



to the huge parking lot, that on weekends it would serve as a rehearsal for a certain type of Chinese opera. There were a lot of costumes and fancy costumes and a lot of painted masks and that really scared me because I thought of them as monsters. That would be my first memory of any type of cultural experience and I remember just being petrified because there was a lot of elaborate colors and costumes and make up and face painting and stuff like that.

VALERIE: Did the dragon dancing ever scare you because I know it scared me when I was little?

CANH: Yes, you are absolutely right. It was a part of that and all the firecrackers and the noises and stuff. You bet, its not fun stuff.

VALERIE: Is there a traditional Vietnamese dish that you favor?

CANH: You know there are so many and I'm so fortunate because I love American food and I love Mexican food and I love Italian. What makes Vietnamese food so wonderful, to me is because you can see all the influences of all the countries that had one time or another colonized Vietnam. Whether it be the French or even Chinese influences. I guess you could say that my favorite dish will probably be [bun thit nuong] because it just has so many flavors. Vermicelli, it's got grilled pork, you can throw in there grilled shrimp and then it has all these different herbs and vegetables that kind of bring out the flavor in the dish. It's not just something so simple as one flavor, its just so many different flavors and spices that fresh vegetables and stuff and grilled meat kind of brings out all the flavors.

VALERIE: Do you have any family traditions that you and your family do every year?

04:54

CANH: We practice a lot of the Asian holidays or the Vietnamese traditional holidays, but at the same time we also hold April 30<sup>th</sup> as an important date also because that it's the day that we left our country. Or Saigon or South Vietnam fell to the Communist North. All the Tet, all the Moon Harvest, all the Lunar calendar New Years, plus also April 30<sup>th</sup> it has a special place in our hearts.

VALERIE: What would you do for Black April?

CANH: Black April, the 30<sup>th</sup> a lot of times we think back, we call my parents. I always call my parents to thank them for bringing us over to this country. Also, you want to call your family members and say, "You remember...25 years ago or 28 years ago today this is what we were doing or this and this and that," we're always trying to go back and remember the anniversary of that day that my family fled and just the day in general. The things we went through and the hardships. We laugh at it now, we can look back and laugh now, be grateful and appreciative of what we're given in this country and what it took for us to get here.

VALERIE: In class we were talking about when families were fleeing during the war, was there anybody in your family that you fell out of contact with and many years later you found back?

CANH: For me, I was 5 years old so there was not people that I were friends with and stuff, but my parents yes. When we were in the refugee camps, we made friends with other people and my parents do keep in touch with them or occasionally through the years I heard my parents have ran into them at different places and stuff, we try to exchange phone numbers and addresses and just try to keep in touch.

VALERIE: Is there a family folktale of story that your parents or grandparents have told you that you would like to share?

CANH: Parents tell me a lot of funny stories and stuff in growing up and things that we did and how this culture is different from that in Vietnam. When we were kids growing up they would tell us scary stories to keep us in line. So we don't do this and be bad and if we're not good the so and so monster will supposedly come and take us away. Or sometimes if they don't want us to, in my family at least, if they don't want us to eat something that's not healthy for us they'll say, "Oh, it's gonna make you stupid, you can't eat that." So growing up I always thought that if I ate this certain type of mango raw, that I'm gonna get bad test scores. So, I still think today it was my mom's way of saying, "Don't eat it, it's not good for you." That I always smile at when I think about it.

VALERIE: Now I'm going to ask you some question about your wartime experiences. Where did you live during the war?

CANH: During the war, we lived in Saigon. I stayed with my grandparents in the city because at some point at the end of the war, it was really dangerous to live in the countryside where my father and mother had a house. So we all kind of lived in the city because we figured in the city we would be safe with numbers, you can get an idea if the communist troops were coming getting a little closer into and also Saigon was kind of south of south Vietnam. I could remember probably weeks and months leading up to April 30<sup>th</sup>, the bombs and stuff got louder and louder at night. So you kind of knew it was inevitable, the day was coming.

VALERIE: Were there any family members involved in the war?

CANH: Yes, on my father's side I had an uncle named Chu Uyen. We called him Chu Uyen, but he fought for the south army and he was captured and he was missing for awhile. So we thought that maybe he was dead and there was news from his fellow comrades that he had passed away, but through some news of prison camps and other people we were told later that he did survived. He did and now he lives in Houston.

VALERIE: Since you had an uncle that was a part of the south and fought for the south. Did your family feel threatened?

CANH: We did. Because of my father's position and then his brother's that were in the war. My father told us that we had no choice. On April 30<sup>th</sup>, when he knew that was the day that Black April, the fall of South Vietnam. He said we had no choice, we had to leave or they would kill him. So he took all of us. We didn't have a choice, we fled.

VALERIE: Did you come into contact with any American soldiers?

09:54

CANH: Yes! We were first rescued. I have to go back to the first time that I was able to see American soldiers was we were drifting on a boat for 25 days, no food and water whatever we had my mom had packed along for that journey or escape. After 25 days we saw an American ship cross by us and they weren't able to help us. So they threw loaves of bread across. So they were just throwing loaves of bread across to our boat and we would catch it. I can see that it was American soldiers throwing bread to us. That was my first encounter so I thought, "Wow, these wonderful people are helping us, giving us food." Then when we got on to the refugee camps, first it was Guam and then Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. We had interactions with the American soldiers. They were really nice and very accepting of us. My first memory of it is, I still remember it was an American G.I. that gave me a can of peanut butter, you can tell now that it was

government issued because it was kind of in a small little round can. You had to open it up with a small handheld can opener. I remember tasting peanut butter for the first time and it was wonderful. He showed me how to eat it with a chocolate bar, that's was pretty much my fond memory of someone introducing me to my first Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. [laugh] Self made.

VALERIE: Do you still do that?

CANH: Now it's easier to buy Reese's Peanut Butter Cup, but every time now that I open up a Jiffy or a Peter Pan and I spread my bread with that peanut butter. I do think about that time.

VALERIE: Can you explain more about being in the boat and refugee camp?

CANH: Yeah, it was scary. At 5 years old, you see people dying in front of you, you see people falling into the ocean, you see it was war. You don't know at 5 years old, you don't understand why your parent's took you from just a happy place where everything was fine. They take you into this boat and this place where you're cramped. You're sleeping with hundreds and thousands of people you don't know. There's no food, there's no, nothing, bare necessities you don't have and you're wondering, "Where are you going? This is not a trip this is not a vacation. What do you mean? Why is every one crying?" I remember screaming at my parents, "Why don't we go home? Why did we go and suffer like this? Let's just go home. Turn around. Let's go home. Why did you do this to us?" At 5 years old, you're just confused. You don't know why you're leaving, you don't know what death is, but then you see it. So all you want to do is turn around and go back. It made no sense to you. So when you got on to the islands and the refugee camps. Better experiences, there was food, water, and you interact with people you don't normally interact with and so you forgot about the hardship, but it was pretty tough at that time, yeah.

VALERIE: Were you ever captured by enemy forces?

CANH: No, I wasn't. Fortunately I wasn't, but we were scared, yes. Because on April 30<sup>th</sup>, my father had all of us on his motorcycle. Imagine 6 people: he, my mom, 4 kids. From my oldest brother being 7, I'm 5, my youngest sister 3, and a little baby, my youngest brother. There was 6 of us on a motorcycle and we're just headed towards the water. We didn't know... it was rainy, we knew the communists were coming. All we could do was drive toward the boats; that would basically be heading towards the ocean. We didn't know where were gonna go or what we were gonna do, but we knew we had to escape. That was scary, yes because we know if there were road blocks, we didn't know if we were going to get captured, we didn't know if we got on the wrong boat. That boat may have taken us out to where someone could hijack us. There were pirates. It was scary, yes.

VALERIE: Did your grandparents not go with you?

CANH: No, my grandparents at the time said, "We're old. We have a son that's missing." Which was my uncle. "What if he were to return? We want to be here for him." They didn't want to take the risk. They figured they'll lived in Vietnam, they'll die in Vietnam. If their fate is to be killed and executed, that's where they're gonna. And a lot of our aunts and uncles stayed because of that. I remember saying goodbye to my grandmother and leaving. Not sure if I'll see both of them again.

VALERIE: They both survived though, right?

CANH: Yes, they did and now. They eventually came to America. Grandfather passed away about 2 years ago, he's buried over in Arcadia near Pasadena in Los Angeles. And grandmother is still alive, she lives in Houston with aunt and uncles.

VALERIE: Were you or anyone you knew ever in a reeducation camp?

15:06

CANH: I was not, but one of the gentlemen, elderly gentlemen that used to work for our office, he was in prison in the reeducation camp for awhile. He would tell us stories of what happened to him and it's pretty shocking. He told me that back before the fall of Saigon, he was a writer and he wrote for the government in the South Vietnamese army. When they found out he was one of the writer's for speeches and stuff for some of the political leaders, that they basically beat his hands. That was his punishment. He was in there for a long period of time.

VALERIE: Why did your family choose to come to the United States?

CANH: At that time in '75, when we fled. I don't think we had any notion where we were gonna to go. We were just going to leave, escape, and hope that whatever that was out in that ocean was better than what was coming to us in Saigon. We were just fortunate enough, we were rescued and the United States. There was a First Baptist Church in Palestine, Texas that sponsored us. We were just blessed and fortunate that the United States country opened up its policies to the refugee boat people and we ended up here in Texas. I don't think we ever had a choice, but we were fortunate. We could have been sponsored by someone else in a different country, sure. We have family and friends and people that we heard, that we've kept in touch with at the refugee camp that ended up in Australia, or some ended up in Canada, or other countries, European countries

VALERIE: I'm going to kind of take it back to the boat. Since there were a lot of people fleeing, families fleeing from Vietnam. Did your family have to bribe their way to the boats or were they just like, "Hurry up and come on?"

CANH: We were fortunate because my father, because he was a police officer he had access to boats and the waters. He knew about a week or two before the fall. So his superiors and he, left certain emergency boats at the dock. So he had a boat there that when we got there, he was able to start up and we took the boat. It was just a regular 2 motor boat that took us out into the ocean, but it wasn't a big enough boat to take care of all of us out in the rough seas. So he was looking for bigger boats to dock into and because of that day, I still remember it was rainy, the water, the sea was really choppy. It was basically, find the biggest boat you can get to; dock if you can and then you're on your own trying to hop over. If you can make it on to the bigger boat, then that was your spot, but if you fall into the ocean then that's your faith. We saw certain boats docks and then they wouldn't make it over. When people would jump they would slip into the ocean and that's that. If you're fortunate enough to jump over, you were able to transport your family over; first come, first serve. It wasn't any bribe at that time, it was just total chaos.

VALERIE: Were you required to have a health inspection?

CANH: Sure, I remember. You know, I don't know if I was required to have a health inspection, but it seemed like at 5 years old before I went to school. I think I was given every shot known to man. It looked like everyday my mom would pick my older brother and I up and go get shots. It looked like there were more shots in this country than holidays and birthdays. It was just gotta get a shot for this, gotta get a shot for that, it got to the point it felt like I was a pin cushion for awhile.

VALERIE: Do you have one of those chicken pox thingy?

CANH: We call it the fob, fob scars? Yeah, [laughs]

VALERIE: What was the hardest thing about starting a new life here in the United States?

CANH: The language wasn't so hard because at 5 years old we were able to pick up the language pretty easily. I have to say, I have to give credit to watching t.v. because I learned my English watching Electric Company, Sesame Street, and Mister Rogers. Because I remember before we actually went to school, we would stay home a lot and watch t.v. and we would learn our English through that. Also in the neighborhoods and stuff we were able to learn the language. I wouldn't say the language was the hardest, not when you're such at a young age. Now, I've got friends I've met in college that came in their teenage years and in their college years, that was hard for them to get it down.

20:04

The hardest part for me, I remember was the weather because we come from a tropical south pacific island, in an area where it's nice and breezy and the temperature doesn't get freezing. I still remember those cold winters in Palestine, Texas. I mean this is Texas, this is not like Michigan or Ohio or up in the northwest where it's cold, but this was just Texas and I still remember it was so cold. The wind would just hit you. If it got about 30-40 degrees, we'd would turn on the heat, put on 4 to 5 blankets and never leave the room. Our family was just kind of nestled in the family area next to the furnace and we would not leave that room; it was just too cold. The weather would be the hardest part, just wasn't used to it.

VALERIE: Who helped you find a home in the U.S.?

CANH: When we were sponsored by the First Baptist Church group in Palestine, Texas, they gave us a house to live in the first few years until we got on our feet they were able to help my father and mother get jobs. My parents, they were able to save up enough money and in about 2 years, I think, they gave the house back to the church. We were able to have a little bit of money to put down on a house on our own. Then my parent's bought their very first house in Palestine also and then we gave the house back to the church.

VALERIE: What made your family decide to move to Dallas?

CANH: It was about 7 years after we lived in Palestine. We came in '75, lived in Palestine, my parent's realized that it was a small town and they needed to expose us to other cultures; getting us out and maybe interacting with people of our own ethnicity. Also, the company, the glass plant that my father and mother were working for, it had closed down. So they were kind of forced to find different avenues of income. So we said goodbye to the church and goodbye to community that we known so well and adapted to and just kind of branched out. We moved to Dallas and my parent's started their own grocery store business. From there we lived in Dallas for about 3 or 4 years.

VALERIE: What are some similarities and differences between you're old community and your new one?

CANH: [pause] I don't know if there was that much differences because it doesn't matter where you live, what culture you live in. At 5 years old, it's just the matter of, who are my friends, who do I live close to, and what kind of games can we get into, and what imaginary stuff can we make up today; are we going to be pirates, are we going to be cowboys and indians? What is fun today? Cultural differences, not a lot. It really wasn't. I don't remember it being that much different whether it be living in Saigon or Palestine.

VALERIE: How do you think your parents adjusted to the new life in America?

CANH: I think it might have been harder for them because when my parent's came here they were in their mid-20's. I think it was tougher for them because of the language. Of course I know it was tougher for them because they had so much memories and so many family member's that were still in Vietnam. So it was harder for them to adapt because I think physically they may be here, but their heart and minds are still with their family. Not knowing what was going on with their brothers and sisters and parents. That might've been the tough part for them, but for us kids, hey, what's on t.v., what games we can get into, it was a little bit easier.

VALERIE: How long did it take before they were able to go back to Vietnam or have they been back?

CANH: Yes, they have been back. I don't know the year exactly, but I remember once Vietnam, the United States, the relations opened up and it was ok to go back. I think my parent's did take a trip back. They've been back quite a few times, but I think it helped them put a lot of things at ease. It helped them bury a lot of the demons and all the fear and just seeing their family again. It put a lot of closure into lost friends, what happened to my schoolmate, my friend, this, this, and that. They were able to have closure and they were able to go back and find closure. That helped.

VALERIE: Do you have any funny or memorable experiences of culture shock?

CANH: Culture shock. Yes. I remember the first year we lived in Palestine. We lived in a small 3 bedroom house that the church had given us to live in. Certain holidays would come up, like I remember it was getting cold and we weren't used to the weather and the Pastor, Pastor Darwin Scott; really nice gentleman that was the Pastor at the First Baptist Church of Palestine.

*25:10*

In October, we didn't know it was October, he came in with some costumes, it was ghost costumes. He told us here in America there's a holiday where the kids will dress up and go to any door, they can knock on it, say a certain phrase, and people will give them candy. I thought, "What a country!" How wonderful is that? I get to be this ghost, I got a costume, it was Casper at the time, and I would knock on any door that had a light on and I would just say, "Trick or Treat," and they would have to give me candy. That was the law, that was how it was for that whole evening. So I remember I thought that was society and that was fun and then sure enough a few months later he knocks on our door, it's cold and we're hovered up in the living room watching t.v. next to the furnace he pulls in this big 'ol tree and just sticks it in the middle of our living room and we're like, "What is this tree for? We're worshipping trees now?" and he says that it's Christmas. We decorate this tree and this, this, and that. So all of these holidays he would bring over the traditions and the turkeys and Christmas trees and all this and we all thought this is crazy, this country is weird, they worship trees, but you know probably Halloween was my favorite, but Christmas was pretty unique too. We had this tree sitting in our living room for about a month and we didn't know, "Should we take it down when it's over or do we leave it up until it dies? What do we do?" But that was fun.

VALERIE: Was it a plastic tree?

CANH: It was a real tree! [chuckles] It was a real tree that we had to water too. You bet. I remember it being so big, it kind of went all the way up to the ceiling and it kind of bent

down a little bit. It was a huge tree, [chuckles] but we didn't know the significance behind it.

VALERIE: How would you describe going to school and kind of being the minority?

CANH: School in my elementary years, school was so easy because it was fun. All the kids just wanted to have fun. We learned, we interacted with other kids, other kids didn't see us as being different. It was a cakewalk, but when you got into maybe the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade it became a little bit harder because somewhere in between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of school to the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of school, the kids started seeing that we were different. Then you can kind of see a little of that discrimination come in. We were picked on by because of our language or whatever the kids would see on t.v. they would come back and start making fun of the Asian culture and stuff like that. So as the kids got older, as we got older it became a little more [pause] a little more difficult, but in my elementary years that was easy because it was just all about, "Hey, I want to be your friend." Sure, everything is easy, but then as we get a little bit older we can see the physical appearance became a bit of an obstacle for us.

VALERIE: Do you think of yourself as an American or a Texan?

CANH: Wow, that's a good question. We live in a state that is so proud of its history that I would probably say [pause] I'll have to say it's 50/50. I'm proud to be a Texas, at the same time I'm proud to be a part of the United States, but in growing up I heard people say it's the United States of Texas. So you know I would have to say it's pretty balanced. One third each way, I'm proud to be Vietnamese because that's where my roots are and that's where I got started. I'm proud to be a Texan because I've lived here most of my life and I'm proud because of the state itself and its history. And then I'm proud to be a part of the United States and I'm proud to be an American. So I would say I'm divided up, all three.

VALERIE: What do you think of the U.S. policy during and after the war?

CANH: I don't know too much about that, but I can say that I know that a lot of times back in the 80's and 90's it was a really dicey situation because of the MIA's and the POW's. That was probably the major, major obstacle that the United States and the government in Vietnam now had to cross. What happened to the POW's and what happened to the MIA's. In order for there to be talk of relation or doors to be open. They had to rest all that issue and I'm glad that it did because now we can actually learn and I think Vietnam is going to be a better country because of what the United States and the people here can bring back. Whether it be the finances, whether it be the culture, whether it just be knowledge, bringing back. At the same time, a lot of its citizens, like me, who are Vietnamese Americans can actually go back and have closure. Go back and see where you're born, go back and say, "Hey, This is where I got started," then you can benefit the best from both worlds. I know for the longest time, a lot of the war issues were the MIA's and the POW's and I'm glad that at least both sides are at least comfortable with that.

30:35

VALERIE: Do you think the Vietnamese Americans, just the Vietnamese in general, could ever put this war behind them. Because now when we think of Vietnam, we think, "Oh the Vietnam war." Do you think we could ever put that behind us and just be like, Vietnam and beautiful country...

CANH: Sure, sure, I think time. I mean in time, it heals all wounds. I think that a lot of times, it's just the matter of just like any other country, in order for you to respect it or in order for you to embrace it, to see a different light of it. You're going to actually have to pay it a visit or be forced to, or somehow have an interest and go seek it out. Seek its history. There's much, much more history to Vietnam than the Vietnam conflict. Then just from the 60's to mid-70's. That's the thing, that is in order for you to understand a country where it is now, you have to go back to its past and understand the journey. I think, yes, one day, but at the same time I think that we shouldn't lose sight, that there was an experience when the United States was there and what happened there because that is a part of Vietnam history. But one day, I think you're right, they'll think back, "Oh, Vietnam is this beautiful country that has beautiful beaches and diverse culture, great food," and maybe they'll see it more of as a vacation destination as opposed to a war torn country, but I think in time.

VALERIE: Are you involved in politics?

CANH: I used to be when I was in college. I was with the Vietnamese Student Association, I was chairman and then I became president. I was, but now I'm more involved with the line of work I'm in, I'm more involved with the Asian community. I try to get our community to understand that the media, newspapers, and the magazines tell us one thing, but it really is up to us to do more research and understand and look a little bit closer into the policies and see what is the root of those policies and see what makes you feel like a Democrat or a Republican. But the most important thing is to register to vote. Do your homework, find out which candidate you share ideas and ideologies with, and from there, vote. Because as citizens here in the United States that is one thing that you have to do, is vote. Get out and vote. So here, we try to register to as many in the community as possible and for them to understand that not all Vietnamese should be Republicans. You have to really do the research. Find out exactly which party you should feel comfortable with and shares your ideas. Not very, really political though.

VALERIE: You said you are a part of the Vietnamese Student Association, what was your part in that and do you think it really helped?

CANH: It did! Because when I got into college, I didn't know much about the Vietnamese culture in the sense that, so much as traditions, holidays, and I just felt that I needed to get back into touch with where I was born and my country. So I was with VSA for the time, for the years that I was there at Texas. We tried to promote Vietnamese culture and heritage. Basically so that the students like I or the people like I, who may have been born in Vietnam or not born in Vietnam, have an avenue or an association where they can go in and say, "Hey, where am I from? What are my holidays? What type of food did my people eat?," learn the language, kind of find some type of familiarity with other kids that share your same likeness or came from the same area or went through the same experiences you went through. It was fun to meet other kids that went through my journey, who were boat people and the story of how they escaped by boat, some went by land. Horror stories of people being raped, boats being pirated, stuff like that, and hearing their journey. It opens your eyes and understand that we're all here at this one place, at this University of Texas. We all took different journeys, but we're here now. It's kinda neat.

35:31

VALERIE: For your generation, you said that you met a lot of people that were boat people and stuff. Fast forward to now, to me, how do you think we (people my age) should reach out or how do you think we could learn more about our history?

CANH: Well, what you're doing now. I think as a college student or as any Vietnamese American kid that was born here, that really didn't see the war, didn't live through the war. I think you're parents and you yourself have a duty, have an obligation to just sit some one down that's older than you down and say, "Hey, tell me about Vietnam. I haven't been back. I don't know anything about Vietnam. Tell me. Tell me your journey. Tell me how you got here." I'm pretty sure they're gonna be really excited and happy to tell you because they themselves don't want you to lose that part of your history, your people's past. And so anytime anyone calls me or asks me, "Hey Chris, can you sit down and tell this person your journey or your side of what you went through?" I'm more than happy to do that because I want them to understand that that's maybe what their parents went through. Or someone that is the generation gap between them and their parent's went through because my fear also is a lot of the times, the kids that are born here in the 80's who has never experienced Vietnam will just think that it was just a war that brought my parents here and that's why I'm here. They should understand their journey and the only way you'll be more enriched and feel more proud of your culture is to understand the sacrifices those people had to make, or that your parents or grandparents or aunts uncles, any the journey that they took in order to be here so that maybe it feels you to be a better person and achieve your goals. Because that is what makes this country so great, is that we're a melting pot. Whether it be the Europeans, the Italians, the French or whoever, they came here because they had a war that forced them here. So they always remember those holidays or those dates and they keep it dear to them and I think the Vietnamese culture should do the same. I'm not the one to go out there and just scream it out to the younger generations, but anytime some one comes to ask me. I'll say you got a minute, let's sit down. I'll take you to lunch and we can talk about it and maybe you can share my story with some one and maybe you can touch them and they can understand.

VALERIE: Do you keep in touch with family or relatives in Vietnam?

CANH: I don't, but my brother's and sister do. My brother goes back a lot, my older brother, he goes back a lot and he has friends and acquaintances over there. I personally don't, most of all my family members are here in America, but I know my parents do. My mom goes back at least once or twice a year. Father tries to at least go once a year. We have employees that work for us that do travel back and forth a lot. And I do always ask them how's Vietnam doing and they always tell me, "Oh...it's growing, it's growing too fast," Coca Cola, Pepsi, even Kentucky Fried Chicken over there now and they tell me everything is commercialized. I say that that's good that our country is growing.

VALERIE: Have you gone back to Vietnam?

CANH: No, I haven't. I plan on going, but it's just the work that I've done here it's just so hard for me to take 2 to 4 weeks just to go there, but my wife and I are thinking sometime next year. We're gonna try to plan a trip where I can go for at least 2 to 4 weeks and just see where I was born, visit the countryside, see the changes, visit some of the memorial sites, and just understand where I came from. That'll be good closure for me too. That's the 5 years of my life that is just a memory.

VALERIE: Does your wife have memories of the war as well?

CANH: No, my wife is Korean, Italian, Irish. She was born on an army base, air force base in Korea. Her father is Italian Irish and her mother is Korean. So she just has Korean memories, not Vietnam memories. But that's what's great about this country because I when I bring her to Vietnam, I can tell her this is the street that I lived on, this is the house that I flew my kite, and this is where I used to go to the movies. I remember it had this tree where these leaves would fall and they looked like propellers, they would come down. I would share it with her and I would expose her to the Vietnamese culture. That's what great about this country, just around the corner, sitting next to you at the university, there is some one from another country that is here that can tell you wonderful things about their country. If you just ask. You know, if you just ask.

VALERIE: So I'm guessing you've never been to Korea either?

40:37

CANH: No, and that's what's great too. I can go to Korea and learn about Korea. She's from Seoul. So she'll be able to tell me something about Korea and that will make me a better person and enrich me, definitely.

VALERIE: Does your family keep an altar for your ancestors?

CANH: Yes, they do. I don't think I've ever been in an Asian home that doesn't have it. Yes we do and we offer food and burn incense. Certain holiday's mom cooks an elaborate array of entrees of food, traditional food and we do burn incense to show respect to our ancestors, yes.

VALERIE: In your opinion, what do you think will become of Vietnamese culture in the United States?

CANH: I think, like any culture here in the United States is that kids, Vietnamese descendents, they're gonna be smart enough where they can take both cultures and they're going to use it to the best that makes them better people. I think that it will make them better human beings, better citizens. If you can just take both cultures and just understand and know your place. I mean that just makes you that much further ahead. I think that if we would just continue to honor, practice the traditional holidays, family values, stuff that our parent's were brought up with. Hold that, but at the same time embrace the American holidays, its values and its cultures. That just makes you so much more better. I think that as Vietnamese Americans, I have a lot of hope for that next generation, the one that were born here because boy they get the best benefits of everything. Just physically, the Vietnamese kids when I was in college I was considered a big guy, I was 5'7" [chuckles] now I go back and at the, whenever I can, I go back to the University and I see these kids that are like 6 foot tall. They're benefiting everything this country has to offer. So that makes them that much more better, they're taller, they get all the benefits of education, they do things that I felt like we were limited to. Because something so simple as, when growing up my brother and I, we couldn't go to certain camps to do certain things because we had to stay home and help my parents with their grocery business because they didn't speak English very well. So we became translators and stuff; that forced us to grow up a little bit faster. But with the next generation, they get the benefits of everything that is given by this country. They have the resources, they have the internet, information is just a click a way. We didn't have that. You get the benefits in everything that this country has to offer. And that is going to make that next generation that much more advance.

VALERIE: But don't you think that with the new generation, that we're having things sort of handed to us...

CANH: I wouldn't say handed to you because I don't think it's handed to you, but I do think you have access and you have availabilities that we didn't because our parents didn't know about certain things. We didn't know that we could have done this or that because we had to basically, it was a trial and error growing up with our parents because they didn't live in this culture. They had to touch and feel and understand everything. We succeeded by the mistakes we made. Whereas you guys, have the availabilities because your parents went through this and you guys have availability and access to a whole ray of things that we didn't. So that's just going to make you so much more advanced than us. Even something so simple as sports, in growing up in my culture, my parents said, "No, no, you can't play football. You're a small little Vietnamese guy, they're gonna break your arm. They're gonna kill you," but that's not the case now. Nowadays it's, "Football is great, it's one of the sports that you can play. It's ok. You're not going to get hurt." So you have the availability, you have so much more to choose from because you're parents have opened up their minds to accepting this country and the greatness of everything that it has to offer. Something as simple as football or just the vacations you get to take and stuff because I look at what my parents were able to offer us, as opposed to what my sister and her husband are able to offer their kids. It's just so much more and they have choices and are able to do so much more things that I just think its gonna broaden their horizon. They don't have that ceiling that we had and they shouldn't. Not in this country.

45:47

VALERIE: Are they any other memories you would like to share or any last comments?

CANH: A few years ago, I went back to UT and I spoke to them about success and what it means and how a lot of times we live in this country and take for granted the things that we have. A lot of the times we get stressed out with just the daily hustle, bustle, grind and that stress of work and achieving and especially with Vietnamese Americans. Like your parents want you to be this, this, and that. It's just all about titles and your doctors this, or MD that, or engineers, doctors, lawyers, whatever, but at the end of the day it's what makes you happy. And I've always told in the years I went back to the students, I said my fondest memories are thinking back and remembering my time at the refugee camps. My brother and I, when the American GI's used to throw loaves of bread at us; I remember he and I caught our first loaf of bread and we held onto it and someone took it from us. So we were able to find another loaf of bread and we caught that loaf of bread. We threw it down and we sat on it and hugged each other as if our life depended on it. That was the only food we had and I still think back to that day and I say, "You know, whatever life throws at you now, or whatever problems or crisis you think you have, think back. Think back That loaf of bread was all you needed. So don't stress out now, there's really nothing now you should be stressed out about. As long as you have you're health. All you needed was something to eat, you were happy. So my brother and I always think back, and I know I always think back and say, "You know, no matter what type of crisis I deal with in my work, in my personal life, and what life throws at me now, as long as I have my health and something to eat. I'm ahead of the game. I'm so ahead of the game." Back then all we cared for was just that piece of bread. Didn't care for anything else because that was the only food we had. So it kind of puts things in perspective and it fuels you. That's why I'm thinking that kids in your culture, your generation should understand that,

ya'll don't have that to drive you. We do. So I don't sweat the little stuff. Complaints here or there, little things doesn't bother me. It'll all get worked out, we all just need to be a little bit nicer to each other, patient, and everything will work out fine. So I draw from that experience, the loaf of bread. I always it my, "Loaf of bread," story. That's probably the one thing I remember in my escape from Vietnam.

48:40

Second clip

00:03

CANH: Maybe you'll share this story with your friends, but it's really funny. When we were in the refugee camp, I still remember there was day when my dad and mom told me, "Ok. There is going to be a certain amount of time, they give you like, 5 minutes." I remember there was a big, gated area and there was just a bunch of clothes and shoes and just like clothing. They give you 5 minutes and you can run in and grab whatever it is that you can grab and you run out. That was your clothes at the refugee camp. I still remember my father and I and my older brother, we all ran in and I was looking. My feet were so hot, I didn't have any shoes and the pavement was really, really hot. So I wanted, that morning to find myself a pair of flip flops. I remember running up to that table and just mounds of clothes. My father was just grabbing clothes, my brother was grabbing clothes, and I was just trying to find a pair of shoes! I was able to pull a flip flop and I threw it down and I put it on and I was like, "Perfect! It fits!" So I was trying to find the other flip flop and I remember the clock was ticking we had to go and they rushed us out. So we ran out, I never found that other pair of flip flop, but I had one flip flop. I would stand and I would walk basically with that one flip flop. I would walk with it and every time I had to stop somewhere and it got really hot, I would put my right foot on [thud] top of my left foot so that it wouldn't touch the pavement. One flip flop. So I still remember to this day, in the refugee camps, the loaf of bread we sat on so that no one would steal it and that one flip flop. So anytime, I have more than a loaf of bread and a flip flop; I'm doing pretty good. Still remember my flip flop.

VALERIE: Do you still have it?

CANH: No, I don't. No, I don't. I wish I did. But I still remember that one flip flop and it baffles me, maybe there was some other kid, 3 hours before me that found the other flip flop and he's walking around with one flip flop too. What if he and I ran into each other or something, "Hey, you have the other one?" We probably would do time share or something. Well, that was my funny story.

02:07

Valerie Tran

AAS 300

Linda Ho Peche

October 27, 2008

### **Excerpts**

Subject: American Soldiers

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Transcript \_\_\_\_\_

09:54

CANH: Yes! We were first rescued. I have to go back to the first time that I was able to see American soldiers was we were drifting on a boat for 25 days, no food and water

whatever we had my mom had packed along for that journey or escape. After 25 days we saw an American ship cross by us and they weren't able to help us. So they threw loaves of bread across. So they were just throwing loaves of bread across to our boat and we would catch it. I can see that it was American soldiers throwing bread to us. That was my first encounter so I thought, "Wow, these wonderful people are helping us, giving us food." Then when we got on to the refugee camps, first it was Guam and then Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. We had interactions with the American soldiers. They were really nice and very accepting of us. My first memory of it is, I still remember it was an American G.I. that gave me a can of peanut butter, you can tell now that it was government issued because it was kind of in a small little round can. You had to open it up with a small handheld can opener. I remember tasting peanut butter for the first time and it was wonderful. He showed me how to eat it with a chocolate bar, that's was pretty much my fond memory of someone introducing me to my first Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. [laugh] Self made.

Subject: Experience on the boat

Name                      Transcript

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11:42

CANH: Yeah, it was scary. At 5 years old, you see people dying in front of you, you see people falling into the ocean, you see it was war. You don't know at 5 years old, you don't understand why your parent's took you from just a happy place where everything was fine. They take you into this boat and this place where you're cramped. You're sleeping with hundreds and thousands of people you don't know. There's no food, there's no, nothing, bare necessities you don't have and you're wondering, "Where are you going? This is not a trip this is not a vacation. What do you mean? Why is every one crying?" I remember screaming at my parents, "Why don't we go home? Why did we go and suffer like this? Let's just go home. Turn around. Let's go home. Why did you do this to us?" At 5 years old, you're just confused. You don't know why you're leaving, you don't know what death is, but then you see it. So all you want to do is turn around and go back. It made no sense to you. So when you got on to the islands and the refugee camps. Better experiences, there was food, water, and you interact with people you don't normally interact with and so you forgot about the hardship, but it was pretty tough at that time, yeah.

3. Subject: Vietnam, the country

Name                      Transcript

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30:53

CANH: Sure, sure, I think time. I mean in time, it heals all wounds. I think that a lot of times, it's just the matter of just like any other country, in order for you to respect it or in order for you to embrace it, to see a different light of it. You're going to actually have to pay it a visit or be forced to, or somehow have an interest and go seek it out. Seek its history. There's much, much more history to Vietnam than the Vietnam conflict. Then just from the 60's to mid-70's. That's the thing, that is in order for you to understand a

country where it is now, you have to go back to it's past and understand the journey. I think, yes, one day, but at the same time I think that we shouldn't lose sight, that there was an experience when the United States was there and what happened there because that is a part of Vietnam history. But one day, I think you're right, they'll think back, "Oh, Vietnam is this beautiful country that has beautiful beaches and diverse culture, great food," and maybe they'll see it more of as a vacation destination as opposed to a war torn country, but I think in time.

#### 4. Subject: Special Memory

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Transcript \_\_\_\_\_

45:52

CANH: A few years ago, I went back to UT and I spoke to them about success and what it means and how a lot of times we live in this country and take for granted the things that we have. A lot of the times we get stressed out with just the daily hustle, bustle, grind and that stress of work and achieving and especially with Vietnamese Americans. Like your parents want you to be this, this, and that. It's just all about titles and your doctors this, or MD that, or engineers, doctors, lawyers, whatever, but at the end of the day it's what makes you happy. And I've always told in the years I went back to the students, I said my fondest memories are thinking back and remembering my time at the refugee camps. My brother and I, when the American GI's used to throw loaves of bread at us; I remember he and I caught our first loaf of bread and we held onto it and someone took it from us. So we were able to find another loaf of bread and we caught that loaf of bread. We threw it down and we sat on it and hugged each other as if our life depended on it. That was the only food we had and I still think back to that day and I say, "You know, whatever life throws at you now, or whatever problems or crisis you think you have, think back. Think back That loaf of bread was all you needed. So don't stress out now, there's really nothing now you should be stressed out about. As long as you have you're health. All you needed was something to eat, you were happy. So my brother and I always think back, and I know I always think back and say, "You know, no matter what type of crisis I deal with in my work, in my personal life, and what life throws at me now, as long as I have my health and something to eat. I'm ahead of the game. I'm so ahead of the game." Back then all we cared for was just that piece of bread. Didn't care for anything else because that was the only food we had. So it kind of puts things in perspective and it fuels you. That's why I'm thinking that kids in your culture, your generation should understand that, ya'll don't have that to drive you. We do. So I don't sweat the little stuff. Complaints here or there, little things doesn't bother me. It'll all get worked out, we all just need to be a little bit nicer to each other, patient, and everything will work out fine. So I draw from that experience, the loaf of bread. I always tell my, "Loaf of bread," story. That's probably the one thing I remember in my escape from Vietnam.

#### 5. Subject: Refugee Camp

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Transcript \_\_\_\_\_

00:02 Second Clip

CANH: Maybe you'll share this story with your friends, but it's really funny. When we were in the refugee camp, I still remember there was day when my dad and mom told me, "Ok. There is going to be a certain amount of time, they give you like, 5 minutes." I remember there was a big, gated area and there was just a bunch of clothes and shoes and just like clothing. They give you 5 minutes and you can run in and grab whatever it is that you can grab and you run out. That was your clothes at the refugee camp. I still remember my father and I and my older brother, we all ran in and I was looking. My feet were so hot, I didn't have any shoes and the pavement was really, really hot. So I wanted, that morning to find myself a pair of flip flops. I remember running up to that table and just mounds of clothes. My father was just grabbing clothes, my brother was grabbing clothes, and I was just trying to find a pair of shoes! I was able to pull a flip flop and I threw it down and I put it on and I was like, "Perfect! It fits!" So I was trying to find the other flip flop and I remember the clock was ticking we had to go and they rushed us out. So we ran out, I never found that other pair of flip flop, but I had one flip flop. I would stand and I would walk basically with that one flip flop. I would walk with it and every time I had to stop somewhere and it got really hot, I would put my right foot on [thud] top of my left foot so that it wouldn't touch the pavement. One flip flop. So I still remember to this day, in the refugee camps, the loaf of bread we sat on so that no one would steal it and that one flip flop. So anytime, I have more than a loaf of bread and a flip flop; I'm doing pretty good. Still remember my flip flop.

## Summary

Yeah, it was scary. At five years old, you see people dying in front of you, you see people falling into the ocean; you see it was war. You don't know at five years old, you don't understand why your parent's took you from just a happy place where everything was fine. They take you into this boat and this place where you're cramped. You're sleeping with hundreds and thousands of people you don't know. There's no food, there's no, nothing, bare necessities you don't have and you're wondering, "Where are you going? This is not a trip, this is not a vacation. What do you mean? Why is everyone crying?" I remember screaming at my parents, "Why don't we go home? Why did we go and suffer like this? Let's just go home. Turn around. Let's go home. Why did you do this to us?" At five years old, you're just confused. You don't know why you're leaving, you don't know what death is, but then you see it. So all you want to do is turn around and go back. It made no sense to you.

Canh is retelling his experience fleeing Vietnam with his family on a boat after April 30<sup>th</sup>. I left this excerpt the way it is because I feel as though it portrays the message that the interviewee, Canh Tran, wants to convey. There were many great stories/memories that he shares, but the line, "You don't know why you're leaving, you don't know what death is, but then you see it," made me want everyone to read this particular passage.