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Name of Person Interviewed: Tao La

Name	Transcript
<i>00:01</i>	
Ly	Mr. La, thank you for coming today, and as you know I'm doing this project for, as a class project for my school at the University of Texas, and I would like to ask you some questions. So, what was it like where you grew up and where do you grow up in?
Tao	I grew up the first nine years of my life was in Vietnam, two years in Indonesia, and the rest was here. So my eleven years total was here in Houston, Texas.
Ly	Where did you live in Vietnam?
Tao	I lived in Binh Long, south of Saigon. About a two hour drive
Ly	And how was life there as a child?
Tao	I mean, when you're young, you know you're just having fun. Other than that, you hear a lot of, I mean, I was born in 1970, so it was way before the war. And after the Fall, then we...we leave. But as in terms of living, you don't see that much of difference changes, plus we were just young kids
Ly	Do you remember how life was there? Like daily routine? Anything like that?
Tao	I mean, our daily routine, we just played as kids, we shoot marbles, we played games as [unintelligible] and stuff like that as we were kids But after, you know, I mean, I remember when I was during the war, when we were playing outside and you would hear like bomb falling so we would be like "ok it's time to run into the shelter" So we had a little shelter inside our house
Ly	Oh really?
Tao	Yeah, like a bunker type
Ly	You said you were there for, around 9 years in Vietnam?
Tao	Yeah, we left Vietnam when I was around nine years.

Ly And do you have any traditions there, or family traditions?

Tao Yeah, we do *đám giỗ*, like normal.

Ly Can you explain more about *đám giỗ*?

Tao *Dám giỗ* is day of the dead. So you celebrate your ancestors the day that they died. We cook the food they like, that they used to like to eat, the drink that they would like to drink, and we serve them on a like, how do you say *bàn thờ*?

Ly Altar?

Tao Altar, yeah. So we serve them all the food and drink that used to eat and drink and we pray for them...on the other side.

Ly So when do you celebrate the Day of the Dead?

Tao The day that they died. And every year after that. So say they died on, let's say, April 5th or something, the next year will be called *đám giỗ* for that person...usually for the older people

Ly So it's a really long lasting tradition in Vietnam?

Tao Yeah

Ly So where did you live during the War? Was it in Binh Long also?

Tao Yeah, in Binh Long as well.

Ly And how was that like?

Tao As I said, we were just kids. But the life for my parents was really hard. My mom was never home because she had to go to make us some money so that hopefully one day we can get a chance to leave. So that's why she tried to go run black market stuff because we had a restaurant back then as well. But as the communists come in, we had to close it down. So we just closed our restaurant and my mom did small black market stuff, trading, selling from small city to Saigon and sell it and bring it back

Ly What about your dad?

Tao My dad just pretty much helped my mom out, [unintelligible] or watched the kids while my mom did it

Ly Did you have any family members that were directly involved in the war?

Tao I don't recall, I don't remember. Some of my uncles were in the military, but I mean I don't see, I don't hear of it.

Ly So did you come in contact with any Americans or any American soldiers?

Tao No, not when I was young, no I don't.

5:00

Ly But did you have a perceived, like a perception of them, from your parents or anything like that?

Tao: Yeah, because my parents had a restaurant, so they had soldiers to come in and eat at the restaurant. They would have South Vietnamese soldiers come in and eat at the restaurant. And we still have a lot of people that work with us now that were in the army back then that are working with us now, and those are, some of them were colonels back then that are working with us

Ly: What do you think of them, when you were little?

Tao: Talking back then, time back then, we couldn't even talk to them

Ly: Oh, like your parents wouldn't let you talk to them?

Tao: It's not that, we don't have the class wise, we're not even in our class. I mean, the country was ruled by military mostly, it's not like here in the U.S. where if you belong to the military, you're still a citizen. Over there, if you're a colonel in a military regime, then I mean you're really high up there

Ly: Like every military official is a higher class than everyone else?

Tao: Yeah, they pretty much live a different standard than everyone else.

Ly So was it kind of taboo not to talk to them?

Tao No, it's not like that, it's not taboo. If you're in their own circle, then it's ok. It's cause you're not in their circle, you're just a regular Joe. Just like it's hard to talk to a senator or something like that

Ly And probably the language barrier was hard too?

Tao Yeah, I was young, I didn't get to see what my parents do

Ly And so, how did the war affect you and your family?

Tao I mean in terms of the war us, that's the reason why we're here now, because of economic freedoms, speech, religion, all those things. We lost a lot of our freedom to that, that's why we found a way to get out. As you can see any other people, the majority of people leave Vietnam because of freedom, it's not because of...I mean, we lost a lot of freedom, that's why. For the people who were soldiers before, there will be, some kind of, they would put you in jail or some kind of re-education camp for all the soldiers. For us, it was more on the financial side. We leave because we had no economic freedom; they take all our stuff away, etc, so we had to find another place to go.

Ly So you said before the war, you had a restaurant, your family had a restaurant, but after the war, did it tear down or something?

Tao No, they come and they give you a hard time. They pretty much like, say we have to give some stuff from you to give to the poor. It's a communist idea, taking from ones who have money and giving it away apparently. But they're not, they're not giving it away those stuff

Ly So I guess they kind of robbed you of everything?

Tao Yeah pretty much, in terms, as you said that, yes it is

Ly Is that how you feel?

Tao Yeah, that's how we feel. A lot of times, that's how a lot of people feel. And that's why a lot of people leave, because they lost it all to that

Ly Do you if there's anyone you know that was in the re-education camp?

Tao We have a lot of people here who live with us who were in re-education camp. Of course they tell stories of what they did and etc... If you sit and talk to them, they'll give you really good stories that you can learn from

Ly But none of your parents or anyone else?

Tao No, we left; we're not part of the army, the South Vietnamese army; therefore, we don't get to go there. We just got out freedom taken away pretty much

Ly Well your father, he was never drafted into the army or anything?

Tao No, we leave partially because we don't want my two oldest brothers was at an age to be drafted, which was 15 or 16 years old, so that's one of the reasons at that time, was war with Cambodia and stuff like that, and my parents didn't want them to be drafted and put in the front line

10:00

Ly What was life like after the war, you said it was very hard, and your mom was barely trying to save money for you to survive, right?

Tao No, my mom had to; we all stayed together, all ten of us. We were a family of ten: seven kids, my mom and dad is nine and my grandma as well. But we closed the restaurant because they gave us a hard time at the restaurant, and my mom bring in some stuff from Binh Long to Saigon and sell it and vice versa bring in stuff from Saigon to Binh Long to sell it just to make the money, just go day by day to make the money, and living was just like that.

Ly So when did you leave Vietnam?

Tao We left Vietnam in 1978, I forgot what month it was, but it was 1978. And we left Vietnam by boat, we go to Indonesia, arrived in Indonesia, we stayed there for almost 16 months, or 17 months, something like that in Indonesia, and after that we came straight here to Houston, as a matter of fact, August 1980 we arrived in Houston.

[cell phone interruption]

Ly So you said the main purpose your family came here was because of freedom?

Tao Freedom, a lot of freedom. We lost a lot of freedom to that. I mean, they come in, they ask you, Where do you hide your money? Etc...those are the little things they do to our parents. And we're not one of those people who had a lot of money anyways, but that's what drive us to go more than anything else.

Ly Was it a hard decision for your family to choose to leave or stay?

Tao It was hard because at first we were just going to send my two older brothers, but then we say "Oh, if they go, what is going to happen? So we say either we all live together or we die together as a whole family so we all go together.

Ly At a young age, did you understand that?

Tao No, we didn't understand. My mom said "ok, just go" so we go wherever they tell us to go. At nine or ten years old kids, we know that decisions made by the elders more than anything else, that's how it is.

Ly You seem like obedient children

Tao [laughs]

Ly So you said your whole family left with you from Vietnam?

Tao Yeah.

Ly All ten of you?

Tao Yeah, all ten of us. We left with some of our cousins as well. The group with our family that was all in our boat was 37 people.

Ly Was it all everyone you knew?

Tao Yeah, everyone, our cousins was still here and going with us, my aunt and uncle was with us; it was 37 of us on that thing with about 400 other people on that boat.

Ly So how did you get that boat?

Tao Oh, you paid for it. You paid to go. Each one cost about, at that time, it was about five or six hundred dollars per ounce of gold, and it was 13 plates of gold per person to go, so it was about almost 4,000 dollars per person to go. So it was a ticket of no return. If you get caught, you go to jail. If your boat flipped, bye bye, you're gone

Ly So you left in 1978, right? What things did you bring with you?

Tao Clothes on your back, that's it...and pots and pans.

Ly I know some people, they said they had to bring clothes or something, did you?

Tao Yeah, we brought some clothes, we bought pots and pans. My mom bought pots and pans because we know what we can do with that, cook and try to open the restaurant again.

Ly Oh, that's smart.

Tao As a matter of fact, we did open up a restaurant in the camp just to serve the people

Ly So was it hard to figure out what to bring. Did you want to bring other stuff?

15:00

Tao No, that was not my decision. The decision was my mom and dad's. We just needed to tag along, that's it. You don't have that much choice. [pause] [laughs]It's not like now we say let's go on a picnic or something, it's not.

Ly Did you leave any of your relatives behind?

Tao Yeah, when we left, we left my oldest aunt; she stayed behind; my grandmother on my mom's side stayed behind. The majority of us left, and they came over later.

Ly Was it because they were older, and it would be safer for them to stay behind?

Tao Yes, they were older and they need to stay, and if something happened to us, we get caught, or something like that, if we were sent to jail, they would be able to help us get out.

Ly Did you have any problems when you were on the boat? Did you get captured or did anyone see you? Or was it a safe ride?

Tao No, it was a smooth ride all the way to Malaysia, until we get there, and until the Malaysian navy came and they robbed us as a matter of fact.

Ly What happened then?

Tao Of course you pay the captain this 4,000 money per person in gold. Of course they had a lot of money, and you had about 400 people on the boat so you do the math. And they know where the money and where the gold is and they take all that. And one of my uncles got tortured and another died

Ly Was it really bad?

Tao Apparently, he had a 20 or 50 dollar bill from Malaysia that one of my uncles in Malaysia give when he come back to Vietnam, and he gave it to him as a [pause]

Ly A souvenir?

Tao Yeah, and they thought we took their money somehow and they accused him of lying, so what they did was, they took a flare gun, they shoot down on the metal deck of the navy ship and make him stand barefoot on that. And his feet now are just like baby skin

Ly That must have been scary for you

Tao Yeah, when we were at the camp, we carried him around pretty much all the time. Like one of those things you carry a king or queen on, one of those chairs [laughs] I still remember my brother, because I'm the youngest one, so my older brother and one of my uncles carried him around, that's how it was

Ly So do you remember how life was on the boat?

Tao The boat, we only had a 36 hour ride, that's all. It was a smooth ride from Vietnam to Malaysia. But after that we went straight to Indonesia. After they robbed us they dropped us off in Indonesia

Ly Oh they robbed you and then dropped you off in Indonesia? [laughs]

Tao Yeah, they said we'll toll you over here and just drop you off. And at the beginning, the camp was a little hard, a little rough cause there was no one on the camp at the time[pause]

Ly So you were one of the first people on the camp?

Tao We were the fourth boat so we had to go up to the mountain to cut the trees, use the wood, and we had to pay the locals like couple hundred dollars in those days just to help us build houses. They go cut the trees for us

Ly They made you cut the trees?

Tao Oh, no they cut the trees and they help us put it together. My mom sold jewelry and everything just to help us with our daily living

Ly So was that how the camp experience was like everyday?

Tao It was like that everyday like that for a while until more people come in and disease start spreading, a lot of people started dying; especially the young and the old started dying off really fast because there was no water system yet. In the morning, you had to go to the mountain to get the water, and everyday more people would get contaminated. You had a lot of malaria, and different types of sickness that the old and young would die really fast

Ly Were any of your family members affected by that?

20:00

Tao My dad almost passed away. He had malaria, but thank God we don't have any other ones, no one passed in that sense

Ly So what did you do in the camp everyday?

Tao As a kid, we just played at the beach. Because you're on an island, there's nothing to do. You have the beach or the mountain. You had no other choice, and you create your own games and play just to pass days by days. It's not here, you get up, go to work. Work? Nothing. You go cut your trees, cut your wood, whatever you had to do just to get food on the table. Hunt, fish, whatever it is

Ly What about your parents and your older relatives? What did they do?

Tao After a while when more people came in, we started to open a small restaurant type just to sell rice, com, stuff like that. We had over 30 or 40,000 people

Ly Just in that one refugee camp?

Tao Yeah, in that camp after a while. We lived there for 8 months, and then we moved to another camp. But the first 3 months was rough for the people there. After 3 months, the Red Cross came in and started setting up the water system and that's when the people stopped dying.

Ly The American Red Cross?

Tao Yeah, the American Red Cross. Everyone come and help give us a hand, and that and bring in food...Instant noodle, so we ate a lot of that.

[laugh]

Ly So, what did you eat before that? How'd you get your food supply?

Tao When we left, my parents made a lot of preserve stuff. So we ate one item almost a month and a half, two months; just that and rice all the time. And we'd go fish, whatever you can fish, you get. Whatever you can hunt, you can get; whatever you can trap, you can get. Other than that, we ate the same thing until there was a market set up so that people can buy stuff. Back then, there wasn't a society, people just lived. As more people come, you develop a social network and more people set up food market and whatever

Ly Was it because you were one of the first people to come in and you had to set it up first?

Tao Some people, yes. We do that because we saw more people come in. We set up the restaurant; we had the restaurant business in Vietnam, we had the experience. And all the family members helped just to make it flow. We had thirty something people in the family, so someone had to do this or that just to make it daily, moving, that's it

Ly Did the Malaysian people help you any?

Tao No, the Indonesian people helped us. The local Indonesian people were really nice, they helped us cut the trees, etc [pause]

Ly How was your family allowed to come to the United States?

Tao Well my immediate family and I, we don't have any privilege to go to the United States at all really. The privilege is that you have to have family sponsor over here first, people who left in 1975, or you belonged to the South Vietnamese Army, and you get the first privilege to go. But us, we have neither one. And so we had to wait out of the 37 people we come with, we had to wait until my aunt take my grandmother over here, and then sponsor us, so we were the last of the group to go, of the 37.that's why we stayed the longest, our family stayed the longest. Which wasn't much longer, just 3 to 6 months longer.

Ly You couldn't go because your uncles were in the military? Just like immediate family

Tao No, just immediate family

Ly So your uncles came first?

25:00

Tao Yeah, and then they come over and they sponsored us; so they had to apply as a sponsor instead of the other privilege.

Ly Was that process really tedious?

Tao It was, but you know everybody is the same, so you just sit there and wait. You're not going to cry over it, because you know that process takes time and how long it's going to take. At that time, the U.S. really opened its arms for the Vietnamese to come in, so it was really easy for us to come in. it's not like it's hard now, but you have a sponsor, it takes 3 to 6 months, and boom, you're in. But you have to wait

Ly Besides the sponsoring, you weren't immediately taken to America, because your family wasn't involved in the war, so you wouldn't go immediately there right?

Tao No, that's why we stayed

Ly So you didn't go through any question process?

Tao Well, my grandmother came over first and she filled out the paperwork over here to sponsor, not like you sponsor somebody...from mother to son, just immediate family. Not even brother and sister, it had to be mother and son. My grandmother came over first and sponsor us, that's how we got to go.

Ly Were you required to have a health inspection?

Tao Yeah before we go, they make sure our health is good, that we don't carry any disease before we get on the plane

Ly How'd they do that?

Tao They had set up a camp.

Ly Doctors?

Tao Yeah, they had doctors. After a year or so, they set up medical clinics for people

Ly So, how does your family feel about their decision to move to America

Tao Well, that was the only country they wanted to go. We don't want to go anywhere else. I mean, if you chose to go to Germany, Canada, Australia, you don't have to wait that long. Those days, you didn't have to wait that long. You had to wait 6 months, and you're ready to go. Other countries would take you. You didn't have to be in the South Vietnamese army or anything, you can say I want to go to Australia, and 6 months, you're out of the island. But we just wanted to come here because we knew there were more opportunities here so that's the reason why

Ly So you were given a choice of where to go?

Tao Yeah, we were given a choice where to go and we go, but the decision is still made by us.

Ly And when did you come to America again, was it 1980?

Tao August 1980

Ly And your uncle was in Houston, you said?

Tao Yeah, my grandma was in Houston, so we all came here

Ly So tell me what it was like when you first came to Houston?

Tao When we first came to Houston, the language barrier was tough. I came here, I started 3rd grade and I didn't know any English. And financial wise, it was really tight. We used to collect cans to sell and collect mattresses out of the dumpster. You know apartments used to clean apartment units, and we used to pick them up from there. And the only thing we knew of was the flea market, we didn't know about the malls or anything. So we just go to the flea market for about a year or something.

Ly For four years?

Tao No, for a year.

Ly [pause] So, who did you live with when you came here?

Tao We lived, my immediate family, my aunts, my uncles, we all lived in a four duplex with 8 bedrooms with about 30 of us. Each family unit, we were on top, my aunt was in one corner, another aunt and uncle was in another corner. So it was like a group. Our family is very tight. Our cousins, uncles, aunts, we're very tight. So we all grew up together, the first two, three years.

30:00

Ly So you lived basically in the same...?

Tao Yeah, as a matter of fact, you think of this building, it's smaller than this room here, 40 of us lived daily in there.

Ly So who found that place? Your uncle?

Tao No, it was just an apartment next to the University of Houston

Ly Your uncle lived there first, and you came?

Tao Yeah, and we came, as a matter of fact, we lived off of Calhoun.

Ly Was it hard adjusting for you?

Tao In the beginning, yes it was. We come here, we know it's like that. We know we have to start over. We just have to work at it, which built our character. And we worked hard, just to get day to day going. And our parents were never home, they worked. And the only ones who parenting us was my older brothers and they were the ones who really disciplined us.

Ly Were you one of the youngest?

Tao I was the youngest boy.

Ly And what did your parents do? Was it hard for them?

Tao My mom worked for a restaurant here in town when we first came over, after that we tried to open our first restaurant in 1982, that's our first restaurant opened here in Houston

Ly And your dad did the same thing?

Tao Yeah, my dad worked with my mom. It's a family business to this day, my mom still comes to work 7 days a week, to this day.

Ly Was it hard for your parents to find work when they first came here?

Tao Not really, my mom came in, there was one restaurant that open here a long time ago, she came in, my mom was a chef, she came in and got right into it.

Ly So you came and went to school here?

Tao I started 3rd grade

[sirens heard from outside]

Ly How was that?

Tao It was rough, you don't speak the language so I was in ESL for about 3 years.

Ly How was that like? Going to school in America and starting like that? Were there a lot of any other Asians or Vietnamese in your class?

Tao When I first started, there was only two. In my third grade class, it was just me and this girl who lived in the same complex as me, but after a while, more and more people come in as well. [pause] It's tough because you don't understand the language. In third grade, I had a really nice teacher, but in my fourth grade, you start to not understand, don't know how to read and write well, and in your history class you start to get really bad grades[laughs] because you don't understand the language. But in your math classes, you're doing fine. So you had to learn everything a little faster

Ly So it was really hard for you at first?

Tao Yeah, in the beginning, 3rd, 4th, 5th grade was hard, then 6,7 a little bit better, and high school, a little bit better.

Ly How about just life in general?

Tao As in life, my mom always at work, and we just stayed home. So we try to help as much as possible at the house. And we live with aunts and uncles, brothers disciplining us. We grew up like that in Vietnam, so we bring that over here. And we just respect the elders, whatever they say, we just say "yes" and hopefully they make the better decisions for all of us. And it turned out good

Ly So what are some of the similarities and differences from your old community in Vietnam and the one here?

Tao Here, you have more freedom than anything, you can say anything you want to say . Back then, as kids, we couldn't tell the difference. 35:00But for my parents, I know it's a big difference for them. They'd rather have work hard and earn their money then not have a chance to earn to work, or when you work over there, and people take the money from you.

Ly Was it a culture shock for you?

Tao In the beginning, yes. We lived in an area, well a culture shock, yeah you're right. It's just you personally don't speak the language, you don't understand how these people are here in the U.S. I remember I didn't remember how to use the remote control for the TV or use a phone, a payphone

Ly Was that the most memorable or funniest experience you had?

Tao Yeah, because we landed in LAX as it stopped over for one night, and we had one uncle in LA at that time. But we don't know how to use a phone to call him. We had his number, but we didn't know how to use it; therefore, we couldn't get in contact with him. If we would have, we probably would be over there right now.

Ly Oh, is that the reason, I was going to ask you why you chose Houston?

Tao Oh, we had uncles over there but we also had my grandma over here too, so we [unintelligible] but of course we tried to go to Houston because my grandmother is over here. We just tried to make a contact, but we didn't know how to use it.

Ly And was there another reason why you picked Houston as opposed to somewhere like in California, because I know there are a lot of Vietnamese people over there?

Tao Family. My grandma was over here, and my aunts and uncles are over here. The majority of the family is over here, so that's why we came here.

Ly Did you feel like you had to assimilate into American culture?

Tao At first, we lived in an area where it was our group only, but after a while you realized you had to assimilate to make yourself grow, that's the only way. After about 2 years, we had to learn to assimilate into a system.

Ly Did you feel like it was forced or did you want to?

Tao No, it's not a forced or anything. You knew that you had to, it was an improvement in life, you knew you had to go there.

Ly So did you start working while you were in school or anything?

Tao I started working when I was in 6th, maybe 7th grade

Ly What did you do?

Tao Dishwashing.

Ly At the restaurant?

Tao At the restaurant, our restaurant used to be down the street. We used to go over during the weekend, dishwash, bus, do what we can to help out

Ly Was it hard, because you had a big family, with money and financial support?

Tao We lived in a 2 bedroom apartment with 10-12 people so you save as much as you can and reinvest back into the business, we tried to be very careful with the money so you don't spend lavishly and you try to save every dollar you've got

Ly So I'm guessing you didn't have any luxuries as a kid?

Tao Oh, no. I remember our first non-Asian meal was Popeyes fried chicken. We used to collect the cans and sell the aluminum, and the first time we made that we bought Popeyes fried chicken

Ly And now are you a citizen?

Tao Yes, I am a United States citizen

Ly And why did you choose to become a citizen?

Tao Well, the country, the United States, has been good to us and it has helped to be a U.S. citizen. It's a good thing to go around. And no matter which country you go to, the U.S. is the best place...a lot of people don't understand it and we take things for granted. You have a lot of freedom here that you take for granted a lot

Ly So you said, it was just your family. Did you have other friends or was it just mainly contact with your family only?

40:00

Tao No, we have other friends. But as for out of Asian community friends, I don't have a lot like some of my other friends who grew up here. I have a majority of my friends are Asian and Vietnamese because our language barrier and culture is different. As for Asians, we're passive; we're not talkative a lot. So it's really hard to hang out with someone other than my Asian friends, so I only have Asian friends. Unlike my wife, she has no Asian friends, but she has all American friends

Ly So do you think of yourself as an American or a Texan?

Tao I think of myself as a Vietnamese Texan.

Ly Can you explain more about that?

Tao Well cause I talk with a Texan accent, and we do a lot of Southern draws here

Ly A Southern what?

Tao A Southern draw, like you talk with a Southern accent. I remember one time I went to California and my cousin's friends said "you're from Texas huh?" they didn't even know where we're from but they say we're from Texas. It's just because of the way we speak

Ly And thinking back on to the war, what do you think of the US policy during the war?

Tao Well, I was too young to think about it.

Ly But thinking back now?

Tao I think, it depends on different people, there's a lot of politics going on in that situation. If you read history, there are many ways to perceive it. The war could easily been won by the U.S. but the U.S. let it go; it depends on how you judge it. It's really hard to see it, but hey, I'm here now, I might just as well make the best out of it.

Ly Did you go to school back in Vietnam?

Tao I was only in third grade, and I come here and start third grade again.

Ly Did they teach you a lot of politics there?

Tao No, not in third grade.

Ly Well right now, are you involved in politics?

Tao No, I'm just trying to keep the restaurant running as best as I can.

Ly Is that your reason for not being involved?

Tao Yeah, it's really hard. Business and politics is really hard, so I'm just sticking with the business part

Ly Do you visit Vietnam a lot these days?

Tao Well, for my 28 years I've been here, 1980 to now, I've visited twice. In 2004 and 2006.

Ly Do you still keep in touch with family or relatives there?

Tao I don't have any more relatives over there. They either passed or most of them come here.

Ly Are all of them in Houston?

Tao Houston, majority are here. About 98% are here. Actually, I have some friends that live here and go back there and work and live over there.

Ly In Vietnam?

Tao Yeah, I have friends who lived here, we go to school here in the University of Texas, and they open their business over there.

Ly So where did you go to school here?

Tao I grew up here and I went for high school, at Eisenhower High School.

Ly Really? I went to high school at Eisenhower too!

Tao Yeah, I graduated and went to the University of Texas and graduated as engineering over at UT, and I joined the restaurant business because it's a family business

Ly You said you went back to visit Vietnam in 2004 and 2006, and how was that like, what was the experience like?

Tao I have a pretty bad perception when I left, so whatever you think in your head when you leave, it's not the same. They're really moving forward over there. When I went back, I thought they'd still be in the Stone Age or something, but they're not. They're pretty far ahead, but there are some areas are really poor. The poor are really poor and the rich are really rich.

Ly Where did you go when you visited Vietnam?

Tao I just stayed in Saigon for about a week, and I went because of my honeymoon. We spent a 45:00week in Saigon and then another week in Thailand. The second time I went, they grew much more, and it's just that the impression you think that it could never be like this.

Ly So it was a big surprise to you because of the change?

Tao Yup, yeah. They had changed a lot. I remember coming back to Binh Long and the time I left, I saw all these shacks around. Now, when you come back, I see all these four, five story homes. I'm like whoa, they're much better off than we are over here

[laughs]

Ly Now does your family still celebrate, do you keep with your Vietnamese culture?

Tao Yeah, everyday, we have dinner, lunch here with mom and pops, we do Tet celebration, chuc tet, we do dam do, we do all those Vietnamese celebrations like that

Ly So how do you celebrate certain celebrations like that, like Tet?

Tao We get together at home; we're very family oriented. So we come to my mom and dad's house, every weekend, or every other weekend if possible just to be with them.

Ly And religion wise, does your family keep an altar?

Tao Yeah, we do keep an altar. We are Buddhist so we keep the Buddhist tradition: the altar for our ancestors

Ly Are there any other Buddhist cultures and traditions that you bring on to America here?

Tao Just whatever we do in Vietnam, we bring it here. We didn't really make any changes

Ly Do you plan to teach that to your children?

Tao We are continuing it from my mom's generation to my generation, to the some of the kids' generation, we still have to teach them, like when they come in, they still have to bow to us...

Ly Do you think it's an important aspect of the culture?

Tao It is very important, to pass from one generation to the next: what do you know about your ancestors, where you come from, what are your roots? We grew up here so that we can assimilate, but bottom line is, it's who you are.

Ly This might sound like a funny question, but can you name a song or music that reminds you of Vietnam?

Tao I don't do karaoke, I tell you.

Ly [laughs]No name of songs or anything?

Tao Actually, I'll tell you, one of the songs you hear people sing in the old days is *Long Me*, and I heard that a lot

Ly Alright, and the following questions will be about the next generation of Vietnamese Americans. And in your opinion, what will become of the next generation of Vietnamese Americans in the U.S.?

Tao I hope we can teach our kids to keep the culture. We should be proud of our culture. Of course we're trying to assimilate, but we keep that culture of being obedient, and respect to elders, those are the things that's in our culture. No matter what, we work hard, as a Vietnamese culture, we work really hard. We don't mind the hardship, and that is what will keep us, keep the kids moving. We teach what we need to get into our kids heads, that things don't come too easily. Don't take them for granted. What you have here is what your grandfather, your grandmother passed down to you

Ly What do you think of the generation now?

Tao I think the generation now, what we called the XYs, some of them are very lazy.

Ly What do you mean by XY?

Tao I think the XY generation are very lazy, they get everything handed to them pretty easy and they take a lot of things for granted seriously. In my view, I think they are. But hey, I'm still old, I'm pretty old school. I mean, I'm not that old, but I think I act in the sense of the older generation because we live with them and we get that lecture everyday from them. But some of the kids these days, their video games, I don't believe in that. I mean, there's a time for that, but not all the time

50:00

Ly So I'm guessing it's very important to keep the culture identity, the Vietnamese cultural identity?

Tao Yes I always do. I try no matter what to keep my culture. Yes I work here, with the mainstream as well, but I keep my identity. I'm proud to be a Vietnamese. It's like anything, people ask me where are you from, I say I'm from Vietnam. I mean, I live here yeah, I assimilate to the US, and it helps from both hands for us so that we can lean on one end or to the other end

Ly Why do you think it's so important to keep that culture identity?

Tao It's just that I'm proud of it, therefore, I keep it. It's important because we have to know where we came from, no matter what. And no matter what, you can never

be an American, a true American, ok? And for the next generation, and the generation down the line, it's really hard. I mean, you will have that barrier and you will never know, that's what I believe in.

Ly And are there any memories you want to share?

Tao Oh, there's a lot

Ly Anything you want

Tao [laughs] There are a lot of childhood memories that we do when we're young. Like when you're young, you have no responsibilities, that's one of the best. And once you get older, it gets worse. Like I said, the best 5 years of my life was in college because there were no responsibilities. Other than that, that's it. Childhood memories are a lot.

Ly And I know that you're the owner of Kim-Son right?

Tao Yeah, I'm the youngest boy, it's still a family business, my mom comes to work everyday, my dad comes to work everyday, my brothers they work everyday.

Ly So would you say food is a big part [interrupted]

Tao It's a big thing at our house, trust me. Just food in general. Eating is a big thing in our house, we critique, we try different stuff, we book vacations based on where the restaurant is. That's the fun part, you ever been in the restaurant business, you meet a lot of people. That's the fun part of it. It's also a headache, but hey, what job don't have a headache right?

Ly Is there anything else you like to share?

Tao Well, nothing really. If this is for the Vietnamese kids coming up, learn it. Just keep your culture alive, participate. Whatever you do, just participate.

Ly Ok, well thank you. Thank you sir, for interviewing with us today

Tao No problem, no problem