here in Texas?

**Anh** Oh it is completely different. Over there, it's like you live in the forest, in the jungle. The people, even they are real nice, but they are real nice, but I don't know. They are more religious than over here. Over here they live open, more open than people in Mississippi. They live open, like a big city.

**John** Are you involved with U.S. politics, or do you keep up with U.S. politics at all?

**Anh** Actually, I don't have any party affiliation, but I just vote for the good people. The people who tend to help the Vietnamese community and Vietnamese country.

**John** So have you voted in presidents in the past?

**Anh** I vote every president election.

**John** Have you had like a favorite president so far?

**Anh** Right now I still studying.

**John** What about the ones you voted for? Or the ones, you've been here since 85, the presidents that you've seen gone through the U.S. Have you seen anything that you liked or you didn't like. For example, Bush and his policies, or maybe Clinton?

**Anh** Yea the policies, some of them I, they didn't do like they should be, they should be doing. When they promise something, they did differently.

**John** Are you voting this year?

**Anh** I'm gonna vote this year but I have to be very careful.

**John** It's going to be a very different election. I guess this is my last topic of questions. This is kind of like remembering Vietnam. Do you still have family and relatives back in Vietnam?

**Anh** Yea I do, I have a brother and sister.

**John** And how often do you keep in touch with them?

**Anh** I call them like every week.

**John** You have friends there too?

**Anh** I have friend too, yea, good friend.

**John** Do you go visit Vietnam?

**Anh** I haven't. I will go this year.

**John** How does your family celebrate important holidays, like Tet?

**Anh** We stuff like tradition Tet, we visit you on the first day. I went to greet my mother and my wife's mother, her, and we see friend the first day. And the day almost finish I got to the temple and pray peaceful for everybody.

**John** Does your family keep an altar for your ancestors?

**Anh** Yea. We have altar.

**John** And what kind of traditions or celebrations do you do with that?

**Anh** Like the lunar calendar and the first day of lunar calendar, you offer some fruit and inscents, yea, in the altar.

**John** Can you name a song or any kind of music that reminds you of Vietnam?

**Anh** Yea. I like the song like Nang Chiu, Nang Chiu is Evening Sun. And it remind me of the period that I was in the apples(?) and I heard that song in the Radio and it was sad.

**John** Do you know who sings that song?

**34:58**

**Anh** I think Huang Huan. Yea, you are very, this generation are very fortunate that there is no war. Because in Vietnam, the younger people like people ranging from 18 to 35, and most of them were volunteer or they are drafted in the army, and not many people come back. A lot of bright, young men were killed.

**John** I understand, I know that I'm very fortunate.

**Anh** Yea, you very fortunate.

**John** Ok my next question, so in your opinion, what do you think will become of the Vietnamese culture here in the U.S?

**Anh** The Vietnamese is the people, very good in adapting the other people's culture. Like the older Vietnamese for four, three, four thousand years ago, we adapted the Chinese culture and we devise it into our own, our own kind of unique culture, that have the influence of China, but not Chinese culture. It's a Vietnamese culture, different. And we use, we learn the Chinese character to devise our own writing. The old writing it different, the Chinese couldn't read, but we come from China. And then when the European came into preach the Vietnamese the

Christianity, and we adapted the Catholic writing, Roman writing, like today's ABC. We adapted, but we did not adapt, we didn't copy. We devised our own writing that's the Vietnamese. No people, other tribes, other people, have the talent and the intelligence like the Vietnamese people. Even they are smaller in person, they are very good in anything.

**John** Small body, big mind.

**Anh** Yea, big mind, we devise everything our own. The cooking, we have our own cooking. We have our own writing. We have our own art. We have our own music. That one completely different than people of the other, people of the world.

**John** Do you think like in the future, if you walk around a U.S. city, you'll see more of a Vietnamese influence?

**Anh** I think so, and I hope so, because the Vietnamese, like I said very talented. We devise our own culture, the younger generation I think I can picture out they have their own unique culture. Not American but not Vietnamese. They have their own specialty, their culture of their own.

**John** So to you, is cultural identity important? Like identifying with your own culture?

**Anh** Yea, yea. This is what I said; we have our own very beautiful culture, our own Vietnamese culture.

**John** My last question for this interview is, are there any other memories you would like to share?

**Anh** Yea, ok. As a older generation, I want to pass, I want and I wish that the younger generation will learn what is the best from the other country and why we keep our own identity, which is the Vietnamese. But we are not the poorer(?) Vietnamese in Vietnam, but we are Vietnamese of overseas, and we learn from the best of the other people and to better ourselves. And then pass that spirit to the next generation.

**John** Words of wisdom. Thank you very much for this interview.

**Anh** Thank you.