

Name of Interviewer: Catherine Kingkeo

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Name of Person Interviewed (or pseudonym): Hubert Vo

Name	Transcript
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00:01

Catherine Where are you from?

Hubert Vo I'm from Saigon, Vietnam. I grew up in Saigon.

Catherine How was your life like as a child?

Hubert Vo As a student I was young by the time ...as a student I didn't know really...pay attention to the war. I knew that there was a war going on. But, as a student I didn't pay really much attention to the war. My family in Vietnam, it was pretty much...I had an easy life because my father was in the Navy and my mom had her own business.

Catherine How were you disciplined as a youth?

Hubert Vo I think I was a very good kid when I was young. I believe that it is our tradition; it's our culture that we need to listen to our parents all the time and we can't talk back any of them.

Catherine What was a typical day for you like in Vietnam?

Hubert Vo When I was in high school I remember every morning I have to wake up to go to school, you know, riding a bicycle to school and in the afternoon we have class around four or five o' clock. Go home and kind of review the homework and prepare for school tomorrow and also at night I have to come up to my parents, either my mom or my father, to recite lessons to them.

Catherine Did you like school a lot then?

Hubert Vo It was okay for me. I enjoyed it too and it was different from here. I had to go to school here but I believe that the school in Vietnam was different.

Catherine Did you graduate high school in Vietnam?

Hubert Vo Yes, I graduated from high school there.

Catherine Did you have any occupations in Vietnam?

Hubert Vo No, I just went straight to school when I was young.

Catherine Were you involved in any cultural organizations in school?

Hubert Vo You know in Vietnam, Vietnamese schools in Vietnam there were not too many activities except for martial arts and I was pretty much involved in Judo and Tae Kwon Do.

Catherine Do you still do that today?

Hubert Vo No. [laughs]

Catherine War time experiences, do you remember very little?

Hubert Vo I remember the time that we had a lot of things going on in Saigon. I travel with my father to different places. He was in the Navy, he was in the coast guard and so I had a chance to travel with him to different parts of Vietnam. And I remember when the war escalated in Vietnam in Saigon. You know when we were driving on the streets and bombs explode right behind us shaking the whole jeep and it was loud and I remember that rockets fly overhead at night and we learn to hear the sounds of the rockets to identify if rockets coming to you or to other places. So those are my experiences.

Catherine Where did you live during the war? Were you still in Saigon?

Hubert Vo Yes, I was in Saigon during the war.

Catherine Did you make any moves?

Hubert Vo Basically, I was in Saigon with my family.

Catherine Were you involved in the war in anyway?

Hubert Vo I was not involved in the war but in school, in high school we had to join what they called the "civilian forces." So after school you have to go to training classes where they actually show you how to use a gun, a revolver, and a rifle and they give you a gun at home for you to protect yourself and your family and you went to different trainings and at night you take turns in a subdivision with other people.

05:36

Catherine And were your family members involved in the war?

Hubert Vo My father was in the war. My uncle was in the war. My cousin was in the war. [pause] Basically everyone have to be enlisted somehow.

Catherine Did you come in contact with any American soldiers at all?

Hubert Vo I was very young by that time, of course, I remember that my father used to work with the Americans all the time.

Catherine What did you think about them?

Hubert Vo I think they're great. I think ...by that time I had..., the opinion by that time was that American soldiers were the greatest soldiers in the world. They come out here to help us.

Catherine How did the war affect you and your family?

Hubert Vo I learned a lot from the war. I learn from...been very cautious. Watch over my shoulders everywhere I go and I remember that the survival skills and got to not trust anybody and you got to be self-motivated. Those are the good things that I learned from the war.

Catherine What is the most that you remember about that time period?

Hubert Vo It was a chaos time. Rockets flew in everywhere and shots heard at night when you sleep. And in the morning when you wake up you, if you drive down the street you can still see the demolition done by the rockets—the incoming rockets at night from the communist soldiers.

Catherine Were you captured by any of the enemy forces?

Hubert Vo No, I was lucky. I was pretty much [pause] very lucky.

Catherine Were you or anyone you know in the reeducation camp?

Hubert Vo My father, no.[pause] No, not really. My direct family was okay.

Catherine Did you or your family suffer from disabilities as the result of the war?

Hubert Vo I know that my uncle died from the war and no not of us were disabled due to the war but except for my uncle, he was killed during the war.

Catherine What was your life like after the war?

Hubert Vo After the war we went abroad by the day the Communist took over Vietnam so it was quite a journey for everyone of us. We have to justify the new life and we have to start everything from scratch. It was a new beginning for us.

Catherine How old were you during that time?

Hubert Vo I was first year in college. I was 18.

Catherine How many siblings do you have?

Hubert Six of us all together; family of eight.

Catherine When did you leave Vietnam?

Hubert Vo I left Vietnam with my family in 1975.

Catherine Why did you decide to leave?

09:44

Hubert Vo It was not me who decided. It was my parents that decided.

Catherine Was it a difficult decision for them?

Hubert Vo As I remember clearly, it was not a tough decision for my parents because my parents knew ahead of time what was going to come and that he had the experiences with the communist so he say that we need to leave.

Catherine Who left Vietnam with you?

Hubert Vo Just my direct family; my parents and siblings

Catherine So everyone came, nobody was left behind?

Hubert Vo No, no one was left behind.

Catherine What things did you decide to bring with you?

Hubert Vo It was my wallet and [Nancy Bui—for money] [Laughs] No, it was not for money. I was a poor student. But, my wallet with my ID card, I know, by that time I was very puzzled, very uncertain, if we have time, one day we go back to the country that's the one thing that I remember clearly that I'm going to hang on to my wallet with my ID and I'm going to keep it as a souvenir. But unfortunately, when I was on the boat and I got seasick I was holding my wallet and tried to wobble down the aisle to the side of the boat and somehow I just dropped by wallet into the ocean. So, I lost it.

Catherine So what places did you go? Where did you first move?

Hubert Vo Our first stop was in Subic Bay in the Philippines.

Catherine How was that like?

Hubert Vo Life was easy because we were in the U.S Navy Base and we were well received and after that we moved to the Wake Islands.

Catherine When did you get to the U.S?

Hubert Vo We left Vietnam in April 1975 and when I really got out of the Refugee camp in some time in August of 1975.

Catherine Do you remember any experiences of being in the Refugee camp?

Hubert Vo [laughs] There was a very experience that I'll always remember all of my life. In Civic Bay, you know, we take turns to clean all the toilets. So, when we do the activity we were given a suit, a white suit, and we always were astronauts going to the moon—so we always had that joke. "It's your turn to go to the moon." [laughs]

Catherine You mentioned that you on a boat. Can you tell me about that experience?

Hubert Vo It was a small boat. It was a coast guard boat and there were like several families on the boat on the boat with my family. We had a crew. We had about 80 something people on the boat. We had to ration our food everyday and our water.

Catherine Was it a hard time for you?

Hubert Vo We had to sleep on the deck.

Catherine Do you remember any experiences on the journey on the boat?

Hubert Vo At first we didn't know where ...we knew where wanted to go but we really...after a couple of days on the ocean people started getting anxious and wanted to arrive on land right way. It's just that people were kind of nervous after a couple of days.

14:57

Catherine So how long did it take you to reach all those places?

Hubert Vo About 7 days before we reached to Subic Bay.

Catherine Did your family choose to come to the United States?

Hubert Vo At first my father decided we need to go the New Guinea Islands and we had it that way but on the way out there we met with the U.S Navy and they welcome on us on board but none of us wanted to come on board just except for one family because we always had the intention to go to the New Guineas Island. But, after a few days we decided it was going to be a long journey so we turned around and so we went to the Philippines.

Catherine What was the first state you moved to when you came to the U.S?

Hubert Vo We were in the refugee camp in Little Rock, Arkansas. After that I was sponsored by the First Baptist Church in Paris, Texas.

Catherine How long have you been in Texas?

Hubert Vo Since I got here in 1975.

Catherine Don't want to move anywhere else?

Hubert Vo I moved from Palestine to Lubbock and then back to Houston.

Catherine Were you required to have a health inspection at all?

Hubert Vo Yes, when were at Wake Islands they gave us shots, took us some X-Rays for us, everything else we...make sure we don't have any sicknesses. And if we do then they treat us.

Catherine What was that like for you being examined?

Hubert Vo I think it's just a routine and everyone have to go through so it's just a normal procedure for me.

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

Hubert Vo It was not my decision it was my parents, again, and I think it was a great decision.

Catherine Does your entire family still live in Texas?

Hubert Vo I have a sister, she's in Oklahoma now. I have a brother in California.

Subject: Starting over in the United States

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

Hubert Vo My father he prepped us already before we land. Before we landed to the United States when we were on the island. He said that, "your life will be different and you have to start all over but one thing I want all of you to do is to make sure you don't ask for food. As long as you're healthy you work for food." That's what I remember from my father telling all of us.

Catherine Who helped you find your new home in the U.S?

Hubert Vo We were lucky. We were sponsored by the Church and people here opened their arms to us. They gave us a place to stay, gave us food for a few months, ...so it was really encouraging. It was a warm really welcoming.

Catherine How did you find your first job?

Hubert Vo I remember, I call him "Brother Scott" but he's a pastor of First Baptist Church. He took me to a grocery, not to a grocery store, something like Target or Wal-Mart nowadays and he introduced me to a manager and help me apply for a position. So that was my first job.

20:00

Catherine What other occupations did you have after this?

Hubert Vo Many, many occupations, not really occupations but I took all the jobs that came to me and to make a living to help my parents and to help my family

because I'm the oldest in the family. I have to help my parents to support my brothers and sisters for them to continue with their education. So I had a variety of jobs. People say that I am an assembly man, I'm a technician, I'm a bus boy, I'm a cook, I am a machinist, I do everything—you name it, I am convenient store clerk [laughs].

Catherine Did you go to college here?

Hubert Vo Yes, I went to Texas State and transferred to the University of Houston.

Catherine How was life in college?

Hubert Vo I think it was great. I worked full time and went to school full time also. I remember some semesters I had, I wanted to take 18 hours to get out of college sooner because I met a beautiful girl. I said "I'm going to marry her so I need to get out of college."

Catherine What was your major?

Hubert Vo Mechanical Engineering.

Catherine What are some similarities and differences between your old community in Vietnam and your new one now?

Hubert Vo Let me start out with the differences. In term of houses when I first arrived here in the U.S I said "Wow, these houses are so tiny so flat here in the U.S."