

**Name of Interviewer:** Laura Garcia  
**Method of Recording Interview:** Tape Recorder  
**Language of the Interview:** English  
**Location of the Interview:** PCL Library, Austin, Tx.  
**Date:** October 24, 2008  
**Themes:** Education, Personal Beliefs, French Influence, Childhood  
**Name of Person Interviewed:** Bruno Lartigue  
**Contact Information of Person Interviewed:** lartigueb@sbcglobal.net

[Special Note: Approximately 8 minutes of the beginning of this interview was lost when trying to convert the recording to a digital format. My apologies for the inconvenience and the subsequent unusual beginning.

### Name Transcript

Bruno I was looking at the U.S embassy and the I got up building. I found myself on the ground there was nothing left, so it's good to be alive.

Laura Wow, you mention that um you talk about the enemy, who was the enemy in your situation when you were over there?

Bruno Basically the North Vietnamese.

Laura When you think about the things you went through back then, do you have any different opinions that you think about the situation? Do you view it in a different manner?

Bruno I do when I got out, when I got out of Vietnam there was a lot of unanswered questions. Why was I there? What was happening? When I was able to answer those questions I was able to put myself at ease, have a little more peace. So what I bring out of it I different management positions I had in Austin. I always tell folks my agencies be thankful for everything you have, the car you drive because in a third world country you don't have those necessities that we have here in America. So it's wonderful and little arguments and bickering don't make much out of them because life is very precious, so that's what I got out of Vietnam.

Laura In Vietnam, can you remember any of the events that led up to your eventual leaving? Was it like, was it a peaceful I guess was it a peaceful transition leaving Vietnam or you were was it a very difficult situation leaving?

Bruno Yeah, it was a peaceful transition it was after Tet Offensive things started escalating and my grandfather decided to, my grandfather was actually working for the shipyards in the streets Saigon, and we lived with him and he decided to leave Vietnam two years later and there was at that time the boat people situation, was not there yet. People weren't fleeing the country so but we were still cautious about what we could take with us outside of Vietnam. We were allowed to take such items but we left, we left I do believe in peaceful times, good times and...

Laura What items wouldn't they let you take back with you?

Bruno Anything that had memorabilia they wouldn't let you take back you know stuff like as a kid since you grow up you don't have video games. You don't have, you can't go outside, you have to find quarters. So we trade ammunition casings.

Laura Oh wow.

Bruno And that was that, was sort of a hey I got this 9 mm casing can I get, can I trade that with a 22 20? And so those were things like that, they wouldn't let you take up obviously because you're going through customs and they're actually looking through all of your belongings.

Laura And you mentioned earlier before we got started with our interview that your mother married a master sergeant and G.I. and that's how, that how you, she obtained citizenship in order to come to the U.S? Or is that just the reason they eventually came over?

Bruno The master sergeant used to come over serenade her on the guitar. At that time I didn't speak English, so I was just laughing. I thought it was kind of cute I didn't know what he was thinking. He was singing Hank Williams' songs actually but ah he fell in love with my mother and told her that if she was willing to come to America that he would adopt her two children meaning my brother and myself and it was a tough decision because I grew up speaking French and I was fluent in Vietnamese at the time and my path was going to be to go back to Paris and continue my studies where the secondary school was coming to America and not speaking English was going to be a difficult challenge. So that is the reason why my mother decided "well I will take a chance, we'll come to America," and then they got married and lived in Colorado and I struggled with the English language.

Laura Before you came over here in those short 11 years, was there anything that happened over there I mean other than the war that you think also has led that might have. Do you still like keep up with that now like any specifics, rituals, younger any cooking habit, any like smells or tastes you remember from over there that remind you of Vietnam?

Bruno I'll tell you a real quick story. My um about 8 years ago I met a Vietnamese woman. very nice and she came out of Vietnam as well and right before we got married and it was in but we were very good friends and when I met her I saw I remembered these spirits in Vietnam and I missed the food in Vietnam. I missed the banh canh. I missed the hu tieu, the pho they have in the restaurant and she come to me and she go here and she bring me bun rieu and I go pow. You know these are the things I haven't eaten in so many years so that's one. Tet has always been a tradition as I grew up in Vietnam so I usually make my program do Tet Saigon in Austin cause they have it.

Laura Can you describe Tet in Vietnam versus Tet here in the U.S? Is it different?

Bruno Well I can say that during Tet in Vietnam I remember the drums, I remember the parade and you can hear the drums and it's the sequence of the drums and that has never left me. And you have the Vietnamese lanterns and you had Ailen in the middle of it, and it was just so unique it's almost surreal kind of like mardi gras or Rio de Janeiro festivities.

Laura So you have a very unique situation because you are not Vietnamese exactly, you are half

French and half?

Bruno I am actually French.

Laura You are? Just all French?

Bruno All French but I spent most of my childhood in Vietnam.

Laura So if you don't mind my asking, how exactly is it that a person that is all French, how did you end up in Vietnam, in the very beginning?

Bruno Good question. My family is from south of France, its south of Bordeaux and as a matter of fact even today she go, I went to visit my hometown Nordic because that's where the Nordic army came from, they immigrated to Vietnam during colonization. So Vietnam was basically colonized by the French, and that's how my family ended up in Vietnam and well you, her my mother left her husband. That's how we ended up in Vietnam, we went to visit our grandparents and as a matter of fact from what I understand most of my relatives died in concentration camps during Japanese takeover of Vietnam.

Laura Where were those concentration camps located?

Bruno That I do not know, I would assume they were north of Hanoi and North from the northern part of it is what I understand because I remember my grandfather said that when Japanese came over they had a house in Hanoi. He said "You've got thirty minutes to vacate the premises, take all your belongings and leave, then we're going to turn this into headquarters."

Laura When was the last time you saw your grandfather?

Bruno My grandfather passed away back in the 70's and he came to visit me in America, very supportive and really he was pretty much a public figure through my childhood. He would take me to the park to the botanical zoo garden in Saigon and then gave me the, how can I say the story of life and how you should relate to other people. Who to respect and all the climb the ladder and success.

Laura Aside from your stepfather being in the war while being a soldier, was there anyone else in your family that was involved in the actual combat or any type of resistance movement at all?

Bruno Well, obviously before the Americans came to Vietnam the French were there and there was a lot of conflict between the French and Vietnamese. Back then under Ho Chi Mein, I've heard a lot of stories of what the Vietnamese did to the French. I want to say I don't recall in my family in combat but yet there was still a lot of friction between the French at the time and the Vietnamese.

Laura What kind of stories did you hear specifically?

Bruno When Ho Chi Mein had his meetings and then he wanted to take Vietnam back from the French so he would, some stories would say he would have the French maids because

every French family had a maid and so he would have the servants either take the weapons from the French, their masters, or kill them by various means. Whether they would put ground glass in their drinks so that it would be sort of diluted. There's a lot of tales of stories.

Laura Did the French maids, would chop up glass and ground it down and put it in there?

Bruno Drinks, so when they drink it, it would pretty much destroy the esophagus system. Yes absolutely, so that's one of them there are plenty more.

Laura Is there, is there a, do you know anybody that, is this more heresay or is this, are there actual people that knew people?

Bruno My grandfather back then yeas and some of his, he had to denounce some of his maids to the authorities because they were working for the communists and they had stolen some of his possessions. His weapons and so forth and it's kind of sad when you have someone that works for you turn up against you, it's very hard to, to report them.

Laura Is there anything else that you remember most about that time period?

Bruno War is there's always good and bad but the good is you enjoy each day you live, you don't make plans for the next day, so you enjoy each day to the fullest. I remember after school in the summertime we would have the opportunity to either go back to Paris or Riou Mount Hal which is French's country Sac Jack where you go to the beach to enjoy yourself and we so those are really good memories of the war. My grandfather was just real eccentric, he drive all over the place he would go to Kaduk and other places and I didn't realize that those places were not really safe but he just loved life and he enjoyed it, he didn't let war stop his excursions.

Laura You mentioned your brother being your best friend when you guys were living through this, living though this time of war together over there. Was, do you guys have any secret games, or secret language that or anything that was just for you two that helped you kind of cope through the war?

Bruno Secret language? No. I will say that I back talked then was fluent in Vietnamese so when my stepfather would come in and we sort of speak in a language he didn't understand, we spoke Vietnamese, he would come in, my father was heavyset so every time he come up I would go, I don't know. Other than that because of the first war we have a pellet gun and we just went around the house so we took care of each other. So every day we went to school my mother told me, she said if the driver takes a wrong turn you need to run off you need to jump off of the car because there are.

Laura What's a [spelling unknown]?

Bruno [spelling unknown] is sort of a backwards rickshaw, so you got two wheels in the front and the driver is peddling and you sit on the rear wheel, that's how we went to school every day, so.

Laura So if you took a wrong turn your mom?

Bruno Right because we had to, we memorized our route to school every day and my mother said if they take a wrong turn you need to run jump off because that means they are going to ambush you somewhere, he's on a mission so if he.

Laura Would they do that with children?

Bruno Oh for French yes, I don't know about all the other Caucasian, some English kids, kids from Australia I do believe also.

Laura Did you go to a predominately diverse school when you were over there?

Bruno It was basically, the school is Saint Siberry it was a very famous French leader, we were pretty much a minority since I was French and a lot of Vietnamese and Chinese people. It was an all boys school cause you had a boys school and a girl school. And you often had a uniform there's no, there's no comparison to the next fashion; let's say you compare that to the professional world of America.

Laura Was it like a private school or was it public?

Bruno No, it was a public school.

Laura It was a public school but they would separate them like boys and girls?

Bruno Yes.

Laura And did they speak Vietnamese I that schools?

Bruno They spoke French.

Laura They spoke French?

Bruno But the professors would also you know they knew Vietnamese cause we had French and Vietnamese professors, invaluable professors.

Laura So your class mates, they were Vietnamese, correct?

Bruno Most of them yes, the majority were Vietnamese.

Laura So they could also speak French?

Bruno And they could speak French because they were learning French at that school.

Laura Oh, wow. And how did, how did they decide what school they went to?

Bruno For one that was the only French school there though, and since I was french my mother wanted me there.

Laura So parents could pick where students go if they were public schools?

Bruno Yes but French, the French school Saint Siberry was the only French school.

Laura It's the only one?

Bruno Public school there.

Laura Ok, well when you were coming over here to the U.S, did you come by, did you come by airplane I'm guessing?

Bruno Yes we flew from Dubai, Saigon to Tokyo, where they took you to Honolulu, and Honolulu into L.A.

Laura Was it just you, your mother and your brother at the time, just you three.

Bruno Yeah.

Laura Was it easy traveling through the international border and going through various check points or anything like that?

Bruno It was. It was. I, I have to say took a lot of courage from my mother to make that commitment, incredible courage.

Laura Did you guys take a lot of things with you or just your clothes, and a couple of things?

Bruno Yeah, just the bare essentials necessities and I think everything else we ship by boat.

Laura Oh so you didn't take the other things?

Bruno Some things yes. Family pictures, albums.

Laura So can you describe your life once you got here to the U.S?

Bruno Yes and I can imagine the Vietnamese coming here for the first time not speaking the language. My, I'm going to say it was interesting because my stepfather was Master Sergeant in the air force so we lived in a low air force base in a family housing area and there was a lot of GI's who had married Vietnamese women so I was sort of a translator back then because I could speak Vietnamese, I would speak with their wives.

Laura Do did your stepfather speak French also?

Bruno No just English.

Laura Just English.

Bruno Just very, very a fraction of French but not...

Laura Was your mother fluent in English?

Bruno She was.

Laura Oh ok I understand now.

Bruno Ok.

Laura I wasn't getting the language barrier I guess the song must have been really great. Ok so when you came over here you were acting as a translator was it easy for you to adjust to the schools over here.

Bruno I just followed the crowd since when I went to Garrett Elementary in Denver, I didn't understand English. So I just followed what the other kids were doing I would say my sciences and mathematics were a little more advanced in the same grade level so my concentration was learning to speak English, and English is a very difficult language it took me about ten years to to learn. Yes, from scratch. All I could say was yes, no I learned those two words.

Laura Were you with a lot of other students who were in the same situation?

Bruno No not at all.

Laura Was it easy to make friends over here or did you ever feel left out of anything?

Bruno I'm going to say I was very outgoing in Vietnam and because of the language barrier I became very shy in America, my brother actually tipped the scale, he was very outgoing he made friends very easily, I was self conscious about speaking correctly and obviously I'm two years older so I was a little more shy, the younger you are the quicker you adapt to a situation.

Laura What did you I'm guessing you went to college here then right?

Bruno I, I went, I did not finish but I took three years of Aerospace Engineering. As a matter of fact I my last couple of years were here at UT.

Laura Oh my goodness, UT.

Bruno I know, we had a family situation an emergency and I had to stop and get in the work force.

Laura Well how did you find your job?

Bruno My, my first job, are we talking about my first job or last job?

Laura First job.

Bruno First job was court manager and there's a story behind that. In Saigon, we used to go to a private club and my mother used to take us for lessons but I passed by the tennis courts everyday or whatever time I went to the club, and I thought that was so elegant. I came to America I didn't realize I would be able to play tennis. My first job was the equipment manager at Lakeway and I remember washing all the courts, twenty-six courts keep it

very clean then I went on to the computer field because I was very into computers so I worked at business centers then I went on to work with undergrad street then Apple computers.

Laura Apple. My I-phone.

Bruno Your I-phone, I-pod. Really but you have ordered it?

Laura Yes I ordered it but I'm a little nervous because I heard that it doesn't really work all the time.

Bruno I'll put your mind at ease.

Laura Ok, do you see any similarities or differences between Vietnam and your life over here or is it complete shock?

Bruno Well similarities we have transportation obviously Vietnam back in the 70's, back in the 60's you had a lot more bicycles and mopeds on the street after cars. When I came to America I saw big cars that was huge because I'd never seen so many. You've got cars in a row, and now you've got SUVs, Hummers, and so forth. And also America you have.

Laura You must have been in shock when you got to Texas and saw the trucks.

Bruno Oh yeah, I always thought of Texas as cowboys and ranches.

Laura Everybody has a horse.

Bruno I never knew there was actually civilization here.

Laura You're not the only one.

Bruno But yeah similarities people are friendly and different situation but you still live and you still enjoy and you still laugh. Humor makes life very enjoyable, in America there is so much more to offer, so much more freedom I remember my stepfather had a 200 acre farm in the Mason-Dixon side of Pennsylvania side. When we moved here from Denver I couldn't comprehend that I could actually walk forever and not be worried about someone shooting at me, got fired there were no barbed wire fences except for the cows and the horses that was interesting.

Laura So you lived on a farm?

Bruno Yes, I grew up in a farm here in America.

Laura Oh wow.

Bruno So I learned how to plow bale hay, cut timber a lot of things as a kid I really wouldn't do but I learned because of very great parents.

Laura Did you enjoy it?

Bruno I enjoyed it as a matter of fact I, early this year back in April I had the opportunity to go back to visit the farmhouse I grew up in, that was I spent 30 years and everything still stands they turned that into the owner who is the person that actually purchased it from us is still the owner of the farm and he turned it to a Christian community so he calls it Cutter Village, it's amazing so there's a lot blessings in this sky of life and I think that was one truly great blessing to turn that wonderful area where folks can retreat and have a weekend retreat and so forth.

Laura I always like to ask this question just because I'm probably a little bit of a romantic. How did you meet your wife because you said she was Vietnamese correct? So exactly how'd you meet?

Bruno Yes, yes. I used to play well okay I still play a lot of tennis and I got up to the top division of the Austin tennis league and I decided to venture into the mixed doubles because I thought it was a little more friendly, a little more fun and my, my wife's cousin and aunt and uncle used to run a store in Northcross mall called The Golden Egg Roll and I used to go there to eat lunch, and as well as the Vietnamese buffet when I finished my tennis matches. And that's how her cousin said he thought I was a soccer player and I said no. No I'm a tennis player. "Oh I've got someone who loves to play tennis." And I said well I'm not interested but she kept pushing me and finally I said you know I am in the mixed doubles arena let me call this lady. So I called, I called Lana and I say here's my cell phone. And that's how we met. It was strictly tennis. A year later I realized that in life similarities are important and we just had so much in common I could tell her Lana [unknown word]. "Oh I know what you are talking about," this happened to me oh yes I know so we could actually reminisce about the past and really have a great appreciation, so I will say the bonus of growing up Vietnamese is we keep all of our issues, arguments very small, we just laugh about it if we think that's not a big deal and life is more precious, more important.

Laura So she came from over there to then.

Bruno Yes she's Vietnamese.

Laura She was over there during the war also?

Bruno Yes, yes so she came, I think she came in 72' or 75'.

Laura So you guys are able to appreciate the little things now?

Bruno Absolutely.

Laura Instead of taking everything extremely seriously?

Bruno Correct, that's important in life that you get harmony and happiness.

Laura Do you consider yourself now, do you consider yourself American, French-American or Vietnamese –French American, any kind of combination Texan or?

Bruno I consider myself an American, I became naturalized in 77'. So its been awhile. I think America is a great country and I could still go to France if I wanted to cause you have your own nationality.

Laura Will you be voting this year?

Bruno Oh absolutely.

Laura Good for you.

Bruno The only other thing I could tell you about my background, my family background, is I don't have any pictures but my great great grandfather built the train railroad tracks from Hanoi to China. So I would be used to going and having a research done on that. I had a friend from Vietnam who recently came back took a picture of the railroad station. Now I want those pictures. Very interesting.

Laura Well what do you think of the U.S policy during and after the war?

Bruno I'm not biased I still, Vietnam is basically a communist country now, I have not been back to Vietnam although my wife and I would one day probably take a trip back. From a civilian point of view I think war really has an impact on civilian lives. I think America did well to get out of Vietnam and I remember when the French lost to and they realize this is not a war you're going to win at the time now that we're looking at a global economy that oversee many countries in the world, so I'm answering your questions or not.

Laura Are you involved with any type of politics now?

Bruno No I just stay informed. As far as politics are we talking about politics in Vietnam or are we talking about politics here in the U.S?

Laura Either or whichever one you find more interesting.

Bruno I like them both.

### **Excerpts**

Subject: Ethnicity/Nationality

Name Transcription

Bruno I am actually French.

Subject: Birth Country

Name Transcription

Bruno My family is from south of France, its south of Bordeaux and as a matter of fact even today she go, I went to visit my hometown Nordic because that's where the Nordic army came from, they immigrated to Vietnam during colonization.

Subject: French Influence

Name Transcription

Bruno So Vietnam was basically colonized by the French, and that's how my family ended up in Vietnam and well you, her my mother left her husband. That's how we ended up in Vietnam, we went to visit our grandparents and as a matter of fact from what I understand most of my relatives died in concentration camps during Japanese takeover of Vietnam.

Subject: Second Marriage

Name Transcription

Bruno The master sergeant used to come over serenade her on the guitar. At that time I didn't speak English, so I was just laughing. I thought it was kind of cute I didn't know what he was thinking. He was singing Hank Williams' songs actually but ah he fell in love with my mother and told her that if she was willing to come to America that he would adopt her two children meaning my brother and myself and it was a tough decision because I grew up speaking French and I was fluent in Vietnamese at the time and my path was going to be to go back to Paris and continue my studies where the secondary school was.

**Summary**

Bruno Lartigue is of French descent but was raised in Vietnam during the war by his mother and grandparents. At the young age of eleven his mother remarried a soldier from the U.S which led them to their journey across the pacific to the U.S along with his younger brother. Although he is not Vietnamese by ethnicity, Mr. Lartigue was substantially influenced by his childhood years in Vietnam before his assimilation into American society. He has lived through an improbable journey that led him to Colorado, Pennsylvania and finally Texas.