

Oral History Transcription

Name of Interviewer: Kim Hoang

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Name of Person Interviewed: Luyen Phuoc Duong

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<u>Name</u>	<u>Transcript</u>
01:35	
Kim	Hi. My name is Kim Hoang and I'm the interviewer.
Luyen	Yes. My name is Luyen Duong. Yes from Houston come here. Nice to see you.
Kim	Thank you sir for coming here. So, can you tell me a little bit about growing up in Vietnam and how you were when you grew up?
Luyen	I was born in Vietnam, in Hue city, the old capital of Vietnam in central. I born over there and go to high school in my motherland city in Hue but after finish high school, I go to Saigon and study architect at University of Saigon and in 1969, I go to the military academy of the Tu Duc and after that I serviced in engineer branch in Da Nang until the 1975 when Saigon come down.
Kim	So did you have any brothers or sisters in Hue?
Luyen	Yes! When I young, my parent had seven children: four sons and three daughters.
Kim	Were you the oldest?
Luyen	I am the fifth child.
Kim	When you were little, what did you like to do? [Laughs.]
Luyen	When young, I studied in military school. By side, on weekend, I enjoyed the boy scout. Every weekend, I go to camping and everywhere in Hue city.
Kim	What is your typical daily routine?
Luyen	In one day in Vietnam? Okay. In Vietnam, we studied full time. In early morning, I go to military school and at noon, come back home for get lunch and after that, 2 pm come back school until seven or six hours and after that, help my father some

work. In weekend, with my friends go to forest and looking for the nests of things, of birds, and everything in the forest. They're very near. In Hue, very small town. The seaside about 10 kilometers and the mainland mountain in about 10 miles too. So the young we go to everywhere in weekends.

05:18

Kim Can you tell me a little bit about the scenery of Hue because I have never been there.

Luyen Can I speak in Vietnamese?

Kim Of course. Either one is fine.

Luyen Okay. I'll talk in Vietnamese since you are interviewing in Vietnamese and I am responding in English, which is weird. [Both laugh.] In Hue, since it is convenient right now to tell the younger generation about it, the history is very fascinating. It goes back to about 200 hundred years ago when a conqueror came in at around the 1780s. Everyone came together to build this new community. In 1993, Hue was finally recognized for its cultural asset to the world. It is one of the main cities in Vietnam. At this present moment, there is a one of the four round pillars left in this world. There is also a very pretty river that flows across. That is Hue.

Kim When you were at the military academy, what did you do there?

Luyen In 1968, the draft began and all the college students in Saigon, if they were at a certain age, were required to attend military school. You could no longer attend school but were required to go to this military school. If you haven't graduated yet, you would have to stop your education and attend school to become a military officer. I was recruited for one year. After I graduated, I was deployed at Da Nang. Because of my background, I was able to work in an office in order to build houses and design the layouts.

Kim How old were you when you attended the military academy?

Luyen I was 23 years old when I attended. I graduated high school at 18 years old and then went to Saigon to study.

Kim So you joined at 23 years old. Where you still there when the Vietnam War began?

Luyen Yes. I was there for the war from 1968 to 1975.

Kim Did you have any hardships at the military academy? Do you remember any specific stories that you would like to share?

Luyen Well, because I was a military officer of an engineering branch, it was not as difficult as the other people. I worked mostly at the office dealing with paperwork. My job focused on my expertise in drawing layouts and constructing buildings for the community.

Kim So you did not participate in any type of combat? [Laughs.]

Luyen No, I never had to experience combat.

Kim Did the Vietnam War have any difficult impacts on your family?

09:27

Luyen Well, talking about my experience with the Vietnam War is very dramatic. As I mentioned earlier, my parents had four sons and three daughters. We all had to go to the military school because when you came of age, you had to go. The only circumstance was if you were an excellent student, you were able to stay and continue your education. However, my family experienced the 1975 period. Therefore, we had to attend re-education camp, which was a very hard time.

Kim Can you explain what exactly is a re-education camp?

Luyen It was basically jail where they forced us to learn about communism. After 1975, all the military officers had to attend this.

Kim How long were you in there?

Luyen Three years.

Kim How was the experience in the camp?

Luyen Life there was pretty independent. You had to cook, go in the forest to find herbs, build your own shelter to live, or take care of fieldwork. For me, I was able to study in the South so the experience was not as harsh as the North

Kim What did you remember most about that time period?

Luyen In the time period of the re-education camp, there wasn't really much for me to remember, not much about that burden. However, at times, people did commit suicide because they lost their strength to survive; those were the times when my spirit would falter.

Kim Did you have anyone in your family who was injured during this whole experience?

Luyen Yes, my oldest brother was in the re-education camp for 13 years. My second oldest brother stayed for 6 years and I only had 3 years. So for my family, it was a total 22 years in the camp.

Kim Did you ever encounter any American soldiers?

Luyen Yes, I did work with the American soldiers.

Nancy [Interruption.]

Kim What did you think of them?

Luyen At that time, the American soldiers came over to Vietnam to help. They also built their stations and bridges in the country. In my opinion, the American soldiers came over because it was their duty to help in the war. Majority of the soldiers were really nice and very friendly toward the people. These people were very laid-back. Some afternoons, we would go with them for a cup of coffee.

Kim Do any of them know how to speak Vietnamese?

Luyen Yes! I remember we would teach them some phrases in Vietnamese and they were really interested in learning. Sometimes we would also teach them how to sing the Vietnamese songs.

Kim When the Vietnam War was over, how was the life in Vietnam? In what ways did Vietnam change?

14:18

Luyen After the Vietnam War in April 1975 and coming back after 3 years of re-education camp, Saigon was completely different. All the businesses in the city were reduced and of course, the lives of the people in Vietnamese society were drastically affected.

Kim How did you come to America?

Luyen I was able to come to America in 1992 through an organization called Hat O. First, I came to California and lived there for one year. Then after a year, a company for interior design in Florida invited me to come there to work. I worked there for 10 years. Then I came to Houston.

Kim So you did not have to go through the experience of escaping from Vietnam?

Luyen No, I came to America by plane with all my family as well. Because I was a military officer, I was able to take this route and bring my family along.

Kim Did you have any friends in Vietnam that stayed behind?

Luyen Of course! There were many that stayed behind in Vietnam. However, the group of friends that was in my rank was also able to come to America by the way that I took. Some were able to leave in 1975; others had to go to re-education camp but were reunited in the States years later.

Kim Did you lose anyone close to you during the Vietnam War?

Luyen I lost my oldest brother during the War.

Kim Was it hard for you?

Luyen Yes, talking about that is always painful. Every war is going to have these sad stories of losing a loved one.

Kim What did you think about America when you came over?

Luyen Well, when I came over to America, it wasn't very strange because in Vietnam, the school allowed the students in Hue to come to the libraries and read books about America. Also, we watched American films and every week, we learned the English language. Therefore, the exposure we got helped us adjust to the American society. Right now, I have two daughters that have finished college already.

Kim Oh wow. What do they do now?

Luyen One of my daughters is a physician assistant while the other one is a pharmacist.

Kim What was the hardest thing that you experienced when you came to America?

Luyen Talking about the hardships in terms of the older generation, I would have to say the fact that everything was very different from Vietnam. It is like a tree that has been surviving in an area of soil for a certain period of time and has now been removed and moved to a different spot. It is going to be harder for the tree to adapt to the new environment. Fortunately, my family was able to adjust. My daughters had a good education and I was able to involve myself with the community. Also, because of the company that I worked for, I was able to interact with different types of people such as Koreans, Japanese, and Colombians. I was also able to travel to different places and form connections. Therefore, the people that came to America through Hat O were very lucky because of the opportunities that we were given.

Kim What do you remember most about Vietnam?

18:44

Luyen

The thing that I remember most about Vietnam is, of course, the altar that I left behind. I lost my parents. For Hue people, the children and grandchildren usually have this sense of duty and desire to honor and take care of their mothers and fathers especially during the time in which they are growing older. Regretfully, when my siblings and I had to attend re-education camp, my mother and father died during that time period. Therefore, that is the one thing that I have always regretted and remembered when coming here to America. I especially remember and miss them during the anniversary days of their death.

19:34

Kim

Do you have a family gathering on these anniversary days to honor them?

Luyen

Yes, of course! I still maintain that tradition. In America, my siblings and I live in different places. One of my brothers lives in Arkansas and my younger sister lives in San Diego, California. As for me, I live in Houston right now. During the anniversary of their death, we have relatives come in and bring their offerings and perform a special ritual at the altar. Relatives as well as friends come together for a feast in memory of my parents' death.

Kim

Have you gone back to Vietnam to visit?

Luyen

Yes. I visited for the first time in 2000.

Kim

Did you see any changes that occurred?

Luyen

There were a lot of changes especially with the younger generation. However, the generation of my friends was not the same. As you grow older, living in the society in Vietnam, there are very little opportunities left for you. There is much suffering in their lives and I help them in any way I can.

Kim

Can you tell me of any stories that you have where you witnessed an individual in Vietnam who was living with nothing? I have heard many stories from my parents but have never been able to go to Vietnam and see for myself.

Luyen

What story would you like me to tell?

Kim

Oh, anything that you know of.

Luyen

Well, this is a little unexpected! [Laughs.] Well, for instance, there are stories about the people that I visited in Vietnam. There were my friends who used to go to school with me. They were very smart and I used to think that they were going to have a better future than me. Unfortunately, they were not given the opportunity to become a military officer but instead, just worked in other things to support themselves. They were also sent to a re-education camp but after camp, they were not able to go to America through Hat O. They had to stay back in

Vietnam in the poor city of Hue. My friends had an intellectual background; they would have been successful if they were given the opportunity to continue their life before 1975. However, during the 1975 period, they were unexpectedly trapped in that area. As a result, they began to drink wine, coffee in the morning, and in the evening, more wine. Their life just fell into turmoil and they were unable to escape that. Their children also suffer as well.

Kim Okay. You are a citizen of the United States right?

Luyen Yes I am. After one year of being in the States, I became a citizen.

22:32

Kim So when you came to America, did anything about this country shock you because the society here is very different than Vietnam?

Luyen Personally, I did not experience any shock. Like I said, I was very lucky. I came to California and after just one year, I was able to land a job in a company that was one of the top ten interior design companies.

Kim What do you do at your job?

Luyen For example, I think of how and where a good spot to place a painting would be, what color a wall should be painted, or what type of door should be made. That is called interior design. Also, a staircase is not just a structure for people to go up on. As an interior designer, I would have to figure out how it will look, what color to paint it because it can be either gold or grey. My company also works with businesses in Hong Kong and Shanghai. For example, I worked on a building in 1996 in Shanghai. Last year, I went there to visit this building. It is called the Zing Mao building and at that time, it was the tallest building in the world. That project took about three to four years with several hundred people working on it.

Kim So why did you choose a career in interior design?

Luyen When I was little, I studied interior design. Hue people concentrate on interior design because we live in the middle of a city with lots of landscape and historical monuments. Ever since I was little, it has been ingrained in my mind that I had to make things look good. When I went to college, I decided to go to Saigon to study interior design. When I came to America, I was very fortunate to go into an interior design company and continue this profession.

25:12

Kim What do your siblings do now?

Luyen One of my brothers is now retired but still does painting. The other brother works in construction in San Jose.

Kim Changing subjects a little, what do you think about the policy here in America?

Luyen Well, America always has their separate policy. They are an independent country and viewed Vietnam, at that time, as a very vulnerable and weak country. It was very unfortunate for Vietnam because we had to be in the front of all the chaos. Take a storm for example; if you continue to stand in front of the storm, you will always be the one to experience the pain and suffering of it. Vietnam is just like that. The American people also had a vision for the country. They brought in the idea of independence and democracy and helped the country with the war.

Kim Many Vietnamese resent the Americans for pulling out of the war. What do you think about that?

Luyen Well, the situation has been said and done. They had their reasons and I would not say that I resent the Americans for it. In fact, I appreciate them because they still had a desire to stay and help Vietnam and not let us suffer. I have also painted some images of an American soldier carrying a civilian on his shoulder across a field of fire. We have to look at the reality that they willingly helped us.

Nancy So after the Vietnam War, what do you think about the American policy toward Vietnam?

Luyen [Laughs.] This question would probably be bettered answer with someone who knows more about policy issues. My career does not really concentrate on foreign policies. However, nowadays, the American people do visit Vietnam to volunteer.

Kim What do you think about the younger Vietnamese generation in America and how do they compare to the youth in Vietnam?

29:57

Luyen Since I also have two daughters that I brought over to America and they had the opportunity to attend school here, I had the chance to compare between the young generation in Vietnam and the young generation that was raised in America. It was very fortunate that some of the youth were able to come to America for a better opportunity and be exposed to an environment that was very beneficial. This was considered very valuable. For example, a tree may have really healthy roots but if you put it in a harsh environment, it will not grow. Therefore, if you had to chance to come here to America to live your life, you need to take advantage of it and concentrate on your education. For example, a tree that you have planted for a year may grow its fruits instantly so you can only use it for a maximum of two more years before it goes bad. On the other hand, if you plant a seed, it will take 10 years before it grows its fruit. In return, we are able to receive the benefit of this plant for another 30 to 40 years. Basically, do not think that you have to rush through school and graduate immediately to find a job to support yourself. This will not necessary make you successful. Therefore, the most important thing that you should do is choose a career that you see yourself in no

matter how long it may takes, or how hard it will be, or how expensive it is. But you have to think this way. Therefore, it is very fortunate for the youth to be in America for all these opportunities. They need to try and work hard at their education. In my opinion, there is nothing in this world that can change your life than a good education.

Kim So do you think that it is important for the young generation in America to know the Vietnamese language?

Luyen When I think about that question, I just need to say one phrase. If an individual knows two languages, then that means they are two people. One person is Vietnamese and the other one is an American. If you learn four languages, you are basically four people. Therefore, if you come over to America, you will have to learn the English language to adapt. However, do not think that when you come to America, you have to learn English to be successful and forget the Vietnamese language. That is a very wrong misconception because you can never forget your origin. It is the duty of the parents to guide their children to learn the Vietnamese language as well as the history and culture of the country.

Kim Is there a specific song that makes you reminisce about Vietnam?

Luyen Oh! There are many songs, but for a Hue person, the song Dem Tang Den Ngu would have to do it.

34:00

Kim You should sing it for me! [Laughs.]

Luyen The song starts out like this. [Sings.] Well, I'm not a singer. [Chuckles.] The song is very sad but whenever I hear it, the image of my Hue city appears to me and I become nostalgic.

Kim Do you usually listen to a CD?

Luyen Yes. I usually paint aesthetic things so I always have to play Vietnamese music to help my inspiration. When I make a painting, I always have to have music and sometimes it will even show up in my works. Music plays an additional role in creating a painting.

35:03

Kim What types of things do you like draw?

Luyen I like to paint sceneries with different techniques. For example, I do oil paintings where you use oil on a canvas. [Shows his paintings that he brought with him.] This one was done by watercolor on a paper that is usually made in a village in Hue that is known for making this special type of paper. When you use one stroke

of ink on this paper, the ink will automatically spread. I also paint realistic things such as landscapes or scenes from society of those who are poor.

Kim Do you usually sit outside and just paint here?

Luyen Yes. Majority of my painting is of scenery and I do it right on location. For example, I went to Washington, D.C. and painted this. [Shows me a painting.]

Kim Do you sell your paintings?

Luyen In Vietnam, after the re-education camp, it was because of these paintings that allowed me to survive. There were not that many people in Vietnam that took part in the tradition of collecting paintings, but there were people in Hong Kong and Singapore who did and some of them bought my paintings. At that time, you worked for the country for a certain small salary that was enough for the minimum living expense. The extra money that I was able to make with one or two of my paintings was used for my enjoyment to go out with my friends. [Laughs.] Also, I have this very special memory. In Vietnam, I met a group of artists who were very famous before 1975. About three years after 1975, everything sort of ceased. However, we still met up to talk about things such as our passion for art and also get together to paint. But when we painted, we just left those painting there because a few first years right after 1975, painting was something that you just didn't talk about. Every morning, we would meet at a café by either getting a ride or riding our bicycles because gas was too expensive. We would talk to each other for three hours from seven in the morning to ten in the morning. We did this for several years until I left in 1992. That café shop is still there in Vietnam. It was owned by a teacher and he and his wife ran the coffee business. There were some mornings when we would come too early before they were open so we would have to go inside and personally get the chairs to sit in. Thanks to those meetings, I was able to get a lot of work done. At 10 o'clock, everyone went their separate ways. Also, for example, if no one pays, I would pay for everybody because I just sold a painting. [Kim laughs.] So I definitely survived because of that.

38:55

Nancy Kim, did you know that after 1975, artists were not supported by the government. This is why they had to gather together to not forget their passion and soon it turned into a very large group of artists.

Luyen Yes, a very large group. Artists could not survive after 1975 because during that time period, Vietnam had not changed yet. It was not open-minded yet. They made artists draw what they wanted society to be viewed as. You could not draw other things such as the beauty of Vietnam. This group that I was in only drew the beautiful as well as independence or a vision. We were not able to display it though, only in special circumstances. Only until 1985 or 1987 did they allow a

few small galleries to open up. In 1990, I was also able to open up my first gallery. The life of an artist.

40:37

Kim It seems that artists in America appear much wealthier than those in Vietnam. In Vietnam, they seem so poor and always struggling. This is what I have seen in videos such as Paris by Night.

Luyen Well, in America, there are many artists that are poor. Though the majority is poor, being an artist is for yourself because when you sit down and paint, hours easily go by without you knowing. In terms of selling a painting for a high price, it is based on your skills.

Kim Have you ever had the Communists prohibit you from painting?

Luyen I was very quick. I knew it was prohibited so I was very cautious not to draw until Vietnam was more open-minded. However, for the most part, they did not really pay attention to the paintings of scenery.

Nancy He censored himself.

All [Laugh.]

Luyen We just had a feeling and became aware of ourselves.

Kim Do you show any of your paintings to Americans?

Luyen Yes, of course. I usually attend things such as that. I go and paint around. Some of the newspapers have taken pictures of my paintings. [Shows me an article.]

Kim Is this you?

Luyen Yes. I usually just take a book around with me and draw different things. It was my leisure activity for a period of time in Palm Beach, Florida. Also, Beverly Hills was a very rich area in Florida for the celebrities. Palm Beach was also a rich area for those of businesses. A small house here is very expensive; perhaps, about half a million dollars 15 years ago. I would paint the scene of the area. [Shows a drawing.] This is a scene that I just painted of a village in Vietnam. I did it by oil painting. Also, you just asked if the Americans recognized my works. [Shows me a picture.] This is Nick Langston. That day, Nick, my old teacher 40 years ago, and my brother were part of the tradition of cutting the ribbon for the grand opening of a gallery. Each of these people was there to represent the country. Nick Langston was there for America, the teacher who taught 7th grade was there for Vietnam, and my brother represented my parents.

Nancy Who is that in the front of the line? [Points at the picture.]

Luyen Nick Langston. When he was there at the gallery and saw the paintings, he asked me why didn't I go and work in Washington, D.C. If someone asked you that, what would you say?

Kim Yes.

Nancy Yes.

Luyen [All laughs.] He asked why! I just told him that it was up to him, right? He told his secretary to get my information right away to go up and work at the capital.

Nancy When is the project?

Luyen Hopefully in two more years. The theme is going to be Washington in the springtime.

Kim So do your daughters know how to draw as well as you?

45:29
Luyen Well, they also have the talent but they were more interested in studying in school to be a pharmacist and PA. Do you have a laptop?

Kim Oh no. Sorry. I did not bring it with me.

Luyen [Gives me a CD.] This is a CD of my interview on SBTN. It should still be replaying.

Nancy You can give him your email so he can send it to you.

Luyen You can still open it up on the computer. The website is sbtn@btnhouston.net. That's it. Just press enter and you can retrieve it.

Nancy Is this your book? [Points at a book on the table.]

Luyen No. This is a sketchbook of someone else. In the future, I can make my own sketchbook with collection of my drawings of a certain topic. For example, the UT campus has a sketchbook or another is a sketchbook of Austin. The sketchbook is very creative. I draw scenes of students sitting down and studying under a tree, for example. [Shows me a booklet.] That is called the American Dream! [Laughs.] In there, I just drew things of this country. This is the capital of Austin; and this one is Sacramento. These are only half done because I'm busy with work so have not been able to finish them. I still need to pay monthly bills. [Chuckles.] If I had time, I would have done them a long time ago.

Kim Do you have last thing that you would like to add?

Luyen About what?

Kim You can talk about anything that you like! [Laughs.]

Nancy Is there anything that you want to talk about that you have not been asked yet?

48:24

Luyen Well, in my opinion. [Pause.] Even until now, I don't know why, even after the Vietnam War, we have not followed the example of the Civil War in America. When the Civil War in America ended, the side that lost did not lose their dignity and were welcomed home. They were able to bring what they had and worked together to build a new society. On the other hand, after the Vietnam War, civilians had to go into re-education camp and jail not knowing when they were going to be released. Some of them were in there for 3 years, others for 7 years, and then there were those who had to stay for 17 years. It all depended on your situation. That is a suffering that so many Vietnamese have to carry. For example, it is already sad that there are those who had to experience the re-education camp. But, there were the children and grandchildren who were also affected. They would think why their parents had to suffer when they did not do anything wrong. That is the one main thing that I have concerns about. I hope that, after 30 something years now, Vietnam should become more open-minded in a more rapid manner so that Vietnam can rise up and bring a better life for the people in the country and catch up with the world. Actually, let's take it smaller and just say Southeast Asia. The people of Vietnam are very intelligent individual. You see, you guys are just as smart as the other people in your classes. However, it's hard because of the situations that have caused us to be so oppressed, right? It's so unfortunate. That is all that I wanted to add. If Vietnam can be open, then they should take that opportunity and do so early and quickly before it's too late. Just like a fruit; when it is time for it to turn ripe, leave it alone. Don't suppress it or it will rot and then, that is a waste. Because life is too short and after 30 years, the country has not really changed for the better yet.

Kim Thank you so much!!

Luyen Thank you to you too. It was a great chance to talk and the interview was very laid-back!

51:32

Kim No, thank you for taking your time and talking to me. [Laughs.]

Excerpts

Subject: Vietnamese youth generation

Name _____ Transcript _____

29:57

Kim Since I also have two daughters that I brought over to America and they had the opportunity to attend school here, I had the chance to compare between the young generation in Vietnam and the young generation that was raised in America. It was very fortunate that some of the youth were able to come to America for a better opportunity and be exposed to an environment that was very beneficial. This was considered very valuable. For example, a tree may have really healthy roots but if you put it in a harsh environment, it will not grow. Therefore, if you had to chance to come here to America to live your life, you need to take advantage of it and concentrate on your education. For example, a tree that you have planted for a year may grow its fruits instantly so you can only use it for a maximum of two more years before it goes bad. On the other hand, if you plant a seed, it will take 10 years before it grows its fruit. In return, we are able to receive the benefit of this plant for another 30 to 40 years. Basically, do not think that you have to rush through school and graduate immediately to find a job to support yourself. This will not necessary make you successful. Therefore, the most important thing that you should do is choose a career that you see yourself in no matter how long it may takes, or how hard it will be, or how expensive it is. But you have to think this way. Therefore, it is very fortunate for the youth to be in America for all these opportunities. They need to try and work hard at their education. In my opinion, there is nothing in this world that can change your life than a good education.

Subject: Honoring parents

Name Transcript

18:44

Luyen The thing that I remember most about Vietnam is, of course, the altar that I left behind. I lost my parents. For Hue people, the children and grandchildren usually have this sense of duty and desire to honor and take care of their mothers and fathers especially during the time in which they are growing older. Regretfully, when my siblings and I had to attend re-education camp, my mother and father died during that time period. Therefore, that is the one thing that I have always regretted and remembered when coming here to America. I especially remember and miss them during the anniversary days of their death.

Subject: Vietnamese language

Name Transcript

32:17

Kim So do you think that it is important for the young generation in America to know the Vietnamese language?

Luyen When I think about that question, I just need to say one phrase. If an individual knows two languages, then that means they are two people. One person is Vietnamese and the other one is an American. If you learn four languages, you are basically four people. Therefore, if you come over to America, you will have to learn the English language to adapt. However, do not think that when you come to America, you have to learn English to be successful and forget the Vietnamese

language. That is a very wrong misconception because you can never forget your origin. It is the duty of the parents to guide their children to learn the Vietnamese language as well as the history and culture of the country.

Subject: American soldiers

Name Transcript

12:53

Luyen At that time, the American soldiers came over to Vietnam to help. They also built their stations and bridges in the country. In my opinion, the American soldiers came over because it was their duty to help in the war. Majority of the soldiers were really nice and very friendly toward the people. These people were very laid-back. Some afternoons, we would go with them for a cup of coffee.

26:48

Kim Many Vietnamese resent the Americans for pulling out of the war. What do you think about that?

Luyen Well, the situation has been said and done. They had their reasons and I would not say that I resent the Americans for it. In fact, I appreciate them because they still had a desire to stay and help Vietnam and not let us suffer. I have also painted some images of an American soldier carrying a civilian on his shoulder across a field of fire. We have to look at the reality that they willingly helped us.

Subject: Effect of communism on Vietnamese people

Name Transcript

21:23

Luyen There were my friends who used to go to school with me. They were very smart and I used to think that they were going to have a better future than me. Unfortunately, they were not given the opportunity to become a military officer but instead, just worked in other things to support themselves. They were also sent to a re-education camp but after camp, they were not able to go to America through Hat O. They had to stay back in Vietnam in the poor city of Hue. My friends had an intellectual background; they would have been successful if they were given the opportunity to continue their life before 1975. However, during the 1975 period, they were unexpectedly trapped in that area. As a result, they began to drink wine, coffee in the morning, and in the evening, more wine. Their life just fell into turmoil and they were unable to escape that. Their children also suffer as well.

Summary

My family experienced the 1975 period; therefore, we had to attend re-education camp. Life there was pretty independent. At times, people did commit suicide because they lost their strength to survive. There were the children and grandchildren who were also affected. They would think why their parents had to suffer when they did not do anything wrong. Regretfully, when my siblings and I [attended] re-education camp, my mother and father died. That is the one thing that I have always regretted and remembered when coming here to America. I lost my

oldest brother during the War. Talking about that is always painful. I came to America in 1992 through an organization called Hat O. A company for interior design in Florida invited me to come there to work for 10 years. The people that came to America through Hat O were very lucky because of the opportunities that we were given. Artists could not survive after 1975 because during that time period; Vietnam had not changed yet. I was very cautious not to draw until Vietnam was more open-minded. However, we still met up to talk about things such as our passion for art and also get together to paint.

The interview with Mr. Duong began in English but after five minutes, it was conducted in Vietnamese. The reason for this was because he was more comfortable in his own language and I wanted him to be able to express his thoughts more freely. I did translate the Vietnamese part of the interview with the best of my knowledge of the Vietnamese language. Therefore, things may have been lost in translation. There were also some things said in Vietnamese that were very difficult to capture its full meaning and emotion in English. I tried my best to keep it authentic.