

Name of Interviewer: Lee Tran

Method of Recording Interview: Digital audio

Language of Interview: English with some Vietnamese

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Search Key Words: Immigration; Women; America; Vietnam

Name of Person Interviewed (or pseudonym): Linh My Tran (step-mother). Also had some minor feedback from my aunt which would prefer to be anonymous.

Name Transcript

00:00:02 (hours:minutes:seconds)

Lee: Okay, how old were you when you left Vietnam?

Linh: 15...I was 15 years old. That's what you mean right?

Lee: What city did you live in while you were in Vietnam?

Linh: In Saigon...Saigon City.

Lee: Was that before or after the war?

Linh: Before and after.

Lee: Before and after?

Aunt: After.

Linh: After?

Aunt: After the war.

Linh: After the war in Saigon? That's what mommy know before when mommy was smaller mommy don't know, but after the war is Saigon, yeah...

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: Yeah, Saigon.

Lee: Okay, so for the major of the time then it was after the war?

Linh: Yeah, that's after the war.

Linh and Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Lee: So Saigon was no longer the capital of Vietnam after the war?

Linh: Right now no right?

Aunt: Before yes.

Linh: You are talking about before?

Lee: When you lived there.

Linh: Yeah.

Lee: So during the war it was the capital of Vietnam right?

Linh: Yes.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: And after the war, mommy don't know.

Aunt: No, after the war Hanoi.

Lee: Okay, can you talk a little about how it was like growing up in Vietnam? Anything you can remember.

Linh: Okay, mommy talk about mommy life only. Somebody else mommy don't know. Okay mommy life...daytime we go to school and after school we like...okay after school I have to cook for lunch. And after lunch we do something around the house. And we play with some friends you know that's the childhood. That's normally mommy know.

Lee: Who did you live with?

Linh: Mommy live with grandma and uncle and *ba Tham*.

Lee: Do you recall the happiest or saddest moments of your life there? Did something really heart-breaking happen to you? Or did something really good happen to you while you were there? I know it's really hard to remember, but anything helps.

Linh: Yeah, some very good and some very bad you know.

Lee: Can you go into any of those?

Linh: That's so far mommy don't remember at all you know. Some very good...

Aunt: [Vietnamese: what does that word mean?]

Linh: Record is like [Vietnamese] remember right? Like good things.

Lee: Or bad things.

Linh: Like good things is mommy...actually mommy don't have much friends. Around our neighborhood we only have 2-3 so mommy don't know.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: See, after the war mommy don't...

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: Mommy lived like a normal life.

Lee: You were part of South Vietnam right?

Linh: Yeah, mommy part of South Vietnam.

Lee: So after the North took over Saigon, I hear that they did a lot of stuff to the South like they took all the guys and made them go to reeducation camps.

00:04:00

Linh: Yeah. That's the family that work for the before government before 1975. They took all of them back to the camp.

Lee: To reeducation camps to try to reeducate them?

Linh: Yeah.

Lee: But you weren't a part of that were you?

Linh: No. Mommy happy because you know mommy is half and half you know. But around our neighborhood the children treat you, but not like a normal. They call you nicknames, you know, some stuff like that.

Lee: So they didn't do anything bad to you really?

Linh: No, they don't.

Lee: Do you know anybody while you were there that were forced into reeducation camps? Any family members?

Linh: Mommy know, but mommy don't anything about them. But mommy know that some of family have the father that go to that camp, but mommy don't know much about how the people treat them. See when mommy was still small you know...

Aunt: You were very young.

Linh: The only thing the family who have the people go to the camp, they know a lot. They know what happened and what going on. The people that go to the camps are the high ranked.

Lee: So people directly involved with the South Vietnamese army?

Linh: Yeah.

Lee: For what reason did you leave Vietnam?

Linh: The reason mommy left Vietnam because mommy half and half children.

Lee: Is that half Caucasian and half Vietnamese?

Linh: Yeah, half American and half Vietnamese. That's the reason mommy here. And some other people left Vietnam because of the communist. That's why they escaped from Vietnam like daddy.

Lee: Around what year was this?

Linh: The year mommy left Vietnam?

Lee: Yes.

Linh: Is 1983.

Lee: Who went with you to America?

Linh: Grandma and Uncle.

Lee: Just Grandma and Uncle?

Linh: Yeah.

Lee: How did you get here to America? Did you go by airplane?

Linh: Airplane, yeah.

Lee: Did you run into any difficulties?

Linh: Like what?

Lee: Like, I know a lot of people were trying to escape Vietnam around that time.

Linh: Yeah, mommy know that the people who escape by Vietnam by boat is very difficult. Some people can die on the ocean. A lot of people died in the ocean too. And some people they lucky they got some other country boat help them. Bring them to the island like Indonesia and Hong Kong and Thailand...Philippines.

Lee: So the new Vietnamese government. The North took over the South, they didn't try to prevent you from getting to America by plane. They didn't try to stop you or anything?

Linh: No they can't because mommy half and half whatever they bring the government here like 1983, Ronald Reagan, the president of the United States. All the people who sign all the papers to agree with the government of Vietnam to let all their children back to the country where there father belong. That's why all the children half and half are here.

Lee: Did Vietnam let those people that were half and half out of the country?

00:08:00

Linh: Yes, yes. They agree. So far mommy know, that's the people like mommy, but the people that escape mommy don't know much until mommy here so mommy know. Like they escape from too many places in Vietnam. Some they go to Philippines. Some they go to Hong Kong and some they go to Indonesia – all those places.

Lee: Were you already considered a citizen of the United States? Or did you have to take a citizenship test?

Linh: Yes...okay, mommy came mommy was 15. So they said after 5 years you live in the United States you have to go take a test. Yes mommy already go take the test and mommy already a U.S. citizen.

Lee: But did that cause any problems for you? Was it easy? Was it hard?

Linh: Actually to do the paper was okay because mommy had been here 5-6 years in...actually let me see...9, 10, 11, 12...4 years in high school.

Lee: High School in America?

Linh: Yeah in America. Mommy 4 years in America and 1 year in college. With mommy I think it was no problem for mommy because mommy was in high school so...Actually it was a little problem.

Lee: Is high school where you learn the language?

Linh: Yeah mommy learn the language.

Lee: Did you know any English before you came to America?

Linh: A little. Actually a little since mommy came here.

Lee: Did grandma know any English?

Linh: She...actually mommy can't say no or I cannot say yes. Just a tiny bit. A little bit. Like a few words.

Lee: Did you have any other educate besides high school?

Linh: That's so embarrassing. No.

Lee: Did you attend college at all?

Linh: No, only high school diploma. College you know...we have no chance you know because the living not too easy.

Lee: Can you go into that a little bit. Like some of the difficulties you faced when you first came to America.

10:47

Linh: Yeah it is very tough. Like since we to the United States the government they help us pay rent like 3, 4, 5 months. And they help us, what they call, the food stamp. After mommy think 10 months grandma go to work for the restaurant. She a cook. Yeah and after that the government they call the IRS. They knew grandma started working so they stopped paying rent. So grandma had to pay rent her work money and they still help us with food stamps. Yeah, so the food stamps for the food. And a year or two years later, Uncle quit school.

00:12:00

Lee: He quit high school?

Linh: Yeah, he quit school and to work for the Jack-and-the-Box because the living kinda hard.

Lee: Did he start working to support the family?

Linh: Yes, support the family for rent, for bills, for food you know. It is kinda difficult for us since we came here we don't know nothing, no English, no nothing. No relatives no friends. Yeah, everything kinda strange to us.

Lee: So when you first came here you knew no one. Absolutely no one?

Linh: No, no one, nobody. Some kind of new life.

Lee: You didn't know anybody from like Saigon that came here?

Linh: From Saigon, yeah we know but just people we know they are from Saigon but not like friends, just acquaintances.

Lee: Do you still have family in Vietnam?

Linh: Yes, for grandma. Grandma still have some sisters and brothers over there.

Lee: How is your relationship to them? Do you get along with them or do you send money to them every once and a while?

Linh: Kinda a long time. Grandma help a little bit. Just send like a gift. Send money for like a gift. Because Grandma kind of old, she money. We don't even have enough money for us, how can we support them? If we could, we would like to because you know the living over there kind of poor. Whatever we can help, we would like to help but you know, over here kind of tough too you know. We need to take care of us over here first and then if we can make it here, we can make it over there.

Lee: Let's go back to the time you were in high school. Can you talk about that a little more. For instance, did you face any kind of stereotypes while you were in school?

Linh: Yeah, mommy remember for the first year mommy went to high school, that was in the 9th grade, that was kind of tough because we know nothing you know. Everybody kinda strange. Especially teachers, kinda strange to us too. But she very nice mommy remember. All the teachers very nice. They know you from another place. And they nice. And the ESL teacher she very nice – mommy still remember her. She give us all the homework and she talk in the class. Whatever you don't understand but for really mommy don't know nothing what she says.

Lee: Did she speak Vietnamese?

Linh: No she speak English. All English teachers. Mommy don't know what happened what she talking about you know. But mommy know is we in class so the only thing she talk about in class every time she talk she pass all the paper out. Homework and in high school they have the Vietnamese teach. That teacher is Mr. Nguyen. He teach in French and English. So whatever mommy don't understand mommy go over him and ask him: Mr. Nguyen what happen what they say you know and he help. And since that mommy learn everyday and day

by day we you know we can catch up easily. But not all, but at least we can know and friends so...friends is American friends and 1, 2 Vietnamese friends. But they are like mommy. They don't know nothing too.

00:16:00

Lee: Were there other Vietnamese students at the school?

Linh: Yeah they have a lot...actually not a lot compared to American people. Like 10 Vietnamese.

Lee: Did you guys like band together?

Linh: You mean dance?

Lee: Ban together.

Linh: No. We friends, but some are older than us. They have been here longer than we. They are in 10 or 11 grade – all boys and we are girls and you know we know every time we pass in the hall we say hi and stuff like that, but we don't talk because they boy and we girl. We have nothing to talk about.

Lee: Okay, after you graduated high school I'm assuming you tried to get a job. Can you talk a little about that?

Linh: Oh no. Before in high school mommy still working too, but part time job.

Lee: Oh okay, where did you work at during high school?

Linh: Before high school, after school mommy go work for the pool place. Mommy go and work for them on the weekend. Like Friday and Saturday. Only like two days and Sunday mommy don't. And they pay 50 dollars. So mommy take that 50 dollars to buy some clothes. I've been work there for two years and mommy turn to 18 years old and mommy quit working and mommy go work for the waitress. So actually mommy work too long. Part-time and then after that mommy turn 18 work for the waitress. And after graduation...you know after high school you can work for the factory. Mommy work for factory too you know...after high school you have no degree you know...only high school diploma. They don't pay you much. So...mommy still work for the waitress. Mommy make a little more money and after that mommy quit for the waitress and go work for the company. The electric company. And since we left...

Lee: Did you meet dad at the electric company?

Linh: Yes, at the electric company.

Lee: Did you know what year that was? Just approximately.

Linh: 90's. Mommy work there in '89 and '90 mommy know daddy.

Lee: Okay, that's pretty much all my questions I have.

Linh: It's okay, go ahead and asking because mommy feel happy.

Lee: Well first off, is there anything you want to add, maybe hardships growing up in America or anything I didn't ask? Anything that comes to mind?

Linh: Like example...

Lee: Well currently we started off pretty much when you were a little girl and now were over here and you have already graduated high school and you married dad. I don't know if I should be asking this or not...Oh I'm sorry go ahead.

00:20:03

Linh: Let mommy talk more, feel happy now. Over here in America if mommy compare with Vietnam, mommy would like to live here better than Vietnam. Mommy feel secure over here more than Vietnam.

Lee: So in the future you wouldn't want to go back and live in Vietnam?

Linh: In the future, mommy don't think mommy go back there and live because mommy feel insecure. Mommy feel because the time mommy live here is longer than the time mommy live there. And the government here is kinda like better. They protect you; they help you. So far mommy know whatever happens over here, mommy still over here because America is the second country and also that mommy and daddy country. So mommy would like to live here and die here. Mommy is not thinking about going back to Vietnam and live in Vietnam. But mommy can visit Vietnam, but not thinking about going back there and live there – ever.

Lee: So do you consider yourself more American or Vietnamese?

Linh: Yeah, for American is good way to live. As long as you working and got money or you try hard you got good stuff. And the people very nice. Nothing nobody come to you and do something to you or harm to you. Mommy think America is the protective place to live. Good place to live. And you have the children; you raise the children with the good way you know.

Lee: Yeah.

Linh: Yeah, mommy think so.

Lee: Yeah I agree with that. Okay, I don't know if I should be asking this, but...

Linh: Go ahead.

Lee: What do you think about cross-cultural marriages? For example a Vietnamese person marrying a white person.

Linh: That is kind of hard you know. I was over there very young and I don't know much about the people or the people over there much. But, American people over here they are good too, they are nice too. Over there some they have some good too, but it depends you know, some place it depends the situation. If you live bad situation or bad place you might have the bad people too you know.

Lee: Would you want your children to marry Vietnamese people to kind of preserve the culture?

Linh: Oh that is kind of hard too you know. Because if...that is kind of hard, let mommy think...because if my choice I would like the same culture. Same Asian, same race, but love [laughs] you can not make your children to marry with people who the cannot love. It doesn't matter what race is it as long as they are good, as long as they respect you, they respect their parents and do right things. They know how to take care themselves; take care their husband and wife and the children it's good, I agree. Doesn't matter what race, but if I got more choice for my own I would like my children to marry with that Asian people. Especially, since you Vietnam you marry Vietnam people so we can understand more the language. Whatever we communicate, that's very good. You know, more understanding and they know your culture, your tradition. That mommy like, but...

00:24:30

Lee: Would you want them to marry an American Vietnamese person or someone from Vietnam?

Linh: From Vietnam? Oh I would like to marry the people Vietnamese live in America. Not Vietnamese people who live in Vietnam, no.

Lee: Why is that?

Linh: The difference is the people who live here have education here, they know more about America and they treat like you know, more understandable. You know there really different because the way they living over here different.

Lee: Can you go into that a little bit. How are they different?

Linh: They are different because the children over here they live here. The culture...most they go to American culture more. They know more. But they still know there Vietnamese culture too. They know both. They understand too. They open you know. But the children over there, it's kind of hard. I can't explain you

know right now because they...I can not say they have no education. Some they have good education to you know, but they are different. You can tell their different. I can not explain like how different.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: The way they treat people different. They are different. Most men like over there are more like dictator. They are not even. Like mommy told you, they are not even they are more like dictator. They...

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: Yeah, if the children who live here born over here, but if they go over there and marry the children over there they are different. The way the living is different. The people who are over there they come here, you have to teach them, to tell them, from the beginning, like to teach a little children to grow up you know. It is kind of hard. Some people they accept it. Some people they can't.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: You know like some people who are educate over there they know more about, they understand more about the living over here. How the people over here, but they are not exactly who children who live here.

00:28:09

Lee: So they grow up in a different world.

Linh: Yeah, different world.

Lee: Can we talk a little about women being treated as second class citizens – so to speak – in Vietnam? Where the men are at the top and the women are below them. The dictatorship that is going on. Do you think it's still like that today in Vietnam?

Linh: I think that is the old fashion. I think still.

Lee: Are things changing?

Linh: Right now, so far, mommy don't think...not sure very much because the children now...the young people now they kind of even now. Because they are going to school. There even. They treat equal. So they not like a long, long time. The people who long, long time like 40...I think like 50 now or 40 something, they still keep their old fashion. They still like husband is the first.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: The age under 50 they know more, they understand more.

Lee: So they're equally educated?

Linh: Equal, but before [meant to say after] 50 mommy think they still keep there tradition. You know, like men always on top. Women behind. Now everyone equal mommy think.

Aunt: [Agrees in Vietnamese]

Lee: So in terms of when a person marries in Vietnam, they husband and wife are equal?

Linh: You mean right now? Right now mommy think.

Lee: At least more equal then they were in the past.

Linh: I think that in the city. Yeah they are more equal. But in the country really don't know. They are more educated. The people who live in the city are more educated because they have chance to go to work make money so they can go to school if they want to. And the people who the same age, but live in the country they have no chance for school, no chance for working. They marry early still same way. They have no education. They might still because they live in the family. The family go like that, the next generation like that. Its already like that so they always...

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Lee: So in the city they marry when there 25 to 30?

Linh: Yeah, not all, but some. Some they marry late too. Because right now the children they think about more education now.

Lee: Do you know if there is more public education in Vietnam right now?

Linh: [Vietnamese asks **Aunt**]

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: They have too many type of university over there. They have law. They have law university too. They have doctor university too. And how do you call the people...

00:32:20

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: They have farmer university too.

Lee: Oh do they? That's interesting.

Linh: Yeah they have a lot of different kind of university, but it depends how you think you can have money to go.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: And they have the language school too you know.

Lee: So you can learn various bilingual languages?

Linh: A lot of places right now they open for Chinese school, like they teach you only Chinese language and the English school too and the French school too. Korean too. Too many languages right now.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: And we can take and in mommy heart for real, mommy want the whole family to go there. First, we go to visit grandma. You know grandma die and grandpa die we have to go there. And, so we can go around where daddy live. The place daddy live. So you know too. And mommy want to take the big portrait for our family. That is the main thing right now mommy really want to do. Because we don't have the one for the whole family. You never know...

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: She say, when we were there ya'll still young, but now the Vietnam they getting better now.

Lee: Yeah, back when I was there, there was just so much poverty everywhere.

Linh: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, but she says right now that everything a lot look better now.

Lee: I mean it was always a pretty country. I remember going to a lot of different temples and shrines, but just the poverty...so many poor people.

Linh: That's why when you go there...mommy feel bad too. You want to cry...

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: Over here more better.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: You know because the girl over here they born here or doesn't matter if they not born here, but if they came here since they were little. They are educated over here. They understand too. Like you. You know how the people how thing to do over here. If you marry the people over here to here they are different. You know they are different world, different idea.

Lee: Different mindset:

Linh: Yes, that's why.

Aunt: [Vietnamese]

Linh: The degree over there different from here you know. Like mommy said, if we have chance, mommy would like to go the whole family, mommy want to go everywhere [in Vietnam].

00:35:38 (end)