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Name	Transcript
<u>00.01</u>	
Suellen	I am here with Dieu Tan.
Dieu	Dieu Tan. That is part of my first name.
Suellen	And she is a floral artist and sculptor here in Austin.
Dieu	Scratch out the sculptor [laughs]. That was just experimental stuff.
Suellen	So what was it like where you grew up? Did you grow up in Austin basically, or a little bit in Vietnam?
Dieu	I grew up in Vietnam until I was eight.
Suellen	Until you were eight? And whereabouts?
Dieu	It was in Saigon.
	[Nancy arrives – external noise- asks permission to take photos]
Suellen	Grew up in Saigon? Which is huge, massive, big big city?
Dieu	Yes.
Suellen	What was your life like as a child in Vietnam?
Dieu	I guess I was ...
Suellen	Was it privileged or ...?

Dieu No, no we were pretty poor. I guess I was a child, so I didn't mind it.

Suellen You were resilient and whatever?

Dieu No, we didn't know any better. We just had fun. I had three brothers I grew up with.

Suellen Are they older?

Dieu One older and two younger. I mean looking back we were really poor, but when we were growing up we had a good time.

Suellen And so your parents ...? It's not like you felt as poor as you were?

Dieu Well everyone around us was poor. My mum worked in the market, and so she would take me and my older brother to the market with her and then I stayed there until it was time for us to go to school and then we would walk to school. Go to school and come back.

Suellen So school was later in the afternoon?

Dieu Yes. School was very short. They had to take a lot of kids, so we only had three or four hours of school,

Suellen Sounds great!

Dieu It was 11:00 o'clock. I think it was only a few hours and it was really big, you know you had 70 students to a class.

Suellen So she went to the markets really early in the morning and then you looked after your younger brothers and then she came back?

Dieu I think my younger brothers went to school to day care or whatever and then it was just me and my older brother. We went to school and then we walked to school from the markets.

Suellen Oh you went with your mum to the markets?

Dieu Yes, so ...

Suellen And then off to school?

Suellen And what about your father?

Dieu My father was working for Pan American airlines, back then it was ... you know it was really big and very glamorous.

Suellen What was his role there?

Dieu I think he was some sort of manager.

Suellen How were you disciplined as a youth?

Dieu We got spanked. [laughs] The teachers can spank you. I got spanked by a teacher [external comment]

Dieu Yes I think the teacher, he just had to too loud and he got everyone up on the bench and he spanked all of us. [laughs]. And then ... let me see .. my mum didn't spank me ... my father ..

Suellen Did you need it? Do you think you deserved it? [laughs]

Dieu Well, as a child.

Suellen And your parents as well?

Dieu Just once or twice. A few times, yes.

Suellen But it wasn't like a

Dieu A few times, yes.

Suellen But I guess you are about my age, I'm 36. [whispers]

Dieu I am 42.

Suellen So I think that was the era.

Dieu Yes, well even growing up here in middle school I remember kids got spanked by their principal [off the subject]

05:00
Suellen So the typical daily routine? Well we've got that you went to the market. So, what time do you think you were out of bed? Went to market?

Dieu Oh, I don't know. I guess early.

Suellen Went to market with mum. Sold a few things with your mother. Helped your mother?

Dieu Yes, she sold dried goods.

Suellen Dried goods, yes. Like spices and?

Dieu Yes, fish sauce. Stuff like that. Dry seafood, like dried fish.

Suellen Like prawns. Do you call them shrimp? Shrimp or prawns?

Dieu Or squid. We eat those and then, yes, with sugar and salt and pepper.

Suellen She would do that at home and then bring it?

Dieu No well, my grandmother lives my grandfather is a fisherman. She buys them wholesale and then she split it up.

Suellen And dries it?

Dieu No, she doesn't dry it. She buys in bulk and then sells it.

Suellen So your grandmother was the fisherwoman?

Dieu Ah, yes. I guess so, yes.

Suellen And so she provided the fish for your mother to sell?

Dieu Yes, initially I guess. She was quite far out.

Suellen You didn't have an occupation in Vietnam you were a child.

Suellen Are you or your family in any cultural organizations?

Dieu No, not really.

Suellen Churches? No church involvement?

Dieu No.

Suellen Did you practice any traditional arts?

Dieu No, I don't.

Suellen Were you there during the war?

Dieu Yes, I stayed there until four days before Saigon fell so it was April 21st is when I left. I think April 25th is when it fell.

Suellen So you left 4 days ...

Suellen I think it is interesting. So your mother was a market worker and then your father was a like a manager at ...?

Dieu At Pan Am.

Suellen And then did he come as well? Everybody came? So he just left his job?

Dieu Well, actually Pan Am sponsored them out. The very last flight, Pan Am flight, they reserved for the families to move out of the country.

Suellen So you didn't have to come on a boat? You flew?

Dieu Yes, we flew.

Suellen This is the most glamorous ... [laughs]

Dieu Yes, I didn't have to hang onto the helicopter or anything like that so ... [laughs]

Suellen That worked out to be a very good job for your dad, didn't it?

Dieu It did because he studied French. He studied French in college. He is self taught English. He taught himself English and that served him better than his French ever did.

Suellen Ok, and you were on a special Pan Am plane?

Dieu Yes. It was an all volunteer crew. It was slightly dangerous. Actually they made a ... ABC did a movie on that last flight out. It was a long time ago.

Suellen And were you actually on the last flight out?

Dieu Yes. I think there were some other flights that left later

Suellen You were on the last kind of ...?

Dieu Commercial flight.

Suellen You were on the last kind of brigade out of the place?

Dieu Yes. I think we barely took off at the ... I guess the air traffic controllers didn't want to leave, let us take off. So we end up having to take up a collection on the airplane to bribe the officials to let us take off. Again in the movie they had gunfire and things like that but I don't think that was true. Yes, that was just for drama. But we did take up a collection for bribes.

10:00

Suellen And that was the air traffic controllers?

Dieu Not sure who all they was. Might have been the military or ...

Suellen Were you involved in the war? How?

Dieu No, I wasn't.

Suellen Were any family members involved in the war?

Dieu Yes, several of my uncles. Three of my uncles. Four? Three on my fathers side and

Suellen So they were in the South Vietnamese army, was it called ?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen Are they alive?

Dieu Yes, they're alive. Yes, one of my uncle lost his leg. So that's life. During pretty heavy hand to hand combat. Yes, he was one of the [unintelligible] guys.

Suellen Did you come into contact with American soldiers?

Dieu No, I didn't.

Suellen What was the main feeling of American soldiers?

Dieu I don't know ...

Suellen Do you remember, your parents talking about ...?

Dieu Not really.

Suellen Because I guess it's hard to kind of ...

Dieu Yes, I was a child so it was

Suellen And I know how a lot of people feel now, that America shouldn't have gone and all that kind of stuff. So it's hard to separate that from how ...

Dieu I don't think my parents had a negative feeling toward them. No, I think that they were there to help. I hadn't heard anything negative.

Suellen Yes, I suppose you would've.

Suellen So how did the war affect you and your family? Well, you had to leave but what about living there?

Dieu Living in Vietnam? I think my mum said that when she was younger when she was living out in the countryside that they had to evacuate a few times because of the bombings. So they had to run a few times.

Suellen Just leave the house and not come back to it or?

Dieu Yes, to

Suellen Just relocate?

Dieu Just for a night or two, yes. My grandfather on my mothers side, he lost a lot of his wealth in the war. Not just the Vietnam war but way back. The Vietnam war came from, the ... during the French resistance in Vietnam, so I guess it's not the Americans.

Suellen So how did he lose that wealth? Just through bombing? Loss of property?

Dieu Yes, I guess at that time when the French were ... this is back in the 50's and 60's ... when the French were in control of Vietnam there was a group of people who were opposed to the war and there were a group of people who collaborated with them and I guess somebody set him up saying he was a French resistance fighter and they told the government and so he got put into jail and they confiscated all his wealth. I think my grandfather on my other side, on my fathers side too, he got thrown in jail. You know back then there was no justice, they just take you and throw you in jail and ...

Suellen And because they were French, part of ... suspicious they were part of the French resistance?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen And this is the South Vietnamese government?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen What do you remember about that time period?

Dieu Oh, and I guess after we left here, some of my uncles you know stayed in the war. We've been able to sponsor them over here but one of my uncle were in jail for a long time. You know they don't tell us the details, but I think he was beaten

15:00

Suellen Just because he couldn't prove that he wasn't involved in?

Dieu Well when the communist came in, they, the soldiers that were left, they become prisoners of war

Suellen Of course, that's right because he was ...?

Dieu Because he was fighting for the south, he wasn't able to get out.

Suellen So even if you were in the military you couldn't ...? Could you get out? Was it more difficult to get out if you are in the military or civilians?

Dieu Well, one of my uncle had to leave and left his family behind because, you know there wasn't enough time for him to go back and get his family. I am not sure how he left. But my other uncles he didn't ... wasn't able to leave [and] was in jail for a long time.

Suellen So, your grandparents? Did they stay or did they come?

Dieu Then stayed because they were in out in the countryside and my parents couldn't have gotten them out.

Suellen And are they still alive?

Dieu My grandfather passed away but we were able to bring all of my fathers family over. We sponsored them over, so they are living in Houston now.

Suellen So, your initial family pretty much sponsored a lot of people over?

Dieu Yes, sponsored three of four families, so his brothers and sisters were able to come over.

Suellen So your uncle was captured. Your grandfather with the French resistance ... was he captured by enemy forces when Saigon fell?

Dieu No.

Suellen No, but just your uncles?

Dieu No, he had already passed away by then. Yes, this was way back in the 50's and 60's.

Suellen Sure. How long do you remember he may have been in jail?

Dieu I don't know.

Suellen Were you or anyone you know ever in a re-education camp?

Dieu Yes, that was my uncle. They call it re-education camp but that was that was ...jail.

Suellen OK. Otherwise known as jail.

Dieu I think it was pretty bad for him, you know how they are, they don't discuss it with ...

Suellen Especially men.

Dieu Yes, he probably did with his brothers but they don't like to tell the kids because we're the next generation. They don't discuss those things perhaps, but I'm sure he had a hard time.

Suellen Is he here in America?

Dieu Yes, yes he is.

Suellen Did you or your family suffer any disabilities as a result?

Dieu Well one of my uncle lost a leg, so we were fortunate.

Suellen The same uncle who went to jail?

Dieu No, this is a different guy. I have so many uncles. I guess we were fortunate, but no, a lot of other families had many tragedies.

Suellen I like how you look at it that way.

Dieu You probably think, gee I wish I had of gotten one of those tragic old person. [laughs]

Suellen Yes, I need to speak to your uncles. Both of them! [laughs]. This is so interesting to me, because in Australia, late 70's there were some people coming to Australia and my parents were very involved in the Catholic church and I remember families and they had to leave, you know one baby started crying and they had to leave it because it was going to give them away because they were getting on a boat and then the struggle to get that baby over and I just couldn't believe the stories. It seems like everybody has, you know, a story.

Suellen So life after the war? You left but how many people were left in your ... you know like uncles? Well your two uncles, your three uncles were left there.

Dieu My grandparents, my aunt and then that's just on my fathers side and on my mothers side ...

Suellen So, big family?

Dieu Oh yes, yes.

Suellen And why did they stay? So you guys leave and then I suppose you don't even have contact with them

20:00

Dieu We'd get letters, yes.

Suellen And what happened to the people that were left?

Dieu I think life ... I think it was very difficult for my grandparents. Not sure?

Suellen They were out in the countryside so I guess I think I read food was scarce and ...

Dieu It was difficult. We sent them, whatever we can ... gifts and so we would send them fabric or spices and things that they can resell on the market place.

Suellen To make a living?

Dieu Yes, but I think it was very difficult and they were very poor. Wow, I should have talked to my family before I came.

Suellen And money? Did you send money?

Dieu Later we did, yes, we sent money.

Suellen When you got yourself on the ground, right?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen You must have been worried when you left, leaving your grandparents there and everybody I guess. Or you probably knew a lot of people that were leaving anyway?

Dieu the I didn't know anyone who was leaving. We were the only ones in the neighborhood.

Suellen Oh really!

Dieu Yes.

Suellen And do you remember having to say goodbye to some friends or relatives? Did they come to see you off or you just ...?

Dieu Yes I think my parents went around and talked to some relatives. My parents didn't tell us anything until maybe the day before we left. We lived... our neighborhood ...we had to cross a bridge to get out of that place, so the night before we stayed in a hotel just to make sure we crossed that bridge because if they bombed that bridge we wouldn't have been able to get out.

Suellen Like a bridge, a really large bridge, that ..?

Dieu I don't know? Well even if it's a small bridge you wouldn't be able to get out, if they .. you know, if the communist came and bombed ...

Suellen And I suppose you couldn't go round telling everybody because then you didn't know ... "hey their leaving"! Do you remember that you just packed a bag or something?

Dieu Yes, they told us just to bring one small bag for each, and so my mum, she made some bags and we had one small bag and so that's all we left with and yes of course all the money we bought over

here was ... you know, it became worthless, the Vietnamese currency, yes.

Suellen Same with Australian? [laughs]

Suellen And, so you just leave your house?

Dieu Yes, we left our house, stayed in a hotel and then we went...

Suellen Pets. Family pets?

Dieu Oh, we didn't have a pet. Most Vietnamese don't have pets in Vietnam because it's just so impoverished ... you can barely feed..

Suellen So that was you and your three bothers and your parents and then you were told pretty much when you were in the hotel that you were leaving?

Dieu Yes, I'm leaving to get to America.

Suellen Do you remember your reactions or your brothers?

Dieu We didn't really care [laughs]

Suellen Excited?? Because it would be exciting right? [laughs]

Dieu I don't know because back then in Vietnam you just sort of ... you are raised to do what you are told, you know, so we really didn't question a lot of things growing up. It's not like my kids right now [laughs].

Suellen And sounds like your parents ..well you seem really a positive person. They probably instilled this, "we're not scared about leaving" attitude.

Dieu I think they were scared, you know, my mother was scared. Initially they were planning to have the employees go separately, go on a separate flight and then have just to have the families out first and so my mum didn't want to do that because what if we get separated and we come to America and she doesn't speak English and she had four kids. So if that was the situation she would have stayed but at the last minute I think they decided to put everyone together.

Suellen You said the employees ... they were going to separate employees from their family?

Dieu Yes, but I think that at the last minute, yes ...

Suellen Was it a full flight?

25:00

Dieu Oh, it was overcrowded. They even took ... I guess in the movie they show ... they take another group of humanitarians on board. Yes, so it was very crowded. So we landed in the Philippines

Suellen Humanitarians from another country?

Dieu From Vietnam. But that they were helping ... they were also politically active or something and they would have been persecuted had they stayed so they took them.

Suellen Right, and then, so it was a packed flight?

Dieu Yes, there were people in the aisles.

Suellen Were you business class? [laughs]

Dieu We landed in the Philippines. [laughs]

Suellen You landed in the Philippines?

Dieu Yes, I don't think we would have made it to America on that flight.

Suellen Really! Did it feel at bit kind of like ... old and did it feel like it was going to make it?

Dieu It didn't feel like it to me.

Suellen It's interesting.

Dieu Because the flight was so crowded, probably just dropped us off in the Philippines.

Suellen Right, that was as close as you could get. How long did you spend in the Philippines then?

Dieu Just several days.

Suellen Oh that's all?

Dieu Until they were able to move us and then we went to Guam after that.

Suellen And was it the same flight that took you to Guam?

Dieu I'm not sure.

Suellen But you flew to Guam?

Dieu Yes, flew to Guam.

Suellen Come on, there has got to be a boat here somewhere right? [laughs – not meant with any disrespect] And that's where they processed the immigration?

Dieu Yes, and my father had got a job. He was one of two people who got a job for Pan Am in Guam so we stayed in Guam for two years. Or three years?

Suellen And in that time everything got processed, so you didn't have to stay in the detention center or whatever it is?

Dieu No, we stayed at the refugee center for maybe one day and then Pan Am sponsored us out. I know a lot of people had to stay there for a long time until they got their sponsor but Pan Am sponsored us out.

Suellen God, thank god for Pan Am. Are they still flying?

Dieu No, they went bankrupt, absolutely bankrupt.

Suellen Oh, OK. And when you say sponsored, they pretty much paid for the whole thing? For all the family?. Is that how it works?

Dieu I mean they sponsored us out meaning that they would take care of us or help us get started instead of waiting for an American family to ...because most refugees they have to stay there until somebody sponsors them out, and I guess the sponsor maybe lets the refugee stay with them for a while until they get started, just to help them find jobs, and education, and transportation.

Suellen And why America? Why did your parents choose America? Could you choose like ... ?

Dieu No, no.

Suellen Oh, you couldn't choose?

Dieu No, no

Suellen Australia?

Dieu No.

Suellen Nothing, you just had to go to America?

Dieu Yes, because Pan Am was an American company.

Suellen Were your parents happy with?

Dieu America? Yes, we had a really good life. I mean my parents, when they came here they had a hard life because they had to start over and they didn't have the skills and so my mum was making minimum wage. My father was working the night shift at P & F J cargoes, you know they knew that coming here, it wasn't for them, it was for their children.

Suellen Why did you decide to leave? Because you didn't want a ... didn't want the ...? What was the feeling? If you stayed, what was the feeling would happen to your family?

Dieu Well, you wouldn't of be able to get ahead because a lot of my uncles stayed because if you're not a member of the communist party or if you're families not ...doesn't have family in it ... it's very hard to get access to higher education and things.

Suellen I didn't know any of that. So the oppression the communist brought with it, I guess, the whole communist party just bought all these ... a new way of life and it was going to be an oppressive force?

Dieu It was more cronyism. If you were fortunate enough to be a member, or have a family member who was higher rank then you get access to more things, otherwise you're ... your just ... it was very hard to get access to education. It was very hard to get ahead

30:00

Suellen And had it already started being like that before it fell?

Dieu No, no

Suellen You knew that this was going to start happening?

-
- Dieu Yes, yes. I guess my father did. He knew he didn't want to be a communist because he had chances before to become a communist when he was in college they recruit heavily and he was one of the top students at the university so he'd gotten recruited and he knew that communism
- Suellen So he knew what was coming?
- Dieu Yes, he knew that communism wasn't right for him so he wanted to leave.
- Suellen I wonder if there was a lot of people that didn't know the repercussions and thought "Oh we'll just stay and see what happens" you know? Your dad was educated. I didn't know what the meaning of communism was until five years ago
- Dieu I mean my aunt too, my aunt too who stayed behind and she was buying into the propaganda "oh it was going to be so much better" ... "it was going to be so much better for the people" and when they came, you know it was just ... it was oppressive.
- Suellen I could see how. I don't know if could be talked into something like that but I could see how a lot of people would be. And it would be the more educated ones who would be, "I can see that this is not going to be good for our family."
- Dieu Right, yes.
- Suellen So who left with you, the 3 brothers, mum and dad?. And then we already know who was left behind. What things did you bring? Well you brought your one bag each.
- Dieu We bought bandages and some emergency supplies. We bought photographs so we have some black and white photographs. I should have brought them.
- Suellen I would have loved those
- Dieu I don't know if I have anything ...
- Suellen [recalling] band aids ... photos
- Dieu We brought some ramman noodles. Just for food just for something that you could eat. (laughs)

Suellen Did you bring a stuffed toy or something?

Dieu No. We really didn't have those. Those things were imports. Those were expensive. I never had a doll until I was

Suellen Same in Australia. I had one Barbie doll because it was a huge big deal to have something I mean not that I was poor but

Dieu Well those things now are manufactured in Asia but back then we really didn't have toys because those things were imports and they were a luxury, luxury stuff.

Suellen Yes, ridiculous luxury.

Dieu So I never really had a doll until I

Suellen Til you were over it when you got here really? Yes, I mean I had a Barbie doll. One Barbie doll and it's arms fell off. Itt's hands fell off as soon as I opened it and mum and dad are like "too bad"!

Dieu Yes, those things were expensive back then.

Suellen Now they are five dollars at Wal-Mart or something.

Suellen Where did you go? We know that.

Dieu I guess we bought some birth certificates and things like that

Suellen Right, all the important documents.

Dieu But that was all.

Suellen it would just be difficult towell I suppose a lot of people didn't have a lot anyway so it's not like they were leaving anything valuable but then a lot of people did have valuable things right?

Dieu Yes, I think there are some people who were very wealthy in Vietnam and so when they left, then they had come here, they had to start over.

Suellen That would be tough. So you went to the Philippines? So you didn't really get a feel of the Philippines?

Dieu No, we just stayed right there.

Suellen But Guam? Was Guam nice?.

Dieu Guam was nice. We didn't really appreciate it that much when we were there, but yes, Guam was nice.

Suellen And there would have been lots of people in the same boat, so to speak, like lots of refugees in Guam.

Dieu Ah, yes.

Suellen But mainly in the detention centre?

Dieu Yes, yes, They stayed at the ... I think it was at the air force base.

Suellen Oh, that is where the detention centre was?

Dieu I think so yes. Refugee centre, that sounds better.

Suellen I know we have some ridiculous detention centre in Australia.

Suellen Well what happened during the journey? Well you said that it was really crowded and you worried was it going to make it. How long was that flight? Do you remember?

Dieu I don't remember. It wasn't very long.

Suellen Not really long?

Dieu Yes, I don't think so. We just went to the Philippines

Suellen I guess you wondered were you going to get shot out of the sky? Or no?, That's a bit overboard?

35.00

Dieu No. Maybe for the adults but I guess for the kids we didn't know any better.

Suellen So could you sit down?

Dieu I think we were sitting. The kids had to sit on the adults lap. I mean we did have a seat, so ...

Suellen But still, kids on adults laps. So safety was not a part of this flight, at all? [laughs]

Dieu No. [laughs] I don't think they had enough food to take anybody anywhere.

Suellen "We are not taking off until this family stows their ..." [laughs].
Refugee camp? No? You weren't were you?

Dieu Just for a night or so.

Suellen One night?

Dieu Yes, then we got sponsored.

Suellen Was that horrible? Weere you just like, "oh my god, you know, I can't wait to get out of here" after one night? Or you don't remember it being ?

Dieu No, it wasn't bad. I guess my aunts complained. They stayed there for several months because you know, there's communal showers.

Suellen It's so crowded?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen And I think that I read that it's not so much that people were treated badly, it's just the fact that they shoved so many people in. It's just too many people.

Dieu Just open air. Just sleep on the floor, and there's no showers.

Suellen It's pretty primitive.

Dieu Yes, they had to hold up towels for each other so they could shower and things like that.

Suellen Why did you choose ...? Because of Pan Am sponsorship? Did you know anybody that was already here, like a friend or ...?

Dieu No.

Suellen No, nobody? Did you come straight to Austin?

Dieu No we lived in Guam for three years and then my father got transferred to Houston, so they're still there and then I came to

Suellen And does he still work for Pan Am?

Dieu No, he got laid off from Pan Am.

Suellen Oh, Yes, of course! Does he still work in the industry then?

Dieu No, he started a drycleaner

Suellen Oh, Ok. So he left the whole airline industry behind, pretty much?

Dieu Right.

Suellen Do you remember, you probably don't. What kind of questions were you asked when you applied to immigrate to the USA? Apparently some people were asked, "what's your military number" you know, or because apparently you were first in line if you were a South Vietnamese Military, and then second in line there was all this kind of story you had to have to be more privileged you don't remember ... ?

Dieu No

Suellen Because you were sponsored I guess it wasn't such an interrogation. So sponsorship, I guess would have covered ... ?

Dieu Well the Asylum. I guess everyone that left Vietnam got political asylum. It's not like now, where it's hard.

Suellen Yes, Ok. That's right. If it was economic you couldn't come or something. If you said it was because of an economic because you were fleeing from against your political beliefs and then definitely.

Suellen Did you have a health inspection?

Dieu I guess we must have, yes.

Suellen You don't remember?

Dieu I think we got shots and all that.

Suellen And then how do you feel about your decision to move to the USA? Not that it was your decision. [laughs]

Dieu I guess it worked out great for us. I don't know what I would have done if we had stayed in Vietnam.

Suellen You feel very privileged?

Dieu Yes, yes. I think I'm in the American Dream now.

Suellen What was the hardest thing about starting a new life? Just one little memory?

40:00

Dieu I don't know if it was just ...

Suellen Do you remember? Well you were in Guam so it was like you had a slow introduction to a new

Dieu I guess it was just getting adjusted at school, because I had to learn the language.

Suellen Oh, you didn't speak English?

Dieu No, no.

Suellen And so you are fluent in Vietnamese as well?

Dieu Pretty much, well for an 8 year old. I mean I can speak at the same level as an 8 year old [laughs]. It is very difficult for me to read a magazine article, you know, there's a lot of political terms and economic terms that I wouldn't be able to understand, so my level,...

Suellen But you pretty much would be able to order a meal?

Dieu Yes, have basic conversations.

Suellen So no English when you came. But you're father spoke English. What about your mum?

Dieu No.

Suellen No, Wow! So learning English ... So you remember that being tough. What about your brothers? How did they adjust? Were they ...?

Dieu Well we were all kids.

Suellen So obviously nobody was crying all night. You were just all together and happy with that?

Dieu No. We were all together.

Suellen Who helped you find a home in the USA, when you got to Houston? I guess that was Pan Am?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen Because your father was still working in Guam for Pan Am and then they moved you to Houston?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen And was Pan Am going under by then?

Dieu No, they didn't go under until in the 80's ... late 80's.

Suellen What was that house like? Do you remember? Are they still in it?

Dieu I'm sorry?

Suellen What was that house like?

Dieu That house in Houston?

Suellen Yes, are they still in that house?

Dieu No, they moved, you know after they started the dry-cleaning. That house, I guess it was in a working class neighborhood. It was a small house. Yes, a small house for six people. I think it was just three bedrooms, so I had to share a room with my brother and my two other brothers. My husband met me when I was there and he thought the house was really small but you know we didn't know any better.

Suellen Is your husband American?

Dieu Yes, yes. He said, "Oh you guys were living in that small house!" [laughs].

Suellen Well, you didn't find a job, you were at school. But your parents? Your dad started the dry-cleaning business?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen That must have been tough at first. To get that established?

Dieu Yes, because he

Suellen Buy the equipment ...?

Dieu Oh, yes the equipment was expensive. We had to take out a huge loan and we had thrown everything into to it. They were so stressed out because if it didn't succeed we would have lost all of our money. My brother gave up going to college to help them with the cleaning.

Suellen The eldest?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen And is it doing well?

Dieu It did well for a while but they sold it off. They are retired now. They just sold it off last year.

Suellen So it served it's purpose?

Dieu Yes, yes.

Suellen You all lived off it, I guess?

Dieu Yes, because you know, it was hard for him to find a professional job after Pan Am.

Suellen Right. What about your mum? What did she work as?

Dieu She worked at the Dry cleaner. It end up being a family business. Before that she was just working. When she came to Houston she worked for Marriott it was a catering company for the airlines so they would order food from .. so it was just a minimum wage job.

Suellen What are the occupations you have held in the United states yourself?

45:00

Dieu I was in Houston and I came here for college to UT, and so I met my husband there and we got married right after we graduated and we went to Kyoto, Japan, so there I taught English and then when I came back I worked at the flower store as a floral designer. I learned the flower arrangement in Japan in Kyoto when I was there.

Suellen Floral design, OK.

Dieu Yes, but I got my degree in computer science, so that was really weird [laughs]. Oh and now I'm doing ... my husband started his software company so I am helping him with customer support right now.

Suellen Ok, so it did come in handy?

Dieu It did, in the end. Yes.

Suellen Similarities and differences between your old community and your new one?. I mean even though you were in the working class house in Houston, was it a lot better as in class than in Vietnam?

Dieu Yes, yes, definitely. In Vietnam we just had ... I think it was a very small house. It was long and straight I think, the first part. I think the second part was my parents bedroom and then the third part was the kitchen and the first part was the living room but we put beds there for the kids.

Suellen In the living room?

Dieu Yes, yes.

Suellen And what do they make their houses out of in Vietnam?

Dieu I guess it was a concrete house, but very small.

Suellen But like running water and all that kind of stuff?

Dieu I didn't have running water.

Suellen No running water?

Dieu Yes, no running water and my mum cooked on coal, you know in the kitchen.

Suellen And so I guess they enjoyed the luxuries that came with the American lifestyle. You didn't have to ... you just flicked on a button and turned a tap and

Dieu Yes, we had cars and ...

Suellen No cars in Vietnam?

Dieu No.

Suellen You walked everywhere?

Dieu Yes. My father had a motorcycle but my mother, she walked or you'd take the little bicycle, do you what those, those penny cabs? [laughs]. People think those are so charming but ... [laughs].

Suellen [laughs] Yes. Like a gondola in Venice, right! It's got that kind of romantic .. I don't know what it is?

Dieu But yes, they think it's cute.

Suellen They do, they do, but you are like, yes

Dieu And people think open air markets are so cute. It's like no! We love the supermarket. We love the supermarket, thank you! [laughs].

Suellen [laughs] Right. I've been to Thailand but I haven't been in Vietnam. I mean Bangkok.

Suellen Do you have a funny or memorable experience of culture shock? Did anything ... do you remember ... a memory of like "Oh god that's weird" or?

Dieu Seeing people kiss.

Suellen Oh really?

Dieu It's weird, you know kissing on the lips.

Suellen Yes?

Dieu Yes

Suellen On TV?

Dieu Yes, On TV and in public. It's was just weird, because you don't see that, you don't see that

Suellen Because the Vietnamese are more?

Dieu Very reserved, yes, there's no kissing.

Suellen There's no public displays of emotion?

Dieu Yes, or affection.

Suellen Was very foreign?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen Did your parents mind you watching American TV? Were they a little bit protective of?

Dieu Oh yes, I mean growing up yes. The sex scenes they'd say "oh no." We don't watch those.

Suellen My mother would fast forward videos and yes ...

Dieu Oh, yes

Suellen Are you a citizen?

Dieu Yes.

Suellen Your parents? Everybody in your family?

Dieu Yes, yes.

Suellen So you pretty much got it straight away or did that ...?

Dieu Yes, you have to be ... you get a green card and you become a permanent resident for 6 years and then after that you can apply to be a citizen, so they get citizenship

Suellen Does that mean you're still citizens in Vietnam?

Dieu No you have to renounce your former citizenship.

50:00
Suellen See I find that difficult, you know. I won't become one because I'm worried that I have to do that but I think I heard that I can hang onto both.

Dieu I don't think so. You are supposed to renounce it. You are supposed to pledge your allegiance to your new country.

Suellen Right and see I worry about that.

-
- Dieu You can only get dual. Well they'll exempt you for some religious if you have a really really really good reason they'll exempt you but the only way you can get that is if you were born in Australia and you were American parents or something then you can get dual citizenship but usually when you get citizenship you are supposed to renounce your ...
- Suellen See, I think as your parents, that would have been ... I mean ... I know they had to do it but ...
- Dieu That was hard, that's why, it ... you know we could have applied earlier but he didn't because he didn't want to renounce his citizenship,so it took a long time and
- Suellen He did struggle with the whole process, because I know I would.
- Dieu He didn't I told him I needed to do it for, you know, to get scholarships. Actually I lost one of my scholarships because I wasn't a USA citizen.
- Suellen So it was in your best interest for sure.
- Dieu Yes, and also to get jobs afterwards. If you worked for the military or military contractors they require you to be a citizen.
- Suellen Do you think of yourself as an American or Texan
- Dieu I'd say an American. I don't know? Texan? I don't know?
- [laughs] [off the topic – not relevant]
- Suellen What did you think of USA policy during and after the war? Do you know much about ...?
- Dieu No.
- Suellen No? I guess the feeling of should've USA been there? You already told me that your family had no negativity towards America and it seems to me that your family were grateful for USA policy.
- Dieu Yes, yes.

Suellen Have you ... do they ever think about .. did your parents ever think about going back and living in Vietnam or that never?

Dieu No, they like it here. Yes their family's here so I don't think they want to return to Vietnam or anything.

Suellen Do they go back for holidays at all?

Dieu Yes, they just got back last summer, to visit my grandparents.

Suellen Do they go much?

Dieu Yes, they tour the whole country and visit the family and whoever is left there.

Suellen Are you involved in politics?

Dieu No, no

Suellen What was your motivation behind the floral artistry?

Dieu Oh I was in Japan.

Suellen Oh, that's right.

Dieu Yes, we lived in Kyoto.

Suellen And you became interested in it then?

Dieu Yes, yes.

Suellen Because it was all around you or something or ... ?

Dieu Yes, I guess that's one of the traditional arts and so I took lessons because over there you can take lessons in flower arrangement, so it's sort of like taking piano lessons here.

Suellen So it's a really popular thing to do there?

Dieu Right, a lot of women do that.

Suellen So do you do that in Austin as well?

Dieu No.

Suellen You are not doing that?

Dieu No, not right now. I did work for that floral store for four years but I am hoping to get into it after my husbands company stabilizes a little bit and then I have two kids right now

Suellen Oh, Ok, so do I.

Dieu Oh you do, are the here?

Suellen Yes.

Dieu Yes that's hard. That's hard isn't it?

Suellen Yes, I study and

Dieu And your husband is here too?

55:00

[off the topic – not relevant]

Suellen Do you keep in touch with family or relatives from Vietnam?

Dieu My family does. I guess my parents do.

Suellen Your parents? Not you yourself? Like with cousins?

Dieu No, I left so long ago so I don't even know them but I know I have cousins I have never met. Yes, I have cousins I have never met. I haven't been back, my parents

Suellen You've never been back?

Dieu No, I've not been back because I have the kids now. It's hard to take them back.

Suellen Exactly!

Dieu I guess they are at an age where I can start. I can start planning for that.

Suellen So your parents would just pick up the phone and call their brothers and sisters.

Dieu Yes, my grandmother, in Vietnam, I think just until a few years ago she got electricity and phone. She's out in the countryside. We'd go out and visit them in the old days and they didn't even have electricity [laughs].

Suellen Did you have electricity in your little house?

Dieu I did. I did in Saigon.

Suellen And would you say the neighborhood was really pretty where you lived in Saigon?

Dieu No it was just all concrete.

Suellen Really?

Dieu Yes. I guess looking back it would be very impoverished, but you know, I didn't know any better.

Suellen Can I ask you, did you feel hungry?

Dieu No, I never had to be hungry but I remember we ate very sparingly. It was just a bowl of rice, and some fish, and some vegetables, and some soup. We were all very skinny [laughs].

Suellen Grandma just got electricity. Wow!

Dieu And phone. She just got phone.

Suellen I mean even my grandma only just had hot water in the last ... [laughs] Australia was behind. Yes, I remember .. I remember it!

Dieu Oh yes, I remember taking cold showers.

Suellen Yes and my father still has this problem with me having a three minute hot shower .. banging on the ..., you know, because he never had it and so when they got it I guess it was a huge big privilege and I don't know ...

Suellen Does your family I just read about Tet and sounds very yummy. Do you celebrate Tet?

Dieu Oh yes.

Suellen I am not pronouncing that right?

Dieu Tet

Suellen Tet. Yes and so that's over new years. Is that right? And do you have the ...what do they call them? The cakes? Not the moon cakes but the rice cakes that are wrapped up and

Dieu Yes, yes we do that.

Suellen So, does you mother make them?

Dieu Yes, she did, but now it's easier to buy them [laughs].

Suellen Oh where do you buy them from? [laughs].

Dieu At the Vietnamese stores. They have Vietnamese grocery stores.

Suellen But are they in the fridge or something or are they just .. ?

Dieu Yes, yes.

Suellen Would they be good though?

Dieu Are they good to eat? Or? Yes.

60:00

Suellen The ones in the Vietnamese stores? I must have a look for them. just that we'd read a whole big article about them and I was getting hungry and I'm thinking I'm going to even try to make these from this article because it was describing how to do it.

Dieu Oh No, I don't think you want to make it.

Suellen Oh really! Yes, I heard that like making tamales. Not worth it.

Suellen Does your family keep an alter for your ancestors?

Dieu Yes, because my grandfather died a few years ago so we have his picture up and we burn incense.

Suellen Candles?

Dieu Incense

Suellen I like that.

Dieu And then at his anniversary we get together and pray.

Suellen Is that your dads?

Dieu My father, yes, and I my ... guess my mum too.

Suellen And so that's set up just all the time and dusted off?

Dieu Yes, I remember when I got married we had to pray. My husband thought that was ...

Suellen Sweet?

Dieu Novel or something [laughs].

Suellen Name a song or music that reminds you of Vietnam?

Dieu An American song?

Suellen I don't know? I guess any song that reminds you of Vietnam?

Dieu You know that song that was in

Suellen Platoon?

Dieu No

Suellen Forest Gump?

Dieu I guess I don't really

Suellen Like one of the popular movies that was set in Vietnam, around the war. No?

Dieu No.

Suellen Is there any you know or it could even be .. you know sometimes there's a song that you know you remembered because you went on a holiday and it was around about the time that you left or ... ?

[interruptions]

Dieu A Vietnamese song ? Oh, a Vietnamese song. Let me see which one I know you know ah ...

[interruptions]

Dieu I'm trying to think.

Suellen A song your grandmother, your grandparents kind of liked or was there any American music in Vietnam that you were ever exposed to?

Dieu No, not really. We watched a couple of American shows. Maybe Mission Impossible?

Suellen Really?

Dieu Yes there was Mission Impossible and the Wild Wild West was really popular.

Suellen I know we watched shows in Australia that Americans had not even heard of and I'm like, "it was a big hit in Australia" and they're like, "we've never heard of that before!"

Dieu Mission Impossible. The old ones with the sexy blonde. The sexy blonde short hair, yes, they loved her. They thought she was so sexy [laughs].

Suellen We had Charlie's Angels and Buck Rogers in the 21st century and then BJ Mackay. They were big hits in Australia but not here really [laughs].

Dieu No, no.

Suellen They're like, "we've never heard of those!"

Suellen So what was the other one? Mission Impossible and ...?

Dieu Wild Wild West.

Suellen Never heard of that.

Dieu Oh really! That was with Robert Conrad.

[interruptions]

Suellen In your opinion what will become of Vietnamese culture in the USA?

-
- Dieu I think as we get bigger in size, I think people will be more aware, you know like the dragon days and the Tet festival. I think we're starting to get more Americans attending now yes, because the Vietnamese always put up a Tet festival every year.
- Suellen I guess because as the years go by you notice there might be more interest in the culture because that's definitely happened in Australia. When the Vietnamese started arriving I think we felt like, "what's going on with these people" you know, and then as they've come into suburbs they've got their cooking and their culture and Australia just loves it now.
- Dieu Yes I think Vietnamese cooking is starting to become ... it's not so foreign anymore and you can see, you know, people ...
- Suellen I love it, I mean it saved Australia.
- Dieu I think most people have experimented with Vietnamese foods.
- Suellen Vietnamese food is probably one of the most popular foods to eat in Brisbane, where I am, you know, that's what most people would prefer to eat. I mean Chinese is going way down now.
- Dieu Well, it used to be when we came, Thai used to be the trendy. Now I think it's Vietnamese.
- 1:05:00
- Suellen Yes it's the Vietnamese. Vietnamese is "in."
- Dieu I think the Vietnamese cooking...
- Suellen Is it important to keep cultural identity, do you think?
- Dieu Is it important to keep cultural identity?. Yes I think so. In my family my father always insisted that we speak English even at home because you know, it was important to keep that because I know some other families they'll start speaking English at home to help their kids get ahead at school but ...
- Suellen Vietnamese at home or?
- Dieu Yes, Vietnamese at home.
- Suellen Vietnamese. Yes. I mean obviously to your parents it would be huge thing to hang on to.

-
- Dieu Yes, but there were some families, who you know they start speaking English at home just because
- Suellen Because it's easier to assimilate
- Dieu Yes, just to help their kids to get ahead, but you know my parents always insisted.
- Suellen Yes, that's great.
- Suellen Are there any other memories you would like to share?

1:06:03

She shared a story at the end after we had finished about a Vietnamese woman who came to the flight as they were leaving and asked if the child could evacuate with them. The child was half Korean and she knew that the baby would not be accepted growing up in Vietnam so she gave up the baby and asked if they would please take the baby and find it a new home in USA. The pilot adopted that baby. The mother stayed because she had family in Vietnam. Her father went to the 20 year Pan Am reunion and that baby who is now about 33 had graduated top of his university class and gave a very moving speech.