

Name of Interviewer: Diane Nguyen

Method of Recording Interview: Digital camera

Language of Interview: English

Location of the Interview: Rowlett, TX

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Search Key Words: Immigration; Vietnam

Name of Person Interviewed (or pseudonym): XuanLan Nguyen

Relationship with Interviewer: Mother

Name	Transcript
<i>00:01</i> Diane	What was it like where you grew up?
XuanLan	Very nice, very peaceful, very nice.
Diane	What was your life like as a child?
XuanLan	It's normal child. Enjoy outside, go to school, friends, family, friends.
Diane	How were you disciplined as a youth?
XuanLan	My parents just talking, and tell me what the wrong side and the right side.
Diane	What was a typical daily routine in Vietnam?
XuanLan	[Unintelligible]...When I was young?
Diane	Yes.
XuanLan	I just go school, go back home, homework, and all we do is walk around. Everywhere we go, we walk, we join friend, movie, music.
Diane	Just like a normal kid?
XuanLan	Yeah, like American in here.
Diane	What city did you grow up in?
XuanLan	Da Lat.
Diane	So it was a big city?
XuanLan	It a city like California in here. The weather is nice.

01:54

Diane Is it close to the beach?

XuanLan No, it high mountain.

Diane High mountain? Okay.

Diane What occupations did you have in Vietnam?

XuanLan I go to school, and I go to work.

Diane Work as what?

XuanLan At accounting.

Diane So you were a student full-time, and then you went to work as an accountant?

XuanLan I go to work for American company.

Diane For an American company?

XuanLan For the...[pause] yes.

Diane Were you involved in any cultural organizations in Vietnam?

XuanLan No.

Diane Did you practice any traditional arts? If so, which ones? And please describe.

XuanLan No.

Diane Where did you live during the war? Where did you move?

XuanLan I move to the capital at South Vietnam. I live in there.

Diane Saigon?

XuanLan Saigon, yes.

Diane So you moved from Da Lat to Saigon?

XuanLan Da Lat to Saigon. But I still go back to Da Lat because my dad still in there. So I come back every 6 month to visit him.

Diane What did your dad do?

XuanLan At that time, he retired. He too old. He retired. He stay home.

Diane Was it just your dad or...[pause]?

XuanLan My dad, my sister, my niece.

Diane What occupations did you have during the war?

XuanLan During the war? That what I'm work for the small company.

Diane What small company?

XuanLan For the small company represent import and export. American company. Import and export company.

Diane Like different supplies? Import and export different supplies? What kind of materials?

XuanLan All kind of manufactory supplies.

Diane Were you involved in the war? And how?

XuanLan I don't involve in the war. I just live a normal life. Go to work and go home. That's it.

Diane Did you work full-time?

XuanLan Yes.

Diane Were any family members involved in the war, and how?

XuanLan There were in military.

Diane Which family members?

XuanLan The brother-in-law. That's it. That's just one.

Diane He was involved in the war?

04:96

XuanLan He is military.

Diane Was he an officer or just a soldier?

XuanLan Officer.

Diane Officer?

XuanLan [Nods]

Diane So what did he do specifically in the war?

XuanLan He training or somehow. He in the military about 2, 3 years. He get out and then he go to work. He go to teaching. He a teacher.

Diane Did you come into contact with American soldiers? And what did you think of them?

XuanLan In Vietnam or in here?

Diane In Vietnam.

XuanLan It just have couple friend and just talk.

Diane Well, when you first met American soldiers, what did you think of them? When you first met them?

XuanLan I first met them, I just knew they come for help, for fight for our country, for my country.

Diane So you thought they were there to help?

XuanLan Yes.

Diane Did you have any negative image about them?

XuanLan No.

Diane How did the war affect you and your family?

XuanLan It tear the...[pause] it make the life harder. And during the war, I just feel...[pause] I not feel security because we don't know what gonna happen tomorrow, in the future. That what we worry. But other than that, we still have the normal life.

Diane So your family still remained together and strong throughout the war?

XuanLan Yes.

Diane What do you remember most about this time period?

XuanLan What you mean this time period?

Diane About the war.

XuanLan Oh, the war.

Diane Your life during the war. What do you remember most?

XuanLan All the time, you think about the people, the soldier fighting for freedom, the politic happen, you just worry. You have no future. You just...day by day, you don't know what gonna happen. So life is not normal, is not always...all the time have something to worry about.

Diane Is there anything specific that you remember the most about the war? When you were living? [pause]

XuanLan It terrible. Everyday, you heard the people die. It gonna happen this house, shooting this house.

Diane So you just remember mostly about? [pause]

XuanLan And some of my friend, they all in military. And today, heard the bad new about the people die. This friend die, and another friend die. Some of myself, I had some really very serious with my life, and they die suddenly. That what I remember.

Diane Were you ever captured by enemy forces? What was that experience like?

XuanLan No, I don't like that.

Diane Were you or anyone you know ever in a re-education camp? What was that like?

XuanLan Yeah, I have friend. But it happen...[pause] I stay in Vietnam after war. The life in the camp, I heard they say is terrible in there. But I haven't been there so I don't know [unintelligible]...I don't know very much about the inside of camp. I don't know. No.

Diane Do you know anyone who was in a re-education camp?

XuanLan My brother-in-law.

Diane Did he ever tell you how it was like?

09:93

XuanLan I heard my sister told me. It kinda brainwash in there, kinda scary for them. Other than that, I don't know that much about information. All I heard the rumor say they terrible, brainwash, and scary, everything. That all I heard. I haven't go to visit anybody in camp so I don't know that much.

Diane Do you know when your brother-in-law went into the camp, and did he...[pause] what is he doing now?

XuanLan He went into camp in 1977 or 1976 or somehow. Couple of year in camp.

Diane And he got out?

XuanLan And when he got out, he went back to [pause]...find job to work. It a normal life again.

Diane Did you or your family suffer any disabilities as a result of the war?

XuanLan All the economic very tough. All we do is stay in line and fight for the food, and have no job, no nothing, It kinda tough, tough time, at that time.

Diane Where did yall live at?

XuanLan Where did I live at that time?

Diane Yeah.

XuanLan I still live in the capital of the [pause]...Saigon.

Diane Did yall live in a house there or an apartment?

XuanLan Yeah, we rent a house at that time.

Diane So the economy was very bad?

XuanLan Real bad.

Diane So it was hard to get food.

XuanLan [unintelligible]

Diane And yall still stayed in the house during that time?

XuanLan In the house.

Diane What was life like after the war?

XuanLan After the war, everybody panic, scary. They don't know what the new government gonna do with the people. They involve with the old government, and everybody panic. They don't know what gonna happen so life is terrible at that time.

Diane When did you leave Vietnam?

XuanLan I leave Vietnam on 19 [unintelligible]...I came in here '79 right? I leave Vietnam...[pause] What was the question?

Diane When did you leave Vietnam?

XuanLan When I leave Vietnam, it 1979.

Diane Why did you decide to leave? Was it a difficult decision?

XuanLan Yes, very difficult.

Diane Why did you decide to leave?

XuanLan I go leave Vietnam for freedom.

Diane And why was it a difficult decision?

XuanLan 'Cause I left my family in Vietnam.

Diane Who left Vietnam with you? Who was left behind?

XuanLan Some of my friend. I left family member, my father, my sister, 2 sister, and some of the niece in over there. That all.

Diane What things did you decide to bring with you? Do you still have them?

XuanLan What thing. Some of the money, I have to hide it and I have to write information in the money to come in here. On the way to go to escape, I have to have money so I just hide some money for myself.

Diane Do you still have them with you?

XuanLan I do. But I don't know where. [laughs] I threw somewhere but I don't know where now.

Diane Where did you go? What places did you see?

15:00

XuanLan I go to the seas in the small town, in the seaside, in the beachside.

Diane In Vietnam?

XuanLan In the small town. I go over there and I stay in the jung for couple more day.

Diane In the what?

XuanLan In the jung, in the forest.

Diane Oh, the jungle, the forest?

XuanLan Yeah.

Diane Do you know the name of this town? Or it's just a little town?

XuanLan A little town. I don't remember at that time.

Diane Where did you go after that town?

XuanLan I go to... [pause] I came to that town, and I go straight to the forest, to the jungle. I stay in the jungle for two days.

Diane What did you do in the jungle?

XuanLan Just hide in there.

Diane Hiding from communists?

XuanLan Yeah.

Diane How did that feel like for you?

XuanLan So scary. You don't know when they gonna...[unintelligible] you hide somewhere so they don't... [pause] everybody... [pause] if they see you, they call security and catch you. Kinda so very scary, very dangerous.

Diane Who were you with in the jungle? Your friends?

XuanLan Yes, my friend.

Diane Just your friends? Or were there other people too?

XuanLan It not friend. It some people to go with. I don't know them before but when you meet one small group. At that time, they introduce themself and you know at that time.

Diane What about after the jungle?

XuanLan After jungle, about 3:00, we went to small boat, and some of the people, they [pause] organize how to escape. And they have a small boat, and when they make a signal, and we jump on the beach, jump in the boats, and then just go. Go out, outside in international border on the beach. That all we go. We don't know where I'm going.

Diane What kind of boat is it?

XuanLan Small boat for the fish. Fishboat.

Diane With a motor?

XuanLan With the motor.

Diane What other places did you see? Once you got on the boat? What other places did you go to? Did you go to other places?

XuanLan Yes. I went to sea. And then we went to...the boat run down to Thailand. [external noise]

Diane So what happened before you went to Thailand?

XuanLan I just on the small boat, and then, we go around, around until we met the Thailand fishman boat. The owner. They rescue us to their boat. Then they help us to, they show us how to get to camp in Songklan, Thailand. And they left us in the small boat. And we just...[pause] how you say that?

Diane Rowing?

XuanLan Yeah, rowing to the camp. But before we get there, we met so many strange people. Very bad people. They want to steal money, or what? Bad people? I don't how to say that. Pirates?

Diane Pirates.

19:46

XuanLan And then we get in camp and we stay in camp. I stay in there about 3 months. And the American [pause] government came over and interview. And I fill out the paper, I have friend in United State. And they make the paper, they ask so many question, what I'm doing,. And then my friend from united state, they send paper for me, and they done interview, and I wait for a month later on they call me and I get to Bangkok Thailand city. I stay in the camp for a week. And then I flew to United State. One thing I remember is labor day, September. Labor day of united state. One day I remember.

Diane What year?

XuanLan 1979.

Diane What was the name of the first camp you were in? where was that at?

XuanLan At Thailand. Songkla. S-O-N-G-K-L-A-N or somehow like that.

Diane And then you went to Bangkok?

XuanLan Went to Bangkok Thailand.

Diane And you stayed there a week?

XuanLan Stay there for a week.

Diane How was the camp like?

XuanLan Oh, so crowded. People. So many. It terrible. We all sleep on the floor, and it worse in there. But anyways it okay. I go get what I want... [pause] freedom.

Diane What kinds of questions were you asked when you applied to immigrate to the U.S.?

XuanLan They ask...it's all I do fill out my name and how I know my friend who sponsor for me. How I know them. Did I work for them before?. I came and all kind of question fill out and okay. I have two, one friend sponsor for me so I came in here. That make easier than because I have friend in united state to sponsor, so that easy for me.

Diane What was their name?

XuanLan Larry Flannagan and Ha Flannagan.

Diane Were you required to have a health inspection? What was that like?

XuanLan Just have some check-up, x-ray, have all kind of shot and then like physical examination, the whole thing.

Diane How do you feel about your decision to move to the U.S.?

XuanLan Like I said, I want the freedom.

Diane How did that make you feel?

XuanLan I feel?

Diane How?

XuanLan How. I feel...[pause] appreciate what freedom give to me. Or what? Is that be okay with that? I appreciate what I have. Freedom, I can do whatever I want.

Diane What was the hardest thing about starting a new life?

XuanLan It not [pause] it hard, but because when I were in school in Vietnam, I study English, and then I get... [pause] I have to learn more and more and more, and then more with the new life. And beside my friend help me a lot. So I appreciate what they had taught me.

Diane So the hardest thing was? What was the hardest thing? About coming here?

XuanLan For life or about what? Or deal with the people?

Diane What was the hardest thing about starting a new life here?

24:87

XuanLan To me, with all the help, some American people, especially my friend. And some American people later on I met, somehow they help me. So [unintelligible] then beside, I learn myself too. So it's not that hard for me. It kinda take time one by one, so it not hard for me.

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

XuanLan The home? First I stay in the apartment.

Diane Who helped you find that?

XuanLan First I live with my friend. Then refer from my friend and then when I look in the apartment, I look in the paper, I look in the side they advertise, somehow.

Diane Did you find a job and how did you find it?

XuanLan I went to college, community college. And when I done with two year degree, and then I saw the work-study program. They advertise for clinic, hospital in southwest. I just call them and make appointment, just temporary work, and then later on they hire me for job so I work it at that time.

Diane What are the occupations you have held in the United States?

XuanLan What you mean held?

Diane What are the occupations you have held in the United States?

XuanLan All I do is, I learn how to... [pause] I'm learning about computer.

Diane What are some of the positions, some of the jobs you have had in the united states?

XuanLan I go from job and then I get that experience and I go to another one, another one, in the medical field. That all I do.

Diane What kind of jobs though?

XuanLan First I do [unintelligible] typist and bookkeeping, and then after that I go to do data entry and then I do to, now I do account receivable. That my job right now, account receivable.

Diane What are some similarities and differences between your old community and new one.

XuanLan To me, it when I were in my country, the community, we all the same. And then came in here, a little bit change. But other than that, to my life, it not that much difference.

Diane So it's not that much difference in the United States and Vietnam?

XuanLan Not that much different. In here, different is big one. In Vietnam, it small one. To me [unintelligible] it not make different so [pause].

Diane Do you have a funny or memorable experience of culture shock?

XuanLan What you mean culture shock?

Diane Culture shock is when you're introduced to this new culture. You went from Vietnamese culture to American culture. Was there something that you remember that really surprised you about how different American culture was from Vietnamese culture?

29:89

XuanLan Gah, that question, I don't know. To me [pause] to me it not different because... [pause] it not hard for me so [pause] I know it different but the way the language and culture in here. But anyway, it not that much different. That boring?

Diane No. Are you a citizen? Why or why not?

XuanLan I am a citizen.

Diane Do you think of yourself as American or Texan? Why or why not?

XuanLan I think I'm part of Texan because I love texas. People friendly, nice.

Diane What do you think of U.S. policy during and after the war?

XuanLan After the war in Vietnam?

Diane During the war and after the war.

XuanLan Sure because before the way, the lives is little bit freedom, but after the war, we dunno what gonna happen in the future. We dunno what gonna happen so it kinda hard, and economic is real bad, and people just keep thinking about food, how to survive with that life everyday. One by one. It very very tough time, very hard.

Diane Are you involved in politics? Why or why not?

XuanLan I like politics, but I don't like to involve with anything like that.

Diane Do you keep in touch with family or relatives from Vietnam? If so who?

XuanLan Just only one. I have one sister. Once in awhile I just write a letter for her.

Diane And she's still in Vietnam?

XuanLan Yeah.

Diane Have you gone to visit Vietnam? What was that experience like? How does your family celebrate important holidays like Tet?

XuanLan In Vietnam or in here? I haven't go back to Vietnam since I came in here.

Diane And how does your family celebrate important holidays like Tet? Your family now?

34:78

XuanLan Yeah, big celebration every year. We eat some traditional food and we visit, go to [unintelligible] like grandparents, parent, and the family, and then friend. Go to temple or go to church. We have three day to celebration. The first day we go to visit all the family member, and we celebration, we go play game, go around, movie or whatever. Then visit friend, eat and talk for three day, long day. It never work in three day. That big one I like it [laughs]. Clean up the house, everything new, new clothes, that fun.

Diane Does your family keep an altar for your ancestors? What kind of traditions or celebrations do you maintain for your ancestors?

XuanLan What you mean ancestors?

Diane For people who have died in your family.

XuanLan Like upstairs I have picture of grandpa, grandma, sister, whoever die. I still have picture and then every week, sure I am a Buddhist, I light incense and pray, remember them every week and weekend. Remember them the day they die, anniversary they die.

Diane Name a song or music that reminds you of Vietnam

XuanLan Oh my. So many song. Each one of them have some special remind me of Vietnam.

Diane Whats your favorite song?

XuanLan Oh lord. I don't remember name though. I don't listen that much now so I don't remember the name.

Diane In your opinion, what will become of Vietnamese culture in the U.S.?

XuanLan To me I think it gonna be from the generation to another generation. It gonna be forever. Never change.

Diane Is it important to keep cultural identity?

XuanLan Yes.

Diane Why?

XuanLan Because that where we came from.

Diane Are there any other memories you would like to share?

XuanLan The memories? I wish I can come back to Vietnam to see my country.