

Name of Interviewer: Andrew Morris

Method of Recording Interview: Audio, Translated through Nancy Bui

Name of Person Interviewed: Bich Phuong Thi Vo

Location of Interview: Austin, Texas

Date of Interview: 2/24/08

Name **Transcript**

Andrew My name is Andrew, I'm doing this through school. It's an oral history project, trying to get some oral histories recorded. I want to start at the beginning and ask the questions chronologically. So, to begin.

TS 2:28

Andrew Where were you born, and where did you grow up?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I was born in Saigon, and I grew up in Saigon.

Andrew What year were you born?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy 1970.

Andrew Do you have many memories of what life was like before 1975?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy No I don't.

Andrew What was your life like when you were growing up?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Our family, in Korea, is hairdresser. So, if we accept this job we have to go and that how we make a living.

Andrew Were the effects of the conflict visible to you in your daily life?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy When she was born, during the war, she was very young. So she doesn't have much memory about the war. She didn't know much about the conflict. She think that the war is not very good for anyone. She know the war through books and film and stuff like that.

Andrew What was your life like under communism? Were you aware of what was going on, did it effect you very much?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy During the time she lived there, under communist regime, she feel like she cannot ever tell the truth because she may get into trouble. Also the policy about privately owned land and houses is very complicated, and over there you have to bribe for any paperwork you need, you have to pay, you have no money. But I cannot do much about it and that's how we have to live.

TS 7:35

Andrew What made you decide to leave Vietnam?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I eloped. I married my husband, I love him and where he lives. I must live with him.

Andrew What does he do, how did you meet him?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I met him through internet. His name is John Nguyen. When I had a little free time I could not go anywhere to play, so I surf on internet, and I know that Vietnamese American over here, their level of education higher and I can learn a lot through him. And then I met John Nguyen through that. And then we started chatting. Five months later he went back to Vietnam

to meet me the first time. And then he keep come back, and chatting on internet until four years later come to Vietnam and marry me.

Andrew Was your husband an American, or Vietnamese living in America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy He is a Vietnamese American. He came to United States around '88, or '89.

Andrew Do you know anything about how he came to America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy He was sponsored by his brother through the Orderly Departure Program.

Andrew Did you come alone or did you bring any family when you came to America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I went by myself.

Andrew Do you still have family in Vietnam?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes. I'm the only one here.

Andrew Do you still communicate with your family back home, through the internet? Do you stay in contact with them at all?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I don't have much time, so we call on the phone more than the internet, now.

TS 11:49

Andrew Were you really nervous to leave Vietnam and come to America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes, I was, but I get used to it now.

Andrew When and where did you arrive in America? Where did you live when you first got here?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I came through L.A. airport, and lived in Orange County, California.

Andrew How did you come from California to Texas?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy A year ago, on one of my husband's vacations, we decided to visit Texas because my husband has some friends over here. When we came here we see that Austin is beautiful, and job opportunities here are quite good. So we decided to move from California to Austin.

Andrew When you were living in Orange County, did you find the transition to be difficult? Or was it easy to get into the swing of things and figure out how things work here? Did you experience racism in any way, or was it pretty friendly welcoming?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy When I took him to U.S., everybody knows its a huge country, and everything is different, transportation, especially the language. It was very difficult for me. I was lucky to have in-law family help me through the transition.

Andrew Where you interested in coming to America before you got married?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes!

Andrew So you're glad that you came?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes, definitely.

Andrew Have you gone back to Vietnam since you've come to America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Not yet.

Andrew Do you have any plans to go in the future?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes, I want to but I don't have the opportunity yet.

Andrew What is it you do for a living?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I'm a nail technician.

Andrew Do you like your job?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes.

Andrew Do you own your own business or do you work for somebody else?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I work for somebody else.

Andrew Do you have any occupational dangers or is it a pretty safe job?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I know that in my job there are some health hazards, the liquid for the nail, the acetone. But this job make living for me so I have to accept it.

Andrew Would you consider any other careers? Are there any careers that interest you at this time?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I like my job very much.

Andrew You said your husband was a computer engineer. Where does he work right now?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy He is resting right now because he went through an accident. But he was working for Free Scale.

Andrew Do you two have any children right now?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Not yet.

Andrew Do you have plans to?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes.

Andrew Do you think it will be difficult to raise children in America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy No, I don't think so.

Andrew Could you imagine a future where you could take your family back to Vietnam?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I think that we will come to visit, my parents, my brother and sister; but we will come back.

Andrew Do you think your family in Vietnam would prefer to come to America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Most of our brothers and sisters would like to come here.

TS 20:00

Andrew What is it like to be a Vietnamese American right now? How has it effected your life to be associated with one culture but to live in America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I have to adapt to new life, the most difficult is the language. And I don't have time; I have to work to support family, so I don't have opportunity to go to school. But I think that I have to learn to adapt with this somehow.

Andrew Do you watch much American television?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes.

Andrew How do you feel Asians are portrayed in the media? Is it accurate or is it based on racist stereotypes?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I don't have much opportunity to watch television, American television, but I watch quite a bit of program on Vietnamese channel. When they describe what happens in Vietnam, Asia, especially in Cambodia, that region, talking about having no freedom, the corruption over there, I think it's true.

Andrew Do you think that the world understands the political culture in Vietnam right now, or has it been forgotten about?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I think the traditional culture in Vietnam is still very much practiced amongst Vietnamese.

Andrew Has the communist regime tried to damage the traditional Vietnamese culture?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy When I was in third grade, I realized that all the books about South Vietnam before 1975 were prohibited, by people. Only Marxism is taught in the class. Older, traditional was very much disturbed. And now, I see some improvement little by little.

TS 27:00

Andrew When you were living in Vietnam, did you have enough food, was your house big enough, were you financially stable or was it political problems that caused you to leave?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy The economic reason in Vietnam is very difficult. Children even in elementary school still have to pay money to go to school. So, not many people can go to school right now. And another thing about the political reason. There are a lot of hard policies towards the people. So living there is very difficult, so many people would like to leave if they have the opportunity.

Andrew What was one of your favorite experiences of America when you first arrived? What was something new that you encountered for the first time that was very different than you had seen in Vietnam?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Too many cars!

Andrew Are there not many cars in Vietnam?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Not many.

Andrew It's mostly bicycles and motorcycles?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes.

TS 32:30

Andrew Do you see much of your in-laws' family? Are they still in Orange County, or do they live in Texas?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy They're still in Orange County.

Andrew Do they have any plans to move out here, or are they pretty settled in Orange County?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy They'd probably like Texas, but they get used to the nice weather there so they probably don't want to move.

Andrew Does your husband have a large family, or is it small, would you say?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes, a large one. Nine people.

Andrew Do you know anything about what they do for a living, or how they live?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Most of them are educators, teacher, one of the brothers, he is a journalist.

Andrew Do your brothers and sisters have any plans to get to America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy They would like to, but they have no way of doing that right now.

Andrew Why not?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy They very much want to, but they have to wait till I become a citizen, and I can do paperwork. 'Til that day there is no other way.

Andrew So when you become a citizen you can possibly bring them over?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes. The process is very long - Nancy.

Andrew What do you think of the United States involvement during the Vietnam War, do you think it helped or hurt the country? What are your general reactions to American involvement in the Vietnam War?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I think that the involvement of America to Vietnam War is a good thing. America came to Vietnam, improved our lives a lot. In my family, I was born in the year that I was the only one born to get any benefit out of it. When the country under communist regime, we all lived very hard, they discriminate people and life is very difficult. Overall, I think American involvement in Vietnam was a good thing.

Andrew Did you feel that America had betrayed Vietnam when they withdrew support and Saigon fell? Or do you think that America had done enough at that point and couldn't help further?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I think that American soldier not done enough yet. I do not say about war, but you know, we need help. People over there are so poor and we live under very low condition, and if America can help then it's probably better than leaving Vietnam.

TS 38:09

Andrew Do you encounter many Vietnamese American families here with American-born children?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy Yes.

Andrew Do you think that Vietnamese culture is being properly instilled in the next generation, or do you think that they're losing touch with their roots?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I think that it's going to change, somewhat, but I think that it is still Vietnamese culture among Vietnamese Americans, the reason because most of the Vietnamese Americans are teaching their children about culture, about the tie of the family, and overall the Vietnamese refugee and immigrants are still coming. So, it's still there for at least several years.

Andrew What do you think would be the most important things to teach your own children about Vietnamese culture and your personal story of coming to America?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy I think that the ones who grow up here will have to adapt to American culture and everything surrounding them, but I would also like very much to teach them Vietnamese language. And also I would want to teach them how to respect their parents, and I would like to teach them sing some Vietnamese songs and fairy tale stories.

Andrew What would be an example of a Vietnamese story you would like to teach to your children?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy There is a story about the moon cake and the earth cake, that's the traditional food for Tet in Vietnam, explains about Vietnamese culture. I will be sure to teach them that.

TS 43:45

Andrew Is there anything else you want to say that you think is important that we take away from this interview?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy When I live here I feel comfortable here. I wish that other Vietnamese Americans would love each other more. I wish to have affordable healthcare, and have it in Texas some day. Because my husband and I, we both work. He is skilled, but he work temporary, so didn't have any insurance. We both work full time but we cannot afford health insurance. So that is what we both work for. I have no complaining when I live here, if any complaining, the person to be blamed is me.

Andrew When you said the Vietnamese need to love each-other more, what did you mean by that?

Bich Phuong Thi Vo: in Vietnamese

Nancy What I mean is that in Texas, Vietnamese are very spread out, not like in California where we gather in one place and we can have our association can have each-other. Here, in Texas I see some of my friend live in very far city or small town and don't have any sort of camaraderie or share anything with the community. I hope one day we can be more tied.