

**Vietnamese American Culture and History**  
**Assignment 3: Oral History Transcription**

**Name of Interviewer:** Trizzie Nguyen

**Method of Recording Interview:** Digital camera

**Name of Person Interviewed:** Long Vu

**Location of Interview (city/state):** UT Austin

**Date of Interview:** February 22, 2008

**Name                      Transcript**

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*[Translated from Vietnamese]*

00:01

**Trizzie**                      Hello Mr. Long I saw you wrote down on your biographical information form that you were abandoned by your mother when you were little. Can you tell me, what was your life like without a mother?

**Long**                      I lived in an orphan-home called Ky Quang Temple; I never got a chance to see my father or mother's face. When my mom talked to the director of the orphanage, the director asked her a question: "Are you giving your child away permanently or temporarily?" My mother replied, "Temporarily, I will take him back home later". I still remember how my mom abandoned me, she told me to sit in the corner of Ky` Quang Temple, so she can go inside to do the some paperwork. But after long hours of waiting, I started to cry and called out for my mother. Then suddenly, I saw a woman who walked out to look for me, it was not my mother but it was the director. She told me "Your mom had to pay a visit to other temples; she will come back later to get you. But after that day, I never saw my mom's face again."

2:08

**Trizzie**                      How were your life in the orphanage, did you encountered any discrimination when you were there?

**Long**                      During the time, at the orphanage home I did not get any discrimination, because there were many children who are Amerasian like me.

3:00

**Trizzie**                      How long did you stay in the orphanage home? How did you get adopted from so many people?

**Long**                      After 1975, the communist closed down Ky` Quang orphanage, many kids were thrown out on to the street. Although, I'm not the exception there was a Buddhist who wants to adopt me and she promised the orphanage director that she will take care of me until I reached adulthood. But she

never kept her promise! She took me down to Long Khanh to work for Uncle Tho.

6:04

**Trizzie**

How old were you at that time?

**Long**

I started to work on the rice field at the age of 7. One day I was in the mango orchard and suddenly the bomb storage next to the orchard exploded. One of the workers in the orchard had to carry me away and brought me back to her house to stay for the night. When I went back home Uncle Tho has not return home from the election. He came home very late at night, and he noticed that his bicycle was missing among the farm tractors in the living room. He accused me of stealing his bicycle. But I told him I didn't do it, and I don't know who did it. I told him the bomb storage exploded near the orchard so I stayed in Aunt 7<sup>th</sup>'s house and I did not return home until this morning. But, he didn't believe me; he told me if I don't tell him who stole the bicycle he will tie me down and drown me in the water. After hours of torture, he was too tired and felt asleep. I decided to run through a hole that a dog dug up. I still remember it was 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning when I heard the bells from Bao Toan church chime. I wandered on the street for sometime and suddenly Aunt 7<sup>th</sup> saw me and ask where I'm going. I told her, "Uncle Tho says he going to kill me if I don't tell him who stole his bicycle". Then aunt 7<sup>th</sup> said, "He such a cruel person, why don't you come with me. But I'll have to hide you underground for several days so Uncle Tho doesn't know you're here and then I will take you to Central Vietnam to live with my mother." During the time that I hid in Aunt 7<sup>th</sup>'s underground basement, there is a lady who lives in the same district, who was known as a communist spy during the Vietnam War. This powerful lady gave out a notice to all the people in that district and warned others of my presence which said that, 'whoever let me stay in their house will be put to jail, but who ever catches me and returns me to her will be rewarded'. Aunt 7<sup>th</sup> has no choice but to let me go, and made me keep a promise not to tell anyone for the past few days that I had stayed at her house. I kept my promise, because when Uncle Huy, who is a customer from the orchard, saw me walking down the street, he asked me where I have been for the past few days. I told him, "Oh, I just wander here and there." Uncle Huy asked me, "do you want to come home and live with me?" I answered him, "yes." He doesn't want anyone to see me so he hid me inside the bamboo basket and take me home by his tractor. He and his wife have two children a daughter and a son. The son was nice but the daughter was cruel to me. She hit me so many times, one time I was so mad so I hit her back. She goes on and told her father about me, he hit me really hard for hurting his daughter. Both of their children goes to school, so my responsibility at home is to make pig food by chopping vegetables into pieces and heat it up with water, I also learned how to cook rice and wash clothes for the whole family. He also has people that work for him in the rice field, so sometimes I went out there bring lunch to them. One time I tried to draw water out from the well, but I was too small and weak to hold up the bucket. I hit my chin and it started to bleed. A nun lived nearby ran over

to carry me back to her house. She then put tobacco leaves on my chin to stop the bleeding, it was also the same nun that takes small pieces of wood out from my eyebrow and I still have that scar today. I received no love from my Uncle Huy's family and he knew that. Uncle Huy is the nephew of "Bac Luong" who lives next door to him. Bac Luong told me that I shouldn't stay with Uncle Huy anymore; he will send me to a better family. Bac Luong doesn't want his nephew to know that he is the one who took me away, so he told me whenever I bring lunch out to the rice field, I can cross over his farm when no one is around. It took me two months to finally escape. When I arrived there, Bac Luong told me to hide on top of the tree branch for the whole day, and then he took me to Aunt Lan's house, a sister of my adopted parents now.

16:35

**Trizzie**

So at that time you live there together with Aunt Lan and your adopted parents?

**Long**

No, my adopted parents stay at a different house. I stayed with their father instead, Ong Ngoai. Because Aunt Lan was poor and her husband was in re-education camp. She cannot support both of her children and me. Unlike the other places that I have live before, Ong Ngoai loved me like his own grandchild. I lived there for a while, and then one day unintentionally Uncle Quan (a brother of Aunt Lan) opened up Ong Ngoai's bible and saw money in there. He took it away, but told Ong Ngoai that I'm the one who stole the money. Aunt Lan then told Ong Ngoai: "See father, I have told you for so many times that this kid has no parents; he will become a thief and go out and kill people in the future. We cannot let him stay here anymore."

*[Pauses for a moment, he cries and struggles to continue]*

Ong Ngoai said, "because he is the kid who has no parents, we have to love him more." He even told all the aunts and uncles that if he passes away, I will receive some share of the land from the family, so I can have some money to support myself when I grow up. I think Aunt Lan is jealous, when Ong Ngoai said this, and besides she didn't like me because I always caught her taking stuff away from Ong Ngoai's house. I had to protect his house, I felt like, "this is my responsibility." But unfortunately for me, the stealing money incident happened again. This time Aunt Lan took me away from Ong Ngoai's house in the middle of the night; she tied me up and put me in a tiny three wheeled vehicle called "Xe Lam" [Lambrettas). She covered the vehicle so I can't see the direction to get back to Ong Ngoai's house. Aunt Lan returned me back Uncle Luong, but he didn't want me back. He told Aunt Lan that he will get in trouble if his nephew knew about this. Thus, Bac Luong had no choice but to finally let me stay with one condition. He told me that if Uncle Huy saw me, tell him that I just wandered around and asked Bac Luong for a place to stay. To live with Bac Luong wasn't any better. His wife told me to chop sweet potatoes to make pig foods. She didn't let me eat with the family; after the meal, the left-overs were for me. Her house has many dogs, if no one watched the food, the dogs will eat all the food and there is none left for me, so I had to eat the potatoes from the farm. But when Aunt Luong smelled the potatoes I cooked, she asked why I

took her potatoes and hit me many times, I told her I was so hungry and there was nothing left for me to eat. About two months later, I saw Ong Ngoai come to Bac Luong's house to look for me. But Bac Luong told him that I'm not around because actually he hid me inside a big pot that is used to store water in the living room so I heard the whole conversation. Bac Luong told Ong Ngoai that, "ever since the day I gave him away to Aunt Lan he never came back to my house." And Ong Ngoai replied, "well, if you ever see him, give him this money so he can take the bus back to see me." When Ong Ngoai left Bac Luong he told me to come out and said, "you know he comes here to look for you not because he loves you, he just wants to put you into jail." But deep inside I knew, I knew that Bac Luong didn't want me to go away, because I was their good labor. Bac Luong's family didn't treat me right, so I left his house and stayed with several different families and the same thing happened again. All of them say they're going to take care of me, but in the end they just want to take advantage of me.

Later on, I stayed with Aunt Quyen, her family was very poor, but they loved me a lot. Whenever she bought candies and cookies for her kids, she also bought some for me. Her family rented a small land to farm from this landlord. But this landlord took me as his own labor, sometime I had to come over to his farm and work for him. Aunt Quyen was very upset and told him that she took care of me so I help her with farming work. It is not fair for me to be used by others for labor. I lived there until I was 12, then I went on to live with another aunt, her name is Nhiem. She owned a pig slaughter plant. I had to wake up at 3:30 in the morning to boil water, put the pig manure near the foot of the coffee tree, and arranged the wood. Aunt Nhiem treated me badly and so did her children, they often hit me when I live there. So I left her house and catch the bus to Ong Ngoai house.

32:07

**Trizzie**

Where did you get the money to buy bus ticket?

**Long**

When I stayed at Aunt Nhiem house, the Grandmother mother in law of Aunt Nhiem, told me to get the left-over poultry and sell them to the market. She said Aunt Nhiem didn't love me and didn't treat me right, so I shouldn't be ashamed to steal the poultry from her. I sold the poultry and earned some money. I often bought cookies and gave it to Grandmother, but she told me that I shouldn't buy her cookies anymore because she will keep all the money for me. She said that if Aunt Nhiem abandons me I can have enough money to support for myself. Because Grandmother kept the money for me, I was able to get back to Ong Ngoai's house. He was very happy when he saw me, when I finally returned home. Grandmother (Ba` Ngoai) gave me two chickens to raise, and when their young chickens were born I could sell those chickens to buy new clothes on New Year's Day. While playing outside I met Aunt Son; she told me that this year all her chickens died of epizooty, which is a type of chicken virus. So she could not buy new clothes or food for her children. I felt sorry for her, so I gave her all of my four young chickens. However, Quyen a daughter of Aunt Lan saw the 4 young chickens at Aunt Son's house. She went back home and told Grandmother and accused me of

stealing her chickens and giving them to Aunt Son. I told her that, you gave me the chicken. So I thought it belong to me, and I gave the chickens that you gave me to Aunt Son. Aunt Lan jumped in and said, "see mom, you raised him hard, and now he talks back to you. One day he will go out and kill people." At that time, I was old enough to I have my own self-esteem, I felt like I didn't want to stay there any longer. So I went away and stayed at Aunt Son's house. I bought a hoe so people could hire me to work on their farm. I saved some money from selling bananas and jack fruits to buy myself a bicycle. When the Homecoming Act was passed, I did all the paper work from my adopted parents.

41:00

**Trizzie**

How did you find out about the Homecoming Act?

**Long**

I remembered the director at the temple once told me that my father was a U.S soldier, to prove my Amerasian identity, I had to come back to the Ky` Quang temple and get the paperwork from the director. So I asked Bac Chau from Saigon, a brother of my adopted parents helped me find the temple. I sent in the paperwork for the Homecoming Act in 1982, but our family didn't get interviewed until 1989. During the interview, the white lady looked at my file and said, "I'm sorry your father has left you; our American people need to take responsibility towards this. I hope you and your family can find a better life in America."

47:29

**Trizzie**

How did you find a place to live when you first arrived in America?

**Long**

Although I came to America under the Homecoming Act, Bac Chau was our sponsor, so my foster parents and I stayed at his house in California.

53:07

**Trizzie**

Who helped you find a job?

**Long**

Bac Chau's wife had a nail salon, so she encouraged me to become a nail technician. She said, "you can do very good business." So, I went to Tam Beauty College, and got a nail license. But before I got my nail license I went to look for a job in a nail salon to get some experience. I'm willing to work for free, but nobody wants to hires me.

58:06

**Trizzie**

Why nobody wants to hires you?

**Long**

They said they need someone with experience, but when they looked at me, I knew they discriminated me because my appearance. I was very dark back then, and when most people first came to America their skin color is very dark compared to people that live in the U.S. So, they thought I looked like a thief, instead of a person looking for a job. I was sad and depressed for the longest time. And then one day, Tri called me

up and asked me why I don't come to Florida. Tri was my friend from the Philippines, whom I'd known just before I came to the U.S. to learn English. He knew a sister that owned a nail shop where I could work for her. So I asked my foster parent's permission to go over to Florida, but they didn't let me. They told me I don't know much English, so it will be difficult for me to go to a stranger's place like that. But I told them I want to go to Florida, so I can have some experience. They still disagreed with me, but I went anyway. When I was there I met a sister named Lieu; I worked there shortly, and later she and her husband got divorced so she sold her business to a new owner. But the new owner told her he won't buy the nail salon unless I stayed and worked for him. So I stayed there and worked for this new owner, his name is Dai. But this guy always cursed at people. One time my friend Tri sat on a chair with both of his feet on top, he cursed at my friend. I was not happy when he cursed at my friend because it is just as if he cursed at me. So I left Florida and went back to LA. But my friend Tri told me that on the way back to come and visit him in Dallas. So I come to Dallas, and I asked Tri if he know anyone that can help me find a job here. He said he knew this guy that live there for a long time named Vu. Vu introduced me to work for this nail salon, but the owner was so wrong he took away all the tips the customers gave to me.

Once again I left the nail salon, and rented a space inside a Hair Salon owned by an Iranian. At first the rent was \$50 a week for the first three month and after that it went up to \$75, but not even three months pasted and it went up to \$100. The owner saw that I had a lot of customers, so she increased the rent. She even made me pay for items, like toilet paper, paper towels, and advertising, which I don't even use. She used the advertisements for her own Hair Salon and not for me but I still had to pay for it, she told me that this is how America is. I didn't know English that well at that time, so a Vietnamese lady that worked for her hair salon translated for me. In addition to those miscellaneous payments, I had to come to the hair salon early in the morning to clean up. Later on she hired her own people to work inside her nail salon, so they could take over my customers. But the customer didn't like the way they did their nails, and there was a lot of complaints from the customers. After that, she increased the rent to \$300 a week and made me sign a 3-year lease, but I told her I had to go home and talk to my uncle about it. Because my uncle lived in the U.S. longer than me, he'd know about the law. They told me I needed to give them an answer by the next morning. I didn't want to bother my uncle, so I didn't know what to do. The next morning she called up her family to beat me up if I don't sign the lease. I asked the Vietnamese lady to call the police for me and they asked me what happened. So I told him about the story; he said that is not right for the owner to do that; if she wanted to kick me out she should give me a period of time and I moved out of the place after that.

One day I read the newspaper and I saw an advertisement for a shop on sale. So I asked my friend to take me there and I bought the place for \$20,000, which was my first nail salon in 1994. Later on, I had enough money to buy myself a house. But I got robbed from a Vietnamese gang in Arlington. I was too scared, so I put the house for lease. One of my customers wanted to lease my house, even though I told them my house

got robbed. But she told me I have a gun, I'm not scared of them; if they're coming I'm going to shoot them. Thus, both of her and her daughters got robbed. After the incident I moved out to an apartment where they have security 24-hours on call; you have to show an I.D. if you want to come in. A few years later, I opened up more nail salons for my brothers and sisters.

*1:18:05*

**Trizzie**

As of right now, how many nail salons do you have total?

**Long**

Right now, I have a total 20 nail salons, and I will open 3 more this year.

*1:19:04*

**Trizzie**

Are there any others memories you would like to share?

**Long**

[Smile] that's all

*1:19:18*

**Trizzie**

Well, Mr. Long thank you so much for coming to the interview today.

**Long**

Thank You!