

Oral History of Vietnamese Refugees 1975-1980

Interview with Mrs. Nguyen Thi Kim Duc by Jaclyn Thao Ly, 8/21/02

Interviewer: My name is Jaclyn Thao Ly. Today is August 21, 2002 at 9:36 a.m. I am interviewing Mrs. Nguyen Thi Kim Duc at her residence # 12 Rue Chagall, Somerset, New Jersey.

To begin the interview, Mrs. Kim Duc, may I ask you to talk a little bit about yourself and your life in Vietnam before 1975?

Interviewee: My name is Nguyen Thi Kim Duc. I was born in Hanoi in North Vietnam. When I was four months old, my parents got transferred on a job to South Vietnam. So we were those that came to the South before the wave of refugees/immigrants escaping to the South in 1954. My parents settled in Dalat, Vietnam. Dalat is a beautiful and romantic city, very famous in South Vietnam. I was fortunate to grow up and live in Dalat for the first 25 years of my life. I went to school from kindergarten to high school completion in Dalat until April 30, 1975, when the war was ended, and South Vietnam fell into the hands of the Vietnamese communists. I eventually followed the wave of people escaping the communist regime by boat.

During the 25 years of my life in Dalat, I grew up and finished high school with the baccalaureate part II degree (translator's note: the baccalaureate degree is the high school completion certificate which is obtained through a highly selective national final exam at the end of the senior year). I went to college for one year then I had to drop out to become an elementary school teacher at the age of 21 to help my family since my father went into retirement. He was a county education chief. After the communist government came, I became principal of an elementary school called Nhat Thong Elementary School in Dalat. I also taught the 4th and 5th grades. In 1977, I escaped by boat.

Interviewer: As you mentioned, you were a teacher for one year at the age of 21, and only one year after, at the age of 22, you became the school principal. Can you explain the reasons of your appointment as a principal at such a young age?

Interviewee: The main reason was that I was single and that most of the school staff, despite their seniority, had husbands who served as officers in the South Vietnamese Army and who were jailed in the re-education camps. The communist cadres didn't trust people who were connected to former officers of the old Republic of South Vietnam. They would rather trust single people who had no such connection. Furthermore, I was the only teacher who had a higher level of education. In those days, the older elementary teachers only finished junior high school and got trained for two more years in the School of Pedagogy to be certified as elementary teachers. By comparison, I had finished with the baccalaureate, and some college, even if I had to drop out of college to go to work to help my family. The communist cadres preferred to make use of young people with good backgrounds without connection to members of the former regime. Therefore, they trusted me and appointed me to be principal.

Interviewer: Having been appointed as a school principal, why did you think of leaving Vietnam?

Interviewee: Well, I often thought of leaving Vietnam because I don't like communists. Ever since I was a small child, my parents usually shared with me their own experiences living with the communists in North Vietnam, and they taught me about the hardship of life under communism. Communists are very ... I must say .. they lack honesty or sincerity, they often distort the truth. My parents told us that to live with communists, one had to accept poverty, oppression, and one couldn't express one's thoughts or opinions, and one must comply absolutely with what the cadres instructed. All liberties, freedom of thought, of speech, of expression, and press freedom, as well as freedom in movement are restrained. Therefore, I disliked communism since I was very young. When the communist government took over South Vietnam, I was really fearful, and in my mind, I always nurtured the idea of escaping Vietnam by crossing the sea by boat. To escape from Vietnam doesn't mean to escape (renounce) my fatherland, but to escape from the communist regime. It didn't mean I renounce my homeland. I love my homeland, but I cannot accept communists, and communist thinking, because the words or deeds of the communists don't go hand in hand. That was the main reason for my desire to leave Vietnam.

Interviewer: Besides these reasons, what kind of experiences did you have in your life with the communist regime, and why did your family cause you to hate communists and the communist regime?

Interviewee: My experiences are a combination of my experience living with communists and my own parent's experience transmitted to me. When I was small, my parents lived with the communists and they understood that the communists were liars and authoritarians. In addition, after July, or rather after 1954 when the North fell under the communists, there was a movement of tortured and forced admission of crimes against the people done in public (dau to), as well as imprisonment of intellectuals, and concentration camp for the people who were considered rich. In my family, many members of my flesh and blood, such as my uncle, and my cousins who were sons of this uncle became victims of the communists. My uncle was a highly educated person with a doctorate degree from London and Paris. He returned to Vietnam with the belief that after the victory against the French in Dien Bien Phu, Vietnamese people would have the freedom to reconstruct the homeland for unification. But that was the communist deceptive front. They retained these patriots who wanted to work for the homeland, and imprisoned them, because these were intellectuals who could exercise their thinking and could refuse to comply with the communist ruthless policy. The communists loved those who were uneducated and at the bottom of society, such as the wretched peasant and working class who could be easily manipulated. Those were people who dutifully followed the order to kill, a ruthless group of people who were without hearts. People who were with some education and the intellectuals could exercise their thinking, have morality and conscience, they would not blindly follow the communist order. The communists were really ruthless and cruel. These were my parents' experiences. My own experience was that when I was 22 years old, the communists took over South Vietnam; I saw clearly that their words were far from their deeds. The communist cadres were low in intellect and education, they always spy on people; I could say that they

robbed people of their hard-earned properties and possessions. Anybody who was well-to-do was condemned. Anybody who had a high degree with broad knowledge was considered guilty because the communist knew that these were people who would not be convinced of their propaganda, and would not comply with their order. Another experience that makes me loath the communists was that they bad mouthed the previous regime, and refused to accept the responsibilities of their bad deeds. For example, in the Tet Offensive of 1968, the communists invaded Hue, and buried alive a large number of people in a common grave. When they took over the South, they falsely claimed that the American CIA or the South Vietnamese army committed that crime. They refused to acknowledge that they themselves committed that crime. They encouraged children to spy on their parents; they exerted extremely tight control over people, kept the citizens hungry to easily curtail all liberties. People living under communism absolutely had no liberty, including freedom of speech.

Interviewer: Well, I would like to ask you to elaborate on the reasons of your deep hatred against the communists, whether it's strictly personal or familial?

Interviewee: Another reason for my deep hatred of the communists was that the war between the North and the South was caused by communism, causing brothers to kill each other. I have family members living in the North, and my family had to immigrate to live in the south, since after 1954, the South still was free under the Republic of Vietnam. With the 17th parallel and the Ben Hai River that divided the North and the South under the Geneva Agreement, the communists didn't keep to the agreement to stay North. Instead they plotted to invade the south, planting undercover agents in the South to sabotage the South. The Southern government had to strengthen its army to destroy the communist ruse and sabotage. I had an only older brother, my mother's only son, who was drafted and was graduated as a second lieutenant from the Military Academy in Thu Duc at the age of 20, not quite 20. Only a year later, when he was promotedwhen he died in battle he was a first lieutenant in the Special Forces. He died barely 21 years old, too young, that was the deepest tragedy for my family. I lost the only brother of my flesh and blood. In addition, I lost several cousins in the North who were sons of my uncle: some died of disease, some were drafted, forced to join the army without any way to avoid it. One of my drafted cousins died in the South without a trace of his body, nobody knew where he died. You see, all these experiences have created a deep hatred of the communists in my heart. My parents.... Well, my parents spent decades of their lives working hard to build their estate, but all have been destroyed by the war, time and again. All their savings were lost in the war and taken by the communists. Therefore, life with the communists is without a future, and that was a reason for me to decide to leave Vietnam.

Interviewer: Could you describe your departure from Vietnam, your boat escape: whom you went with, by land or sea, and other details you feel like sharing with me?

Interviewee: My boat escape was lengthy and very adventurous. After two years living with the communists, I always thought about escaping over the sea, but I didn't know how to begin. I bumped into my former husband who was a teacher at a high school for

boys in Dalat. He was not allowed to continue teaching after the communists came. He made friends with the fishermen to learn about the sea routes. He was fortunate to meet a group of people who had some money. They were formerly college students at the University of Dalat who were closely connected with people who used to serve in the former regime as province chiefs, soldiers, and officers. This group needed to... wished to escape by boat. They had tried twice already, by land, but a number was discovered and arrested and jailed, some others were killed, others were lucky to be released by the communist authorities because their families managed to bribe the communists. This time, they planned to escape, not by land, but by sea. My former husband learned the sea routes with the local fishermen, other people in his group used money to buy a boat, motor oil and necessary provisions for the trip by sea. They planned to start the trip in March, because according to folk wisdom "March is a month that the sea is good for even old folks" which means that the sea will be calm. Our means was very limited and we could buy only a small fishing boat. Besides, if we owned a large boat, it would attract the attention of the communist police, and we would be arrested. So.. we got a small boat and we had to repair it. It was a small boat that was sunk in the bay of Dai, brought ashore, fixed, and then we secretly brought motor fuel and rice to store on the boat, all with the help of the fishermen, otherwise we could be discovered, arrested and put to jail. We spent half a year to prepare for the escape. After everything was ready, my former husband came to Dalat to ask to marry me. Ten days after the wedding, we made the escape by sea. As soon as we left bay Dai, the boat was grounded, we thought we would be arrested, but luckily, the tide turned and the boat could continue. After one day and one night, a storm came. Since everybody on the boat had no maritime experience, we immediately threw the anchor to stop the boat. It was a mistake that could cause the boat to capsize. We waited for the storm to blow over. When it was over, our anchor rope was broken, and the boat floated for 27 days. On the boat, there was little water, and some raw rice, which eventually became molded due to the humidity from the seawater. The young men, with their previous experience of escaping as well as in coping in the communist jail, were able to chew the raw rice to keep their strength. Myself, I couldn't do that, so I didn't eat anything. Gradually I was so weakened, I couldn't sit straight. In the meantime, everybody had to take turns to bail out water in the little fishing boat. The boat was really a small fishing boat good for the river, equipped with one motor, which by now was also dead. The boat floated on its own from the bay Binh Dai into international waters. A month passed... during the day we packed like sardines on the deck, at night we were soaked in water, because with the storms, the waves, some as high as a 20-30 story building, beat down on our boat. We were always soaked day and night during that period. Worse, the oil tank was broken; the water became mixed with oil and gave several people a severe rash. Then hunger. There were 15 adults and one 2-year-old child. Luckily, the child survived because his father chewed raw rice to feed him. We came across 30 big ships, signaled for help, but none rescued us. Some stopped to say hello, then left. On the 27th day, all of us were totally exhausted. After encountering so many storms, we noticed that the winds were changing, which meant a storm might be arriving. We spotted a huge ship, were excited about it, but we didn't think it would help us. But this ship came straight for us. Later the assistant captain told us that he saw our bed sheet with the words SOS – save our souls—hung as a flag on our little fishing boat. It was my then husband who hung that flag, and it helped save the lives of 16 people on

the fishing boat. The ship was Korean, with the capacity of 60 tons. It came towards our boat. It was a World War II ship going from Korea to Indonesia to buy wood logs. The captain of this ship saw our SOS flag, and he directed the ship to circle us. Based on our previous experiences with other ships, we sent the women and the child on the deck, and all the men below deck. The ship crew thought we just ran short of supplies, so they dropped two cans of oil, a case of apples, and two loaves of bread. We tried to explain our situation, but we couldn't speak English. The man who was the father of the two-year old, afraid that his son would die, took the chance to put on a life jacket and climbed the ship ladder onto the ship. He then fell on his knee to beg the ship captain to save us. The captain wasn't fluent in English either, since he was Korean. He refused to bring us aboard, but when he understood that our little boat was already filled with water, and without his rescue, we would all perish, he decided to bring us aboard with the understanding that he would drop us off on any island nearby. We happily agreed as long as we were saved. They sent down a rope ladder to us to climb up. All of us were extremely weak, but we gathered all the energy we could to climb up. I myself crawled on both my hands and knees to get up. The captain and his assistant, with their gloved hands, came to the end of the ladder to pick us up. Two persons fell into the sea, drifted toward the ship propeller. Fortunately, the engine had stopped; otherwise the propeller blade could have decapitated them. My then husband threw two buoys down for them to hang on. After picking up 14 people, they went to look for these two guys. It started to rain and get dark. Fortunately, these two guys were found and brought up to the deck. Thank God, all of us survived. We sailed on this big ship for 10 days. When it arrived in Indonesia, we were accepted by the American Embassy to land in Indonesia since the Korean government didn't want to take in refugees in Korea.

Interviewer: Could you explain how you got to New Jersey?

Interviewee: We were accepted into a refugee camp in Indonesia. We stayed there for five and a half months. The United Nations' High Commission for Refugees provided assistance. We were well treated, had enough food. Although everything was relatively O.K., when we heard of the conditions of refugees living in Thailand or Malaysia, we knew that we were quite fortunate to be in this camp. Here, we had enough food, received second hand clothing, and met with a Canadian delegation, that was both U.S. and Canadian authorities that interviewed us for resettlement opportunities. A number of people volunteered for the resettlement. In this camp there were about 60 people, a rather small number, among which some volunteered to go to Canada. Our group all requested to go the U.S. The reason I was allowed to resettle in the U.S. was because I had a cousin living in Morristown, N.J. He contacted a parish priest in Morristown to sponsor me into Morristown, N.J. We settled in Morristown for 5 years, both working and going to school. I have lived in New Jersey since then from 1978, yes, January 1978 to date, a total of 25 years.

Interviewer: Did anybody help you at the beginning of your stay in New Jersey?

Interviewee: At the beginning of our resettlement, we (me and my then husband) lived with my cousin. We did not receive any help from any social services organizations. We

didn't go on welfare or receive food stamps or Medicaid. We heard from other people that when the resettlement team interviewed refugees, they gave some information about assistance, but we were not knowledgeable, so we didn't know anything about assistance. In Morristown, the number of Vietnamese refugees receiving welfare or social assistance was very small. We were told that receiving welfare was not a proud behavior for refugees to do. They gave us guidance in finding work. After two weeks of rest, we got a job. Despite our lack of English proficiency, without a driver's license, we relied on people who had been here before, and worked in manual labor such as cleaning offices at nights and working in hotels. We tried to become self-sufficient. After 5 months staying with my cousin, we moved to Dover where we were enrolled in the CETA program for English and job training for refugees in order to work for the development of the U.S. We got paid two dollars an hour in the program. We tried to live on that sum. In Dover, it was lonely at first. Luckily, we met a few other Vietnamese with whom we shared an old house, about probably 80-90 years old. We occupied a small room on the third floor, without heating or air-conditioning. In the winter, the temperature was like outdoors, in the summer it was terribly hot. We lived like that to save on the rent. After the CETA program was completed, we had to become self-sufficient by working and going to school. I was lucky to be accepted to the community college. We met a Vietnamese priest whose name was Father Nguyen Van Tien. He referred us to work for a parish in Morristown. In this parish, we cleaned the high school for girls and the church. We mowed the lawn and did other odd jobs. The parish gave us a small house and allowed us to go to the community college full time. We were the servants for the parish and the school for two years. After two years, we graduated from Morris County College, with honors. A big company called Western Electric, the "grandfather" of AT&T, hired us. I worked for this company through many changes into the Bell System, a total of 21 years. The course of working and going to school at the same time was real hardship. I didn't have a car. In the winter I walked to work, sometimes I took the bus. It was a 45-minute walk from the bus stop to the parish to work. When it snowed, I walked in the deep snow to work. Later, I saved enough money to buy a cheap car to go to work and school. After I started working for Western Electric, we continued to do cleaning for the parish to save more money. After one year at Western Electric, plus our continuing employment with the parish, that is a total of 5 years in the U.S., we managed to build a new house in Piscataway. At the time of construction, the house cost 110 thousand, by the time we sold it; we had a profit of 90 thousand. Up to the present time, I have built 5 houses on American soil.

Interviewer: As you said, after five years in the U.S. you were able to have a house built in Piscataway, that was after you finished the two-year program at the community college, and got a job with the company. Your life seemed to be settled. What do you think of the U.S. as the land of opportunity?

Interviewee: True, I think the U.S. is the land of opportunity, and we took the opportunity to advance. I think our homeland, Vietnam, has many talents and many intelligent people, but there has been no opportunity due to the war, and social condition. I know I had many friends, who were very smart, but due to their family's poverty, they had to ... just like me ... abandon their schooling to work to support their families,

thereby they lost the chance for a higher education. When I managed to arrive in the U.S., happy that clearly we were out from under the communist yoke, and that we could live and breathe in freedom, I tried not to abuse my liberty by just having fun, or wasting my time and youth. Instead I went back to school. Formerly, I was just an elementary school teacher, and I majored in literature, languages and philosophy in high school. My math was very weak, however, once I was here, due to the language barrier, I had to switch to a new field of study, computer science. I am glad I chose the right field, because in my career of 20, no 21, years with the company and its system, my salary as a computer specialist was not bad compared to those in other jobs. I came here with empty hands, went back to study English and enrolled in college. My study, well.. it was a challenge due to my age and my insufficient English proficiency. I used the dictionary heavily to decipher the meaning of the textbooks. It was difficult, but with patience and persistence, I eventually graduated with honors. My professors at the college all said that they were proud of us, particularly "the foreign students", because we worked hard, attended classes regularly, submitted our homework on time. I think Vietnamese students there were a source of pride for the Vietnamese community because they studied seriously, received high grades, and were offered jobs by big reputable companies. For those who were younger than me, they went ahead for a higher degree. After I graduated and started working for the company, I was allowed to take courses paid by the company to get a four-year degree. While I wanted to do like the younger students to pursue a Master's degree, due to my family situation and my health, despite my admission to the Stevens Institute of Technology's graduate program, I had to quit after one course. So, my dream of a graduate degree in computer sciences was not realized. However, by comparison, if I had stayed in Vietnam, I would not have been able to get a college education, and could not have reached the level I am today. For me, the U.S. is indeed the land of opportunity. Anybody can realize his/her goal with persistence. The important thing is in order to become successful, one has to be able to resist temptations, uh. debauchery and cheap pleasure that sidetrack, and to be focused on the straight road.

Interviewer: I was quite impressed by your life story: You came to the U.S., managed to be self-sufficient, you succeeded in building several houses, you made good use of the opportunity offered by the American society, you overcome many difficulties, got a job with a big company, and you life can be considered settled in a successful way. Could you elaborate on your personal life? From the material point of view, you are doing quite well, what about your emotional and spiritual life?

Interviewee: Let me talk a little more about my personal life. In the struggle to become self-sufficient without having to depend on anybody, I think I managed to be relatively successful. In my personal/emotional life, in the daily life in the family, things were different. I did not have the good fortune of family happiness. Remember at the beginning of our talk about my planned escape by sea from Vietnam, I mentioned my "former" husband. I married him with the objective of planning to escape, added to my youth and lack of knowledge about the "back side" of life, I tended to idealize everything. When I came face to face with reality, things were different. I was particularly romantic and idealistic, so I suffered a lot with a reality check, and my romantic dream was shattered. Therefore, I don't havewell, .it could be said that I

live for others, helping my relatives, because I love my family members, as well as helping poor people in Vietnam. In my heart, I feel that if I had some omnipotent power, I would help all the Vietnamese people to be well-clothed, well-fed and happy, so that all the children will have the chance to receive an education, without suffering or ill health. That was my heart's wish. The reality of my life was quite far from my idea. So when I got married, the gap between our ages was too big, our way of thinking was too different, so I was not having a happy married life. For fifteen years, I tried to maintain the Vietnamese tradition of not accepting divorce. I endured a lot, but my endurance reached a limit. I couldn't change anybody with it. As a old saying goes "the course of the river can be changed, a mountain can be removed, but a man's character cannot be changed unless that person really wants to change." After 15 years, I became conscious of this truth, and I realized that if I killed myself with a poison potion, I would not be around to help my family in Vietnam, so I had to gather my courage to walk out. At least, I could still work, in any job, and I could continue as the source of hope for my family in Vietnam. That was the reason for my life, and my sacrifice and efforts have paid off. Today, I have been reunited with my family after 18 years of separation.

Interviewer: You have gone through a lot and have managed to establish yourself from nothing. Could you explain what marked your success?

Interviewee: I would not want to be arrogant to say that I am successful. I could say that I tried my best to reach the goals I have, step by step. I was aware that as Vietnamese refugees, the young people have more opportunities. They have their parents to help them with their education. For people like me, coming here at an older age, we have to earn our livelihood while trying to go to school hoping to have a better future for ourselves and for our children later. We encountered a lot of difficulties. The first challenge was the language barrier. In Vietnam in high school, I learned written English. Over here, the aural and oral comprehension was very difficult. Americans speak English differently than our Vietnamese teachers. My verbal communication was almost unintelligible to American speakers. The second challenge was the transportation problem. I didn't know how to drive; it took some time to learn how to drive, and some time to save up to buy a car for transportation purpose. When I reached the first goal of completing my studies and obtaining a job, I was interviewed by TV 13, because I was considered a success story, or if not success, an example of persistence. As I mentioned, TV 13 interviewed me because they considered me an exemplary refugee, who came with nothing, without the English language proficiency, without knowledge of the American society, yet I succeeded in working and in becoming a tax payer like all the good citizens. They asked me to talk about my life in the refugee camp and how we got to New Jersey, just the story I told you earlier. Father Martin Brian, parish priest of Morristown, sponsored us. We shared housing with relatives for a while, then we moved on our own. We worked while going to school, and after two year working as custodians for the parish, I got my associate degree in computer science. Subsequently, I got a job with the big company. By the time of the interview, I was pursuing my bachelor's degree in computer science.

Interviewer: Let me briefly summarize your life story: you were an elementary school teacher, you escaped to the U.S, you were not proficient in the English language, you

overcame many difficulties, and you became a computer specialist. You have been successful in your career, and you have a cheerful attitude about your personal life. Have you ever thought of returning to Vietnam to live like a Vietnamese?

Interviewee: To return to Vietnam is a dream of all Vietnamese refugees. Refugees left Vietnam not because they didn't love Vietnam, but because of their ideology, of their belief that communism was not acceptable, so they went into exile. The U.S. is where the exiles came to re-build their lives. These people are not just Vietnamese, they are Chinese, Polish, Korean, from countries that were turned red by communism. These people hate communism, do not accept communist ideology, and they escape to the U.S. The souls of the expatriates or the people in exiles always belong to the motherland, always look to the motherland. I am one of those. I miss Vietnam and think of it every moment of my life; I spend very minute of my wakefulness to think about the dream of the old days when I was young. I would love to come back to live in the same house where I lived in my youth before I was ten years old. I dream of changes in the political situation so that Vietnam will no longer be communist. I am sure if that happened, all the Vietnamese refugees in exile would return to the motherland to enjoy the flavor of the atmosphere of the homeland. Can you imagine? . . . I work all year round, I have not much time to think too much, but on the new year's eve of the lunar new year (Tet), all Vietnamese feel the sadness and humiliation of living in exile in a foreign country, without being able to enjoy the flavor of Tet in the homeland. This is the time when I miss Vietnam desperately. Secondly, I could never imagine that one day my bones will be buried in a foreign land where I was not born, where "my birth umbilical cord" to say it in the Vietnamese way, was not cut and buried, and where I didn't spend my growing up years. So the return to live in Vietnam continues to be a dream of many Vietnamese refugees, and of my own.

Interviewer: You like to go back to Vietnam, and living in the U.S. you still retain Vietnamese customs and tradition. If in New Jersey there was a Vietnamese community for you to join in, would you feel like a Vietnamese – American, or do you still feel like you are Vietnamese in a community living in America?

Interviewee: Absolutely, whether it's in New Jersey or California, or wherever, Vietnamese people usually ally and unite with each other to find again the sense of homeland fraternity. With the same language, same culture, it is easier to communicate than with people outside. We interact with other "foreigners" for courtesy and for our livelihood. Older people of my generation, we prefer to hang out with our compatriots, rather than socializing with other foreigners, or local people. The reason we like to gather is to find some comfort, and to allow our children an opportunity to get to know their roots, to learn about the customs and culture of Vietnam, so that they will not forget their roots. Certainly I like to participate in the activities of the Vietnamese community in New Jersey or anywhere else. Even if we succeeded in establishing our own associations or organizations, they are still on American soil, and the American soil is not the land of the Vietnamese.

Interviewer: Do you feel that you are an American citizen or an American of Vietnamese origin?

Interviewee: Legally, I hold American citizenship. It is needed for my job, my livelihood. On national security level, the government trusts people with citizenship, because they have gone through an I.D check, and they always try to be good citizens. I work, I pay taxes, and I obey American laws. In short, I try to be a good citizen, but I never consider myself American. Even if I became a billionaire in America, or if I got appointed to a big position in the American Congress, I would never forget that I am Vietnamese, that my skin is yellow, my hair and my eyes black, my origin is from the descendant of the Dragon and the Fairy (in Vietnamese mythology). I am proud to be Vietnamese, I am not proud to be American. I am a good American citizen on the American soil, but I am not American.

Interviewer: I can understand your feeling. In the old days, you were a teacher in Vietnam, totally imbued in the tradition and culture of the Vietnamese people. Could you tell me what you see as the difference between the Vietnamese and U.S. cultures?

Interviewee: The Vietnamese culture is Asian. It has existed for four thousand years, as our elders have been proud of our four-thousand-year-old culture and civilization. The Vietnamese became a nation a long time ago. The U.S. culture is based on a mechanical/technological civilization; everything is based on pragmatism, on scientific proof. It is admirable that the American technological civilization has moved forward very fast, the U.S. is number one in sciences and medicine. I myself have benefited from American advances in medicine to be cured from a critical illness. I admire their technical skills to send a man to the moon. Absolutely admirable, I think. However, I would never forget the Vietnamese culture, I am proud of it. It is a traditional old culture based on Confucius teachings, and high morality. It teaches people the arts of living, the way of living a moral life, a philosophy of life. To compare, between the two cultures, one is materialistic, and the other spiritual. The American culture is materialistic, and the Vietnamese culture is spiritual where people live more for feeling/sentiment, for the inner life, for ideas and ideals, and for humanistic values.

Interviewer: To conclude our interview, what advice would you like to share with the young people today?

Interviewee: I don't feel quite qualified to give advice, but at least for a senior citizen like me, considering a person with good longevity can live to about seventy years, I have lived 2/3 of my lives, I can say that based on my experience, wherever we live, in any location, any country, any community, there are always good things to learn. We must select the good thing to emulate. The U.S is a country of opportunities; so young people should take the opportunities to develop into successful and productive citizens to help society, people and their own lives. For example, if you become a medical doctor, you can use your talent to save people, thus you become a productive citizen. If you become a priest, you can guide people to live a moral life. Young people should avoid the path to destructive behaviors such as using drugs or alcohol, or getting involved in debauchery,

thus becoming parasites to society. Drinking triggers illegal behaviors, resulting in jail time. Once you are involved in the legal and jail system, you cannot help your family, and you become a burden to society. Young people should feel grateful to their parents who have made huge sacrifices to give them the opportunity for a more comfortable and successful life with all modern conveniences that my generation couldn't have. You must ... you must be successful to set an example to your children, the next generation, to teach them to become successful and productive citizens of tomorrow. We need to set a track record for the future generations to follow, because if we don't teach them our culture, it will perish. I am afraid that without reinforcement, the Vietnamese culture will be diluted and mixed up, which is a shame, and a dishonor to our ancestors. Thus, our young people should try to maintain our culture and tradition, learn the good cultural practices from other cultures, resist the temptation of bad behaviors, take advantage of the opportunities and support available to move ahead to success, so that their own future and the future of their children will be bright, at the same time they make the motherland of Vietnam proud of those children who left the land but wouldn't do anything to put it to shame. That is only my sincere advice.

Interviewer: I am honored to interview you today. Thank you. I must summarize that you have been successful since your youth, and have been educated well in the tradition by your parents. And here in the U.S. thanks to your parents' training, you have the fortitude to become successful, probably more than some persons who are native born. As a senior person, your advice is very valuable. Thank you again. Would you like to add anything to the interview today?

Interviewee: Thank you. I appreciate your compliments. I admire you young people, who came here... I guess you were not born here.... and also had to overcome a lot of initial difficulties including the language barrier, and to achieve success, sometimes more than native-born children. That was thanks to your parents who inculcated good thinking and education in you, and you try your best to succeed to show your appreciation of the sacrifices your parents made for you. In your success you made your family and your ancestors and parents proud, and consequently glorify the motherland of Vietnam. I am grateful to young people who are ambitious and decent like you. Thank you and I am very touched and honored to be interviewed for this project.

Interviewer: thank you (auntie)*

* Note: due to the age difference between the interviewer and the interviewee, the interviewer usually referred to the interviewee as "bac", an honorific term meaning "older auntie".