

The University of Southern Mississippi  
Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries  
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Cui Nguyen

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt  
Interpreter: Angel Truong Phan

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*An Oral History with Cui Nguyen, Volume 1043*

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## Biography

Mr. Cui Nguyen was born in 1954, one of seven children, in the city of Rach Gia in the Kien Giang Province of South Vietnam. His father, Ngoc Van Nguyen, was a fisherman. His mother, Kau Thi Nguyen, farmed rice. They all worked together to fish and sell at the local market. In 1972 Mr. Nguyen served in his town in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army).

In 1981 Mr. Nguyen escaped Vietnam by boat with his uncle and two sisters-in-law. After brief stays in Thailand and Indonesia, he arrived in Atlanta, Georgia, where he worked in a chicken factory. Later, he worked on a shrimp boat in Tampa, Florida, saving money to purchase his own boat. In Tampa, he met his wife, Hang Nguyen, and they moved to Biloxi, Mississippi. Together they have four children.

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## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

CUI NGUYEN

*This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Cui Nguyen and is taking place on September 20, 2011. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. English/Vietnamese interpretation is provided by Angel Truong Phan.*

**VanZandt:** Today is September 20, 2011, and this is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History. We're here in Biloxi, Mississippi, in East Biloxi, at the home of a longtime resident here. Angel Phan is here to interpret, if we need interpretation. And thank you so much for being here, Mr. Nguyen. Could you begin by stating your name? What is your name?

**Nguyen:** Me?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** Cui.

**VanZandt:** Do you know how to spell that?

**Nguyen:** C-U-I.

**VanZandt:** C-U-I, Cui.

**Nguyen:** Yeah, Cui.

**VanZandt:** And your last name?

**Nguyen:** (phone ringing) Last name Nguyen.

**VanZandt:** Nguyen? OK. Do you need to get that? Stop? That's OK. Do you have a middle name?

**Nguyen:** Name, Cui Nguyen.

**Phan:** Cui Nguyen, it's just Cui Nguyen.

**VanZandt:** Just Cui Nguyen, OK.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** And Cui, where were you born? (0:00:53.0)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Rach Gia, Vietnam.

**VanZandt:** OK. Rach Gia. Is that South Vietnam?

**Nguyen:** Yeah, South.

**VanZandt:** South Vietnam, OK. Very close to Saigon, or where in South Vietnam?

**Nguyen:** On the south Saigon.

**VanZandt:** South of Saigon?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** OK. Oh, Rach Gia, OK. Yes. That's where your—

**Phan:** Like my father.

**VanZandt:** That's where your father's from. Did they know one another?

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** They *did*? Oh, you knew Mr. Truong, Dac Truong?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** When you were young?

**Phan:** They're really good friends.

**VanZandt:** You were friends when you were young.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness. (laughter)

**Phan:** They're best friends.

**VanZandt:** Did they live nearby?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Neighbors.

**VanZandt:** Neighbors, oh, that's wonderful. And what year were you born?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** Oh, [19]54.

**VanZandt:** Nineteen fifty-four.

**Phan:** Same years.

**Nguyen:** Yeah, 1954.

**VanZandt:** Same years, same age, OK. The year North and South Vietnam divided, 1954. What did your mother and father do for a living?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, he's saying her name is Nguyen, Thi Kau. (0:02:07.7)

**VanZandt:** How do you spell that?

**Nguyen:** K-A-U, Kau.

**Phan:** K-A-U, huh?

**Nguyen:** K-A-U.

**Phan:** T-H-I, N-G-U-Y-E-N.

**VanZandt:** OK. Your mother's name. And your father's name?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** It's N-G-O-C, Van, V-A-N, and Nguyen.

**VanZandt:** OK. Great. Did you have any brothers and sisters?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Three, he had three sisters and four, there were four boys. (0:03:20.8)

**VanZandt:** Four boys. OK, seven children. And where were you in the order?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** What number?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He was the sixth child.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He's the sixth child, but he said his mom had a couple of other children that had died, so counting them, seven.

**VanZandt:** And what did your father do for a living?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)



**Phan:** He was a fisherman. (0:04:23.8)

**VanZandt:** He *was* a fisherman, OK. Is that where you learned how to fish? From your father?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** So he went with his father, (0:04:41.8) and then when the fall of Vietnam (inaudible; noise interference).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** So your father was a fisherman. What did your mother do?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. She was a farmer, and then when she had time, she—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** —went on the boat (0:05:08.5) with him, his father.

**VanZandt:** And what did she farm? What kind of things did she grow?

**Phan:** She grew rice.

**VanZandt:** Rice, rice farm. OK. And was that just for the family, or did she sell it to the market?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Just for the family.

**VanZandt:** Just for the family. OK. Did you help in the rice fields, too? (0:05:40.0)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said he went out there to help his mom.

**VanZandt:** And what was that like, Mr. Nguyen? For people who have never been in a rice field, can you describe what that's like? What kind of tools he uses?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. OK. So he said after the rice had grown, you have to go out there and cut it. And he remembered he had to dry it, and you have to, I guess, hit it, so the grains would fall. And then you would take, I guess—(speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** So it would be this long, but you would only use the rice—

**VanZandt:** How long? For the recording, because you're saying—like, a few feet?

**Phan:** Oh. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, he said, whenever they would get the grains, the rice from it, it would be a foot wide of it, and they would hit it against—(speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** —a table.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He would hit against the table.

**VanZandt:** Whack it? (chuckles)

**Phan:** Yeah. He would hit it against the table, and then what is left of it, they would put it in a machine and grind it.

**VanZandt:** How did you cut it? What kind of tool did he use to cut it?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Like a machete?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said that it's a knife, but it was curved, a curved knife.

**VanZandt:** OK, I see. I think I know what you mean now. OK. Thank you for describing that.

**Phan:** Did you ever see it, before?

**VanZandt:** I never saw it. I would see people in the rice fields, and buffalo, plowing, but when we were there in May and June, almost the rainy season, but not too many people were out working. So I didn't see how they did it.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) What year?

**VanZandt:** Two thousand [three].

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said around forty years ago, they didn't have any machinery, and everything was done through, by hand.

**VanZandt:** Well, what I saw were buffalo pulling plows. Did you use buffalo? Did you have buffalo?

**Nguyen:** I don't have. I know that. (laughs)

**VanZandt:** You know about it. (laughter) You *wish* you had some, huh?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said at that time they didn't have any buffalo, but—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Cheers (all are served drinks). (laughter)

**Phan:** Oh, cheers.

**VanZandt:** So back then, they didn't use buffalo. All by hand.

**Phan:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** OK. So your mother farmed rice, and you helped her and helped fish, too. Did you go to school? (0:09:45.1)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** For two years. (laughs)

**VanZandt:** Two years. (laughter)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He was eight or nine when he started school.

**VanZandt:** OK. And you went for two years. In Rach Gia, there?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** No, at Rach Gia(?).

**VanZandt:** OK. Was it Catholic school?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** It's a government [school].

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK, public.

**Phan:** Like public schools.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said he remembered they had to pay, also.

**VanZandt:** So your family was well off enough to be able to pay for school. Many weren't.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said that if they didn't have money, they could not go to school. You had to have money to go to school.

**VanZandt:** Why did you quit school?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said that at the time, his mom needed help. And so he wanted to help his mom, and she had to buy clothes for him, and she had to feed him, and he went to school, but he'd rather go help her tend to the rice field, or go with his father to help make a living for the family.

**VanZandt:** Sure. So tell me; fishing in Vietnam was very different from fishing here on the Gulf Coast. (laughter) *Very* different. Can you tell me about what fishing was like in Vietnam when you went out with your father? What kind of boat, and what you caught, and how you sold it? (0:12:06.0)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said the only difference was everything they did by hand. Separating the shrimp and the fish and everything was all by hand, pulling up the nets. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Pulling up the nets was by hand. It's just a little bit easier over here because we have machineries.

**VanZandt:** What kind of a boat did your father have? Did he own his own boat? (0:13:10.8)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** It was made from wood, and he bought it, and his family owned it.

**VanZandt:** And tell me about the kind of things that you caught. What all did you, kind of fish did you catch?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. (chuckles) Yeah. He said in Vietnam, whatever they caught, they were able to keep it. There was not a distinguish between size or what kind it was. Everything, we brought it in. (laughs) (0:14:20.9)

**VanZandt:** It didn't matter like here. Very different. Here, only certain amount, quantity—

**Phan:** Size.

**VanZandt:** —size, yeah. But there, anything; you can catch anything.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Crab, did you catch crab?

**Nguyen:** No.

**VanZandt:** No crab.

**Nguyen:** Shrimp only.

**VanZandt:** Oh, only in Vietnam?

**Nguyen:** No, only here.

**VanZandt:** Yeah, right.

**Phan:** Here, here.

**VanZandt:** But in Vietnam, what did you catch? Crab? In Vietnam, crab?  
(0:14:46.6)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said everything, from crab to fish to shrimp to everything, but over here, it's just—

**VanZandt:** Eel, yellow eel?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Yes.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. (chuckles) He said he remembered just putting his hand in, and it would shock. (0:15:13.6)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah, yeah. So he was putting his hand like in motion, like he's putting in the water, and he said that it would electrify him, the eel.

**VanZandt:** So they were *electric* eels.

**Phan:** Electric eels.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said that it was just a little, but not too much like electricity, or else he would not have put his hand in there. (laughter)



**VanZandt:** Wow!

**Phan:** Electric eel (speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Yeah? Oh, same. So you catch that here, too?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. Well, tell me about after you fished with your dad, and then you brought in your catch. Then what did you do with it? Who did you sell it to? And did you keep some for the family? How did they market it? (0:16:14.9)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He sold it at the market, and then of course they kept some, also.

**VanZandt:** Sure.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** His mom went out to the market and sold the—

**VanZandt:** And sold it, the catch.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Just like the farmer market here.

**VanZandt:** Ah! OK, very similar.

**Phan:** Very similar.

**VanZandt:** Well, your mother was a hard worker. (laughter)

**Phan:** Yeah. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said everyone had to work. Yeah.

**VanZandt:** And you had neighbors. Mr. Truong was a neighbor. Was it a small village or big city? What was your hometown like? (0:17:16.7)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said it's very similar to Biloxi, Mississippi, *very* similar, just there's the city part of it, and then there's a smaller part of it where the market is; very similar to this place right here, and similar to the farmer's market where his mom had, go to sell the fishes.

**VanZandt:** And how did you get around? Were there cars, or did you ride bicycle? Walk?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**VanZandt:** (laughs) Two legs? (laughter)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said that you had to have a *lot* of money to have a bike. (0:18:36.8)

**VanZandt:** Did you ever have a bike?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** So you used your good, old two legs.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Any other childhood memories, Mr. Nguyen, favorite things that you remember that happened to you when you were young? Fun times with friends or games you played, things you liked to do for fun?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (laughter)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said when he was growing up he liked to go to the movies, and he liked to go hang out with his friends. And when he turned eighteen, he'd drink a little bit. (laughter) (0:20:03.9)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said around 1968 to 1970, the Americans were over there, and the cinemas, they had American movies, and he remember watching some war-like movies during that time.

**VanZandt:** Do you? OK. Do you remember any names, titles of the movies? A favorite movie? (laughter)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** He don't remember the names like that.

**VanZandt:** You don't? Because your wife used to sneak out of school and watch movies.

**Phan:** Yeah. (laughter) (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** She remembered the French comedies she liked.

**Phan:** Yeah. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said in Vietnam, that's what they did.

**VanZandt:** Right, went to the movies.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Did it cost much money to go to the movies?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. It's been a long time. I don't remember that.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. What kind of a movie house? Where did they watch the movies? Was it in like a building, movie house, or?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. It's in a house, and it's just like in America, in a theater.

**VanZandt:** Regular theater, OK. Well, Mr. Nguyen, tell me about the war, since you brought that up. You were twenty-one years old in 1975, when the fall of Saigon happened. Did you have to join the [South Vietnamese] Army? (0:22:04.9)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He did go into the Army. He was the ones that—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Before 1975, he was in the Army. He wasn't for the North [Vietnamese Army] then; he was for the South. (0:22:46.7)

**VanZandt:** And so you were drafted into the Army? He had to go? In other words, I think when they turned eighteen, they had to go into the Army.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** And what did he do in the Army? What was his job?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** Wow! Wow! He said he held guns, and whenever the North, the soldiers had came down, he was the one that was there to be on the defense.

**VanZandt:** Defend.

**Phan:** To defend.

**VanZandt:** First line. Front line?

**Phan:** Yeah.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Did you have an M16?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughs)

**Phan:** Well, he said he remembers during that time it was very exciting because whenever there was a Northern soldier or something, they immediately told him to go out there to *shoot* them, or else they're going to shoot—

**VanZandt:** Right.

**Phan:** —back.

**VanZandt:** It's you or him.

**Phan:** It's either him or them.

**Nguyen:** Lot of people, yeah.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

(A portion of the audio not related to the interview has not been transcribed.)

**Phan:** Yeah. So (speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Wow! Exciting.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said, “When I turned eighteen, you just got to go.” And he was telling me about Dac, my father. And he said, “We have to go protect our territory.” And he described it like being policemen for his town, and it was just such an honor to do it. Yeah.

**VanZandt:** That’s awesome. So you were proud, proud to be ARVN [Army Republic of Vietnam].

**Nguyen:** ARVN?

**VanZandt:** Army Republic of Vietnam. You were South Vietnamese Army. We called ARVN.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** He said, “I had to.” (laughter)

**VanZandt:** No choice!

**Phan:** No choice! (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Well, you have good memories with your friend, Dac, protecting your area. Did you stay there where they lived in your village to protect, or did they leave and go elsewhere? A lot of people moved around to different locations.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said he stayed in his town.

**VanZandt:** That was good, close to family, so you were able to see your family, still?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So he just stated that he had to go to, I guess, reeducation camp for a couple of months, and after that, he didn't actually go fight the war, but he was able to come to America after the fall of Vietnam.

**VanZandt:** Right. Well, back to your time in the service, fighting, I wonder what happened. So 1972, is that when you joined the Army? Do you remember the year? You were eighteen?

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** So 1972.

**Phan:** Right.

**VanZandt:** So that's when most of the Americans were leaving. Right? Americans were leaving.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Yeah. He said yes.

**VanZandt:** Right. The end of the war. Just anything that he wants to share about what he thought about that time, the Americans leaving, what that meant for the war and the turning of the war, and the fall of Saigon, just those years from [19]72 to [19]75. (0:28:27.9)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So he said right after they left, he just remembers that it was just a big battle, like between the North and the South, and they kept on fighting for their ground and their say-so, but until there was nothing left to fight for.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughs)

**Phan:** Yeah. They fought to the best of their ability until they lost, and no more bullets, and no more guns, and then they were arrested and had to surrender.



**VanZandt:** So you were losing supplies, very low on supplies, had nothing left to fight with. You were heroes after the Americans left, trying to hold your ground, and defend your country.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** He said, “No. I was running.” (laughter)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said, “They were chasing me. I was running.”

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said, “After that, I mean, I tried, but even my Army clothes I had taken off and thrown away. There’s no more”—

**VanZandt:** In [19]75?

**Phan:** “No more fighting. Had to run. (laughter) Had to go.”

**VanZandt:** Get out of there.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Had to get out of there.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said if you had, at that time, it was funny, if you had that suit on, still, uniform on, that, “I was sure to be shot.”

**VanZandt:** Sure to be shot. So tell me about that, when you left, when you decided to go, and you ran, went back home, took off your uniform. That was when? April, close to April 30? If he could, just talk about how close that was to the actual day [of the official fall of Saigon].

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said, yes, during April 30, that's when—I mean, they didn't really shoot you to kill you, but they wanted to shoot you so you could run. You could run. And he just remembers being shot at so he could run. But yes, it was during April 30, 1975.

**VanZandt:** OK. What were you feeling? You knew the end was coming, and what did you expect would happen after the Communists took over South Vietnam? What did he know? Because many who were from the North knew what the Communists, how they had treated the people in the North. They *knew* how bad it was going to be. Did he know? Was that why they wanted to leave, because they knew it was going to bad? What did he know ahead of time?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** “Well, I stayed, and I worked, but the Communists, they were just really hard on us, and so I mean, I didn't think of a plan to leave Vietnam or anything. It's just, as the time had passed, we were just suffering. And so we just know that one day we're going to have to leave here. (0:33:05.3)

**VanZandt:** Were his brothers in the Army as well?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said three of his brothers had went, including him, so three boys went, and the youngest boy did not.

**VanZandt:** And so after—if he can, just talk about when Saigon fell. At what point after that did he end up in camp? And how that happened that he went to reeducation camp. (0:33:41.9)

**Phan:** OK. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. So he was actually at home, at his house, and they came.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** They actually knew their names, and they just said that, “You need to report here.” And so he had to report there, and that’s when he had went to reeducation camp for three weeks, total. And what they were trying to teach them in there was politics and rules and regulations.

**VanZandt:** What kind of things were they telling you, Mr. Nguyen? Do you remember? About life [under] the Communist philosophy? What kind of things did they tell you?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughs)

**Phan:** He said, yeah, they had their own philosophy, and they put them through a guilt trip of why did they sell, were sellouts against their own country to the Americans, and why did they become soldiers for the Americans. That was basically—they wanted them to confess that, hey, they did wrong.

**VanZandt:** And how did you get out in three weeks? You were lucky, only three weeks. Many stayed for years.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** How did you get so lucky to get out in three weeks?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said that he was only in the Army for four months, and so his rank wasn't high. So the higher the rank that you are, the longer you're going to stay in there. And so at that time I just needed to go for three weeks.

**VanZandt:** Did you have friends who weren't so lucky, who stayed longer?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said, yes, he heard a lot of people that had stayed in there longer, but he don't know a lot of—he didn't have a lot of friends. You know, your [Angel Phan's] father [Dac Truong] was my friend, and I remember slightly about that, but I didn't have a lot of friends to know how long they stayed.

**VanZandt:** Well, can I just ask you quickly, did you have any thoughts about President [Ngo Dinh] Diem? I know you were younger then, and not in the Army. But any thoughts about that before we get off the war, about the politics of South Vietnam and how the government, dysfunction or their strengths, weaknesses under the leadership—

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** President Diem was assassinated.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He was the president—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** South Vietnam.

**Phan:** South Vietnam.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Well, right, but before, President Diem in 1962 was assassinated, the president of South Vietnam. Does he remember anything about that?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** D-I-E-M.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Is that his—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** He was killed [just before] John F. Kennedy was killed.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Yeah.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said during his reign, or during his leadership, I was very young. I was very, very young.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** I was only seven or eight years old.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said he remembers him being assassinated, but he doesn't know much about him.

**VanZandt:** Not much about him. OK. Well, tell us how you decided to leave, Mr. Nguyen. It must have been a difficult decision to leave Vietnam. Tell us about that, and how you made the decision, and preparing to leave. (0:41:09.1)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So he said that after the fall of Vietnam, it was hard for them, and so him and his uncle and two—he was married before—and his two sister-in-laws—so there was four people on the boat. So they went on their own boat, and with the guidance of his uncle, which was—(speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) So it was him and his uncle that took turns driving the boat, and they were able to land in—(speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Thailand. They were able to land in Thailand. (0:43:44.5)

**VanZandt:** Thailand.

**Nguyen:** Thailand.

**VanZandt:** Ah, you went that way, to Thailand.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** Right.

**VanZandt:** And did his parents go with him? Who all went with him?

**Phan:** It was just his uncle and his two sister-in-laws.

**VanZandt:** That's it.

**Phan:** There was four people on the boat.

**VanZandt:** OK. And how did the family make that decision of who would go? Did they, or did they just leave? Did they know that he was—(0:44:07.5)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said that he knew that if he had discussed it with them, that they were going to cry and be emotional, and he just didn't want that, and he just made plans with his uncle and his two sister-in-laws, and they just, one night, just—because it was just so hard living over there, that they just got on the boat and just left.

**VanZandt:** So his parents didn't know.

**Phan:** His parents didn't know. His wife didn't know. Nobody know. He just didn't want them crying and sobbing, and he just wanted to find a better life.

**VanZandt:** Mr. Nguyen, so you made it to—were you picked up by another ship? Or what happened along the way when you left? (0:45:18.5)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. There was a Thai boat that stopped, and they were able to help us with some food. And after that, we just continue on to Thailand.

**VanZandt:** Wow. So you made it on your own.

**Phan:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. And didn't have any bad experiences with Thai pirates? Just—

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)



**Phan:** No. It was just such a small boat, they wouldn't have any interest anyway.

**VanZandt:** How long did it take you to get to Thailand?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** It took us five days.

**VanZandt:** Five days. What did you take with you?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (laughter) (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** "I didn't bring anything."

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** I brought—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. "I brought some rice with me, no clothes, just some soy sauce and some rice and some water."

**VanZandt:** Did you make it; did that last you five days, enough food and water, rice?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** It would only last two or three days, and it was gone, and then the Thai—

**VanZandt:** But then they had help.

**Phan:** They had help.

**VanZandt:** Thank goodness.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Well, what happened after you got to Thailand?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Was there a camp that he stayed in?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He was in a refugee camp for two months.

**VanZandt:** And what year was this? What year? Did you leave 1975?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** [Nineteen] eighty-one.

**VanZandt:** Oh, not till [19]81. OK. And then from Thailand to America? 0:47:51.1

**Nguyen:** No. Indonesia.

**Phan:** Indonesia.

**VanZandt:** Indonesia.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** One month in Indonesia. (0:48:03.2)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** And then to America.

**VanZandt:** And were you able to come to America because you were in the Army, South Vietnamese Army? (0:48:13.2)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, yeah.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. When he went to the [refugee] camp, he had some documents, and he gave it to them, and he was able to go through that.

**VanZandt:** So what did you think when you found out you were coming to the United States? What went through your mind? How did you feel?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He was very excited, actually, to come to America because he had always knew that he wanted to be in America, even when he signed up to be with the Americans in the Army. He said that, "I'm going to make it to America. That's where I wanted to go." So there wasn't fear there. He was like, "That's my goal, and I'm going to get there," because he wanted to leave Vietnam and the country where he didn't think that it was ruled right.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** And I didn't want to mention this, but he have it in here, and he mentioned the word Viet Cong, that he's leaving the Viet Congs.

**VanZandt:** The Viet Cong. I'm so glad you mentioned that because I wondered. So you were excited, happy, wanted to come to America. No regrets about leaving, along that journey to Thailand? No thoughts about turning back?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** No. He's like, "I'm just moving forward."

**VanZandt:** Moving forward.

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** Yeah.

**Nguyen:** Yeah. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Too bad, things were too bad under the Communist rule. So tell me how you felt when you first—where did you first arrive in America?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Atlanta, Georgia.

**VanZandt:** Oh. What did you think? What were your first impressions of America?  
(0:51:29.3)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Right off the plane.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said, “Freedom. I just felt a sense of freedom, and I got to go ride on a car. It was just easier. I know everywhere we have to work, but everything was just much easier, and I just felt a sense of freedom.”

**VanZandt:** Freedom. And your family was still together? Those that you left with were still, arrived in Atlanta together?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, OK. So he was able to come to Atlanta by himself. The other three, they went to Texas.

**VanZandt:** Why did that happen? Why did they separate? Was that by choice?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So there was a American society that had sponsor him, and they had relatives that sponsor them to go to Texas.

**VanZandt:** How did you feel about staying in Atlanta? Was that difficult to be separated at that point, or was he OK being on his own?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. So when he was sponsored to go through this organization, they gave him some health checkups, and they found that he was healthy. And so they immediately put him to work in a chicken farm. (0:54:34.4)

**VanZandt:** Oh, chicken farming. In Atlanta?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Yes. (laughter) What was that like?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, it's like a factory. It wasn't like a farm where you raise it. It was more like a factory. I just had to hook it onto a hook and hang it up.

**VanZandt:** Easy work?

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Easy work? Yeah. (laughter)

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Did it pay OK?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Well, for me it was good. I think they paid me \$4.55, but yeah, it was hard work. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Four dollars and fifty-five cents an hour?

**Phan:** An hour.

**VanZandt:** That was good then.

**Nguyen:** Yeah, good.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**Nguyen:** Good job.

**VanZandt:** Good money.

**Nguyen:** (inaudible)

**VanZandt:** Yeah. (laughter) Easy.

**Phan:** And he's doing his hand, motioning.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. (laughter) So how did you end up here in Biloxi from Atlanta? How'd you get here? (0:55:51.7)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He was there, and he met a friend, and his friend said, "Come on to Biloxi to go fishing." And he came.

**VanZandt:** So your friend was already living here?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** How did you meet him, living in Atlanta?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. His friend just was visiting Atlanta, and they just happened to bump into each other. They'd been friends since they knew each other in Vietnam, and—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** They lived in the same village, and he just said, "Come." And he came.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. So how long did you stay in Atlanta before you came here to Biloxi?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Eight months, and then he moved to Biloxi.

**VanZandt:** So you came to Biloxi in 1982? What year did you come to Biloxi?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Florida, Tampa, (speaking Vietnamese).

**Phan:** Oh, OK. So before he said—

**VanZandt:** (inaudible)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said that, OK, well, I actually, so—(speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Ah. OK. So he was in Texas, and he moved to—for eight months in Texas. And then he moved here for a year, and after a year, staying here in Biloxi, Mississippi, he moved to Tampa, Florida, for ten, fifteen years before he moved back here again. (0:58:20.5)

**VanZandt:** OK. Wow. So in Texas, were you fishing? What did you do while you were in Texas?

**Phan:** He was just visiting in Texas.

**VanZandt:** Oh, just visiting. You didn't live there. OK. So you met your wife in Tampa? (laughter) Is that right? (0:58:38.1)



**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter) He met his wife in Tampa.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. And we heard her story, her side of the story. What's *your* side of the story?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** OK. He said that he was a fisherman there, and when he came home to where he was living at, he met his wife, and they became friends, and they became one.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** And the rest is history. (laughter)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** OK. So you were fishing in Tampa. (0:59:43.2) Is there a big fishing community in Tampa, Vietnamese?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** I wonder why he left Biloxi to go to Tampa.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. He had some people that he knew, and they said there's an opportunity for a job to work. Then he just went to Florida after, just seeking opportunity, and—

**VanZandt:** Was he a deckhand? Did he work on a shrimp boat?

**Phan:** No. He stated that he worked for an American boat, a [shrimp] boat, and he saved up enough money to buy his own boat.

**VanZandt:** OK. A shrimp boat, though, the American boat that he worked on?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Shrimp boat.

**VanZandt:** OK. So you've been here in Biloxi a long time now, shrimping, when you came with your wife to Biloxi. Tell me about how shrimping was then versus now. How has it changed over the years since you've been shrimping here?

(1:01:28.6)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** The same.

**VanZandt:** Good years, bad years, or any challenges?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said, like back then, there's not a lot of boats, so you were able to go out there, and some days you catch more, and some days you catch less. But when there's less boats, of course, you can catch more for yourself.

**VanZandt:** So more competition now.

**Phan:** More competition now than then, back then.

**VanZandt:** Mr. Nguyen, what do you like about the fishing life? You've been a fisherman a long time. What do you like about fishing, being out on the water?  
(1:02:34.8)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said, "I don't feel tied down when I'm out there. I like the freedom. I like that I'm good at what I do. I'm not good with the language, my language skills or anything, or education, but when I'm out there, I like it a lot.

**VanZandt:** We haven't talked about [Hurricane] Katrina. So you owned your own boat. What happened during Katrina? Is there anything you want to share about your Katrina experience? Where you went during Katrina? Was he with your dad? I wondered. (1:03:40.4)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Yeah. He actually went in the—

**VanZandt:** Back Bay, there, with all the other boats?

**Phan:** Back Bay, Back Bay, with all the other boats.

**VanZandt:** Was he tied up with the others?

**Phan:** With my father, also, yes.

**VanZandt:** OK. So on your own boat. Who else was with him during the storm?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** “So it was myself and my wife and my two younger children. My two older kids, they took our cars and evacuated with it.”

**VanZandt:** Is there anything you want to share about your experience during the storm, Mr. Nguyen? It must have been very scary. Any memories that you want to share about that time during the storm, after the storm, recovering afterwards?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He just remembers that during that time, when the storm had come in, the waves were, the waves and the wind was just blowing, tossing that boat back and forth, and I remember the ropes had broke, and I was *very* afraid. (1:05:41.7)

**VanZandt:** So his boat, the rope broke.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** And he was not attached anymore.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** It was tied to the tree, and it had broken off, and so I was *very* afraid.

**VanZandt:** Oh, gosh.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** And so he—and we heard this story before, also, from previous interview—because he was tied to my father’s boat, also, so when his boat, the rope had broken from the tree—that was supposed to be (inaudible).

**VanZandt:** Right.

**Phan:** When it broke, so he was very afraid, but what he did was, he cranked up his engine, and they tried to ram into the cliff.

**VanZandt:** OK. So he was tied to your dad's.

**Phan:** Yeah. So they—

**VanZandt:** So we've heard that story about ramming to stop.

**Phan:** To stop, yeah.

**VanZandt:** OK. And was your boat damaged? Was there much damage?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** So all the boats were right next to each other, so there was a lot of—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** —(inaudible), and my boat was smushed. Yeah. But I was able to fix it.

**VanZandt:** You were able to repair, yourself?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Good. And go out shrimping? How was shrimping after Katrina? Good catch? (1:07:14.3)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yes, yes.

**VanZandt:** Did you have any trouble with debris out there, with your nets breaking? I mean, early on—

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He remembers it was a good season after Katrina, but during that time he had to have surgery, and he was in the hospital, so he did not go himself to see if there was any debris.

**VanZandt:** Right, OK. Well, Mr. Nguyen, after last April, when the oil spill happened, BP [Deepwater Horizon] oil spill, tell me about how that's affected you as a fisherman over the past year and a half. (1:08:08.4)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. I cannot fish anymore.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** There is just too much oil.

**VanZandt:** Still?

**Phan:** How can I go fishing any? I mean, I can't go anywhere. There's just still a lot of oil. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He's heard from other fishermen that, yeah, there's still a lot of oil out there.

**VanZandt:** Was he able to be a part of the cleanup effort at all? (1:09:08.5)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** Vessels of Opportunity?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** OK. That was good. Well, what did you do? Can you talk about what you did?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Just looked for oil and spot it.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** And he brought out the, I guess the—

**VanZandt:** The boom?

**Phan:** The booms.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** To absorb the oil?

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** And when you saw oil, how did you report it? And who did he report to?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He would report it to his boss, the one that hired him on to do that.

**VanZandt:** Was that someone who worked for BP, or was that Coast Guard? I just wondered who.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. They worked for BP.

**VanZandt:** And where did you see oil? Can you describe where? (1:10:24.9)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Highway 90.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Highway 90 beach.

**VanZandt:** OK. Highway 90 goes all along the whole Gulf Coast. So I wonder just—

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Horn Island, Ship Island.

**VanZandt:** Around the barrier islands.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** The long island.

**VanZandt:** And did you see any wildlife, turtles, birds, anything affected?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He just saw oil, lots of it.

**VanZandt:** Mr. Nguyen, what do you think the future holds for the seafood industry here, since the spill? (1:11:22.7)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said, “I’m sure the scientists can give you a better prediction of how things are going to go, but the best answer would be coming from them. I’m not so sure how it’s going to come back.”

**VanZandt:** Well, is he interested in pursuing any other kind of occupation in the meantime, or how is he getting through this? There’ve been programs offered to get retraining, and is he taking advantage of—(1:12:36.1)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Asian Americans for Change (speaking Vietnamese).



**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** He said he's open to it.

**VanZandt:** How does he feel about—like, I'm just wondering what other challenges the fishermen have experienced, like competition with farm-raised fish, imports, foreign imports, rising gas prices. What other kind of challenges have they faced over the past few years? Anything else that he wants to talk about.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Well, his biggest challenge is he was able to overcome the rest, but as far as the oil, he doesn't know. There's a lot of uncertainties. The fishes and the shrimp are dead. I don't know when they're going to come back, but I definitely do need to search for a way to make a living. (1:14:19.2)

**VanZandt:** A different way?

**Phan:** A different way.

**VanZandt:** What would you like to do? Did you ever, throughout your life as a fisherman, have any dreams or interests in pursuing any other kind of job?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. His dream is just to have a big, huge boat and just go fishing. He just likes that. And I tried to ask, “Is there any other dreams, anything else you want to do?” (1:15:46.7)

**VanZandt:** That’s what he likes doing.

**Phan:** This is what he loves doing.

**VanZandt:** Doing what he loves, yeah. I can see why.

**Phan:** And he said, “I’ll do it until I die, or until I can’t do it anymore.”

**VanZandt:** Yeah. Well, all right, Mr. Nguyen. You’ve overcome a lot. You said you have; you’ve overcome a lot in your life. You escaped the Communists, got out of reeducation camp, made it to America, and made it through Katrina. Is there anything you’d like to share about how you think you’ve been able to do that? You’ve been going through hard times. What would you attribute your strength to and your sense of resiliency? (A portion of the audio not related to the interview has not been transcribed.) You want me to say that again?

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. OK. I just wondered, in closing, he’s been through so much in his life and just overcome so many obstacles and challenges, living in Vietnam under Communist rule, escaping, making it to Thailand—so many didn’t. So many were so unlucky and didn’t make it through all the steps along the way to America. And then Katrina, starting over again. So to what does he attribute his strength? Does he have anything to share about that? (1:17:23.4)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** How has his past helped him.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said he was able to overcome a lot of it is because he said I guess like during the hard, there's good times, and there's going to be bad times, but during the bad times, you just got to stand strong and go through it because after you stand for so long and you just go through it, it's going to pass.

**VanZandt:** Thank you, Mr. Nguyen. What are you proudest of in your life, in closing? (1:19:24.1)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He said that his dream was to come to America, and he *made* it. And he's very proud to be in America. (laughs)

**VanZandt:** Thank you. Is there anything else that I haven't asked? That's wonderful. I can tell it means a lot to you, freedom, your life on the ocean, which is a lot of that freedom and independence. Anything you want to say for your children to hear fifty years from now, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, to know about you, or any advice you'd like to leave them? (1:20:27.0)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He said that if they do hear this, just know where they came from and know what he had left behind to get to where he is, and the suffering that he went through for them to have a better future, and that they shouldn't follow the evil or dark ways, but continue to do good and follow in the good ways.

**VanZandt:** That's great. Thank you. Thank you so much. (laughter) I appreciate it. That's wonderful.

**Phan:** That was good!

**VanZandt:** Good advice.

(end of interview)