

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

Hang Nguyen

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt  
Interpreter: Angel Truong Phan

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*An Oral History with Hang Nguyen, Volume 1043*

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## Biography

Mrs. Hang Nguyen was the only child of Binh Nguyen and Nhung Nguyen, born in 1968 in Can Tho, South Vietnam. Her father, who passed away in Seattle, Washington in 2009, served in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army). Her mother worked in the home. After the fall of South Vietnam, Mrs. Nguyen's father was sent to reeducation camp. It was then that her mother had to go to work selling fish, coffee, and fabrics in different places.

Mrs. Nguyen escaped Vietnam at age seventeen with her father. After a brief stay in Malaysia, then attending school in the Philippines for six months, they arrived in Tampa, Florida, where she met her husband, Cui Nguyen, a fisherman. In 1996 Mrs. Nguyen and her husband moved to Biloxi. Mrs. Nguyen worked as a seafood processor from 1998 to 1999, then as a prep cook at Beau Rivage Casino for five years. Together they have four children.

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## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

HANG NGUYEN

*This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Hang Nguyen and is taking place on September 19, 2011. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. English/Vietnamese interpretation is provided by Angel Truong Phan.*

**VanZandt:** Today is September 19, 2011. This is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History, and I'm here in Biloxi, Mississippi, with Ms. Angel Phan, who's going to be offering interpretation here. And we're here in the home of a Biloxi resident in the Vietnamese community. If you could, say your name, please.

**Nguyen:** My name Hang.

**VanZandt:** OK. Hang. How do you spell that?

**Nguyen:** H-A-N-G.

**VanZandt:** H-A-N-G?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** Nguyen.

**VanZandt:** And what is your last name?

**Nguyen:** Last name Nguyen.

**VanZandt:** OK. N-G-U-Y-E-N, OK, good; just for the recording so they'll know how to spell it when they type this. Thank you. And where are you from in Vietnam? Where were you born?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** I was born in Vietnam in Can Tho.

**VanZandt:** In Can Tho. And I'll spell that, C-A-N, T-H-O? Is that right?

**Nguyen:** Yeah, um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And that's in South Vietnam.

**Nguyen:** South Vietnam.

**VanZandt:** Near the Mekong River?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) No.

**VanZandt:** Oh, no? OK. I have a map.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. It's probably an hour and a half away from Saigon.

**VanZandt:** I'm showing a map here, and—I know (Mrs. Nguyen reaches for her glasses). (laughter) You and me, we have to put our glasses on. (laughter) That's Can Tho.

**Nguyen:** Yeah, right here.

**VanZandt:** Far south. And the Mekong?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Around here somewhere. So not too far from there.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** It's a beautiful area. I remember visiting. We took a boat there.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** And what year were you born? Do you know?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Nineteen sixty-eight.

**VanZandt:** Nineteen sixty-eight, OK. And how many brothers and sisters did you have in your family?

**Nguyen:** Only one of me. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Just you?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Only child? (laughter) Very special. (laughter) OK. And what were your parents' names? Can you say the name of your mother?

**Nguyen:** The name my mother Nhung, last name Nguyen.

**VanZandt:** Nguyen, OK. Do you know how to spell the first name?

**Phan:** You know how to spell Nhung, N-H-U-N-G.

**VanZandt:** N-H-U-N-G. OK. And your father's name?

**Nguyen:** Father, Binh.

**Phan:** Binh?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** B-I-N-H.

**VanZandt:** B-I-N-H, OK, Binh Nguyen.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm, Binh.

**VanZandt:** And tell me anything that you'd like to share about growing up in Can Tho. What was that like? What was your childhood 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:** So I had to trigger some questions about her mom and dad and how she grew up in Vietnam, so she said that her dad was in the Army, and her mom was a housewife, and she stayed home to watch her. And around 1967, '68, her father got injured, and so he had to come home. But he was able to draw compensation from that, so they were able to live off that for a while. And she came to America in— (speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. And she came to America in 1985.

**VanZandt:** Eighty-five. OK. And your father was in the Army. Was he away a lot when you were growing up, or did she see much of him while he was in the Army, before he was injured?

**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:** Oh, OK. So (speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Oh, OK. So when he was in the Army, they had not had her yet, but she heard the stories from her father that he did go into the Army.

**VanZandt:** So what kind of stories, do you remember, that your [father] told you?



**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. So her father just vaguely told her about what he did, but he recently passed away, two years ago in 2009, and that's when she was able to hear more about his story.

**VanZandt:** And was he living in Vietnam still, when he passed away?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, OK. It was when they came to America in 1985; it was her and her father that came together. Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Oh, wow. Did he live here in Biloxi, near her?

**Nguyen:** Seattle.

**VanZandt:** Seattle, Washington.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Wow. OK. So you went back to see him in 2009, for his funeral?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** I'm sorry. I'm sure you were able to celebrate his life there. And, anything that you would like to share about him, what he was like and his life, to honor him? Is there anything in particular?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** What he was like.

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

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. So she said that when he came over here, he actually worked for the company—(speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. So he worked for a manufacturing company that manufactured boats, and then the fiberglass messed up his lungs, and so he was sick for the most part, and he drew off disability, and so he moved to Seattle to reside there, until he passed away in 2009.

**VanZandt:** OK. And we'll get back to him a little bit, too. Tell me about your mother. You said she was a housewife. So if she could tell me about what her mother was like and maybe what their house—describe her house, growing up, and just spending time with her mother.

**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, like stucco, huh?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She said we lived in a big home. It was made of stucco, and it was very close to the market.

**VanZandt:** Close to the market. Did you spend time at the market a lot?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Well, she said that in our culture, we actually go to the market every day.

**VanZandt:** Every day, OK. And just tell me what that was like. I remember going to the markets, and it was very exciting. A lot of people went and sold their goods. Did your mother grow anything or sell anything? Or you just went to purchase things to eat for your family? Is that what the market trips were for, just to feed the family?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. She mentioned they would go to buy fish and meat and—

**VanZandt:** Things that they needed.

**Phan:** Things they'd need for cooking.

**VanZandt:** What was school like for you, Hang? Did you attend school at all?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** I went to school until the ninth grade.

**VanZandt:** Oh, wow. OK. Was that nearby, near Can Tho where she lived, or did she go away to school?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Can Tho.

**VanZandt:** And what was school like? What kind of memories do you have about school?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Good, bad.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She said the school, it's as big as Boom Town Casino here in Biloxi. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** I gotcha.

**Phan:** And each class, there were twenty to thirty students.

**VanZandt:** Oh, wow, big school, lots of students. Did you like it? Good memories?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** She said she liked school, but at the same time, she enjoyed her free time, too. (laughter) And so there were times where she skipped school. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. (laughter) So what did you do when you skipped school? (laughter) Can you tell? Your grandkids would love to hear that. What did Grandmother do when she skipped school? What kind of fun? What things did you do for fun?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Trouble?

**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:** OK. She said when she skipped school her favorite thing to do was to go to the movies.

**VanZandt:** Yeah, me, too. (laughter)

**Phan:** She mentioned at that time, yes, we did have theaters. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Even then, back in the old days. We're close to the same age, you and me, and I used to like to skip school and go to the movies, too. What movies did you watch? What kind of movies? Romance?

**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:** She said she was only twelve or thirteen at the time, but her friends worked there, and so she never had to pay for her tickets.

**VanZandt:** Free.

**Phan:** And it was free, and so they would just let her in to watch anything that she wanted. She had favor with them. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Anytime you wanted, free tickets.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Do you remember a favorite movie or a favorite movie star? Were they Vietnamese films?

**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:** OK. So it was actually American movies that was translated—

**VanZandt:** Oh, in Vietnamese.

**Phan:** —in Vietnamese, and she enjoyed that a lot.

**VanZandt:** American movies. Were they Western movies or comedies? Does she remember?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** She said she really enjoyed the comedies and the romance, and—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. And she liked, one of her favorites, and she thought that that was great, was like the French movies, the humorous ones.

**VanZandt:** Funny French movies. (laughter)

**Phan:** Funny French movies.

**VanZandt:** And they were subtitled, too, in Vietnamese.

**Phan:** Right. There were subtitles.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. That's great. Any more that you can think of?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** That's it. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** That was about 1970s and '80s. I was trying to think of what American films were popular. I remember going to see *Grease*, the musical *Grease*, (laughter) and *Saturday Night Fever*. So I didn't know if she remembered any of the names.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Disco. (laughter)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** No.

**VanZandt:** That's fun. Well, that's not too bad if you get to go to the movies. Sounds like you had fun with your friends.

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

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

**Phan:** Well, she said, when I was younger—well, we know that she's the only child, and so she was able to spend a lot of times with her friends.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. So and you got a lot of freedom, it sounds like. Did your family ever travel anywhere outside of Can Tho that you remember? Trips to the beach or just anywhere else? I wondered if they—

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She said her father and her family used to go to the beach before the fall of Vietnam, two or three times. They would go to Vung Tau.

**VanZandt:** Oh, Vung Tau.

**Phan:** And after the fall of Vietnam, they didn't go.

**VanZandt:** Well, maybe if you wouldn't mind talking about that. About, she was seven years old, about, in 1975, the fall of Saigon. You were seven years old, around?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Very young.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** What does she remember about that?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, OK. So her father—(speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. So her father was captured to go to reeducation camp, and they just had to stay home. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, my God!

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)



**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Wow. So during that time her father went to reeducation camp, the soldiers had come into her house quite often to measure their home, to count their bowls, count their, everything that they had in there. And they would come quite often because they were, I guess she said that they were the wealthiest in their little village. Not a lot of people had a lot, but like for them, they had enough. And they would come and just—

**VanZandt:** Take inventory.

**Phan:** Taking inventory of everything. Yeah.

**VanZandt:** And how did you feel about that, Hang? Was that a scary time? You were so very young. How did you feel about that?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, she said she was so young at the time, she didn't know.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She didn't think anything of it.

**VanZandt:** Too young to know what was really happening.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** How was your mother doing, once your father was taken away?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Well, after that her mother had to go to work, and so she would go sell fish, coffee, and fabric in different places. And in the beginning, she would go with her mom, but later on, her mom went by herself.

**VanZandt:** So life changed dramatically, it sounds like, after he was taken. Did you know where he was taken to? Did they know where her father was sent, and could they visit him? And just if she'd talk a little bit about that, while he was away.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Wow! They asked to visit, but they were not able to reunite or even see him until five or six months later. And every time they would tell her that he's at this camp, or at this camp, or that camp. And they would go there, but every single time that he's not there. But they kept on asking, and six months down the line, they were able to see each other.

**VanZandt:** What was that like?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** How was he doing?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, she just saw that he was suffering, and so she was really, really sad.

**VanZandt:** And he was able to come back home after a while. So tell me, then, about deciding to leave, and how you decided to leave, your father decided to take you, and what that was 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:** Well, at that time, when her father was released, he was able to get some land, but he said it was just too hard to make anything off of it. So they were able to

relocate. And then her mom was still doing sales in the market, and she found a way to go to America.

**VanZandt:** Through Vung Tau? Is that where they left?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Another place.

**VanZandt:** I'm not sure I know that. Do you know how to spell that?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah, it was near Can Tho, though.

**VanZandt:** Near Can Tho, oh, OK.

**Phan:** Yeah. And then so her mother found a way for them to go America, and she said, "You and your daughter can go," because her mom was still there, that she needed to take care of her mom back in Vietnam. And her mom is still in Vietnam now.

**VanZandt:** Is she?

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** So her mother decided to stay to take care of her mother.

**Phan:** Her mother.

**VanZandt:** So her grandmother.

**Phan:** Her grandmother, but her grandmother passed away in 1991. (speaking in Vietnamese) And so her and her father left and—(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) OK. So when they left on a boat, they went to Malaysia and stayed in a refugee camp there. And they went to the Philippines. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Yeah. She said she went to school in the Philippines for six months, but she laughs because like she remembers so little of it even now, like she can speak very little.

**VanZandt:** English.

**Phan:** English.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm. I think that happened a lot. People learned a little English, little bit, in the camps, but didn't remember much of it afterwards. Yeah. Can I ask you to back up a little bit? I'm just thinking about how difficult that decision must have been to separate the family, and what life would have been like if her father had stayed, being in the Army. Having been in the Army, they were persecuted severely by the Communists, obviously. How did they make that decision to stay? I know you said her mother wanted to stay to take care of the grandmother, but what would life have been like if she and her father had stayed? If she could, talk about what the reason was for having to leave.

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

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Yeah. So like she said that her father was a soldier for the Americans, so he said he'd rather die on American soil than die in Vietnam. And at that time, it was hard for him to make any living after he was released. And so her mom tried to find a

way for him to go, and at the time, I asked her if she had a choice to stay with her mom or go with her father. And she said, well, because of skipping school, and the teachers came to the house, (laughter) and my mom said, “Well, you just need to go. Maybe you’ll have a better opportunity over there.”

**VanZandt:** Less trouble, maybe.

**Phan:** Less trouble. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Go see all the movies you want in America. (laughter)

**Phan:** And so her and her father ended up leaving. It was a decision that it was just going to be better for her and her father because it was just hard for him at that time.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. He tried. You were there ten years under Communist rule before you left, a long time.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, she said, they didn’t have a big family, so they didn’t—they always had a good meal. It wasn’t that they were starving or anything. It’s just, they just wanted a better life for him and her.

**VanZandt:** Better opportunity.

**Phan:** Better opportunity.

**VanZandt:** Well, Hang, can you just tell us about that journey. First, how did you prepare to leave? What was that like? What did you take with you? And we hear stories of people—it was very secret. You couldn’t tell anyone you were leaving. If she could just talk about those days leading up to leaving.

**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:** Wow. I am just replaying all this in my head, and because I didn't want her to stop while she was going.

**VanZandt:** Yes, absolutely.

**Phan:** But she said they were only able to take two pairs of clothes. Her mom had already paid for their trip, so they didn't take any money with them. So there were maybe fifty or sixty people on the boat.

**VanZandt:** Fifty or sixty.

**Phan:** Um-hm, with them, and she remembers leaving, and when they were out at sea, they didn't have enough food on the boat. But luckily there were some fishermen that helped them, and they were—

**VanZandt:** That were on the boat?

**Phan:** There was another boat.

**VanZandt:** Or that came?

**Phan:** And at that time, they lost sense of direction where they were going, and they could have went into the Thailand territory and had been raided.

**VanZandt:** Where the pirates were.

**Phan:** Pirates. But luckily, instead of that, they bumped into some fishermen that were able to feed them. But they didn't have any money to return to them, but they were just grateful that they were able to point them in the right direction, and not go into some danger zone.

**VanZandt:** They saved you and pointed you the right way to go to Malaysia.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** OK. So how many days did it take you to get to Malaysia? Do you remember?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Around nine days.

**VanZandt:** Oh, that's a long trip, nine days. OK. But you had enough food, thanks to the fishermen, food and water?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And Hang, you were seventeen years old. Were you able to stay with your father through that trip? Were there other people that you knew on the boat from your village? What was that like, the journey?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Just my father and I.

**VanZandt:** Didn't know anyone else.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** OK. And what were you thinking as you left Vietnam, not knowing where you were going? What was going through your mind and your heart?

**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) (laughter) (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** OK. I had to ask. So she said there was a lot of uncertainties leaving Vietnam, because I was so used to my life in Vietnam, and I don't know anything. I'm stepping into the unknown, but I'm just going to walk by faith and just let faith just lead me to wherever that it wants me to go. And then I asked her, because you also said the "heart." And I said, "Well, did you have a lover that you were leaving in Vietnam?" And she said, "Well, yes, I did have a friend." (laughter) And then she started laughing. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** A friend, wink. (laughter)

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** A close friend. Oh, so he stayed behind?

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

**VanZandt:** What was his name?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** She said she don't remember his name. (laughter)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She said, "It's the past. I don't even remember his name. We just wanted to leave it at that."

**VanZandt:** OK. Gotcha. It's important at the time, but, yeah, you moved on. Well, you got to Malaysia, and how long were you in Malaysia?

**Nguyen:** Six months.

**VanZandt:** Six months. OK. And what was that like? Were you trying to get to America at that point, and did you know where you wanted to end up, or did they have a choice?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, her father was a soldier for the Americans, so he brought his papers with him. So right when they checked his papers, they were chosen to come to America. So they didn't want to go anywhere else.

**VanZandt:** And what did you know about America? You'd watched films. You'd seen lots of movies. (laughter) Was it like the movies (laughter) when you got here?

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

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

**Phan:** Very similar, but not exactly, yeah.

**VanZandt:** (laughs) OK. Well, where did you end up? You went to the Philippines; Malaysia, Philippines. And how long were you in the Philippines?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)



**Phan:** About six months.

**VanZandt:** Six months, too. And then on a plane to America?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** First plane ride?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** How did you feel about that? Scared? Excited?

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

**Phan:** Yeah. So it's beyond fear, now. She wasn't afraid anymore, the nine days and everything she surpassed, that she was just hoping to get to America.

**VanZandt:** Ready to get there.

**Phan:** Right. Ready to get there; the sooner, the better.

**VanZandt:** OK. That's great. Well, where did you land? Where did you first come in America?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**VanZandt:** Florida. Do you remember where in Florida?

**Nguyen:** In Tampa.

**VanZandt:** Tampa, OK. What did you think about Tampa?

**Nguyen:** Good. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Good. Beautiful beach.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Like Vung Tau, without the mountains. Well, tell me just a little bit about what it was like the first year that you were here in America. How did your

father find work? And when did they leave Tampa? Just a little bit about the early times and adjusting, what it was like adjusting to life here, so different from Vietnam.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So she went to school for three months, and after that—

**VanZandt:** High school or what kind of school?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) High school.

**Phan:** High school.

**VanZandt:** OK.

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

**Phan:** Ninth grade, I started ninth grade. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** What was that like being new? Were there other Vietnamese students there?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Yeah. So it was hard. It was very difficult, she said. Everyone spoke English, and she didn't understand it. So for three months, she went to school, and there were some Vietnamese there, but they didn't speak in her language to her. They spoke English; just like nowadays, the kids in school, they just speak English. They don't speak Vietnamese. And so summer, and after three months, then summer came; picked up a job. She became a seamstress. Yeah. So she knows how to sew.

**VanZandt:** You knew how to sew from Vietnam, or did you learn?

**Nguyen:** I go learn. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, OK. She worked in that company, and so she told me that she didn't actually do the sewing. She ironed.

**VanZandt:** Ironed, oh, OK. A lot of ironing.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** (laughter) OK. What kind of clothing factory was it?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. It's like a children's clothing store.

**VanZandt:** Great. Did you like that work? Happy to have a job, or not much fun?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** At that time, I didn't like it that much. It was really hot, and I had to work overtime, and at the end of the week, I only make a hundred and something dollars.

**VanZandt:** Oh. Not much pay, um-hm.

**Phan:** And it was only—I only got three dollars an hour.

**VanZandt:** Wow, goodness.

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

**Phan:** So she said she was only making a hundred and something a week. She would rather get married and have a husband so he could take care of her. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Yeah. Let him do the hard work. You could take care of the house?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** That sounded good. (laughter) Didn't take much ironing to get to that point. Oh! I don't blame you. That's a lot of work for not much pay. That must have been hard to even find a job.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** My goodness. So I'd love to hear about meeting her husband, then.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** So when they came to America, the people that sponsor them, their home was—(speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** There was a two-bedroom and one-bath home that they stayed in.

**VanZandt:** In Tampa?

**Phan:** In Tampa. And the family had—(speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** It was a couple, and they had three kids, two girls and one boy. And she stayed there with them, but at that time they were separated, so the men would sleep in one side, and the women would sleep on another side with the two girls, and the man would sleep with the son.

**VanZandt:** With her father?

**Phan:** And she would sleep in that room with the girls and the mother, also. And her husband, now, he was a fisherman, and so at that time, he didn't have a home, but he would come and stay at their house, also, in the living room. And those people were really, really nice. They let them stay for no rent, and if he had money, he would pay them a hundred or two hundred dollars for electricity and stay there. But they didn't expect anything of him. So she stayed there, and her husband was there, and that's how they met.

**VanZandt:** And you fell in love in that house in Tampa.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And he was a fisherman off the coast there in Florida?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** He fished. And do you remember when you fell in love? What did you like about him?

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

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

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

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Well, at that time, she—(speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Well, so at that time she was just thinking that it was just the right thing to do. I just want a husband to take care of me. I will take care of him and his meal, and when he comes home, but I didn't want to go outside to work. And it was just right to get married so that he can do the hard labor. And then she said that that was her idea, but her father didn't like that idea.

**VanZandt:** Oh, he didn't.

**Phan:** And so I mean, she started seeing him, and they started getting to know each other better, but her father eventually said no, and they end up moving out, her and her father. But just—

**VanZandt:** What did he not approve of?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Oh. Her father said that he wasn't well off.

**VanZandt:** OK. He thought you could do better.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. OK. After they moved out for several months, their love was still strong, so she end up following her husband, and her father moved to Seattle, Washington.

**VanZandt:** Wow. So you had to make a choice, following Father's wishes or following your heart to go with the man you loved. And so what happened then? You got married after your father left?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh. So her and her husband, now, they actually got married when he was still in Florida, and they came and apologized and asked for his blessings prior to getting married. And so they got his blessings, and eventually he accepted him. And then after that, he found his second love, also.

**VanZandt:** Your father.

**Phan:** And that's when he moved to Seattle, Washington. She wanted to clarify that he did not move because I didn't follow his wishes. I asked for his blessings later on, and I got it, and then he had met a lady friend, and he moved up there to be with her.

**VanZandt:** Thank you for clarifying. I wondered that, yeah, that he went off to Seattle, if he was angry with you. But it wasn't that. He found a love, too. And so how did you get here to Biloxi from Tampa?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So they permanently closed where they usually go fishing. They closed it permanently, and so they had to relocate so that he can continue to be a fisherman around here in Biloxi, Mississippi.

**VanZandt:** How did he choose coming here to Biloxi rather than Texas or some other part of the coast? I just wondered if they'd been here before.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. He has a small boat, and they were able to go here and Louisiana, and along with that, they do have friends here.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. OK. So you moved to Biloxi. Do you remember what year that was?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Nineteen ninety-six.

**VanZandt:** Ninety-six, OK. And what did you think about Biloxi? What were your first impressions of Mississippi?

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

**Phan:** She said like now, she really like it now. It's real fun here. But maybe ten years ago, it was *so* boring. (laughter) There was nothing going on here.

**VanZandt:** I agree. It's changed a lot in ten years, casinos and a lot more to do.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. So when you first moved here, Hang, what was that like? Did you get a job? And tell me about what *you* did while your husband was fishing.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** I know she wanted to stay home, so I wondered if she got to do that.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. OK. So while her husband was continuing fishing, she stayed home, had his babies, and took care of [their] home. But after a while, after their daughter got a little bit older, she went and worked for a processing company for a couple months.

**VanZandt:** Seafood processing?

**Phan:** Seafood processing company for a couple months, and after that she applied to the—(speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Casino.

**Phan:** Yeah. And she applied to the Beau Rivage Casino at a restaurant there. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She was a prep cook there.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. Very nice. Good restaurants there. Well, let's back up a little bit. You have how many children?

**Nguyen:** I have four.

**VanZandt:** Four children. OK. And what are their names?

**Nguyen:** One Ronald, and Robert, John, Nancy.

**VanZandt:** Robert, Ronald, John, and Nancy, three boys, one girl.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Oh. Are they all out of the house now, grown up? How old are they?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Wow. OK. So her oldest son and the youngest son and the daughter still lives with her, but her second son had actually bought his own home, and he's taking care of himself. That's the one that you saw earlier.

**VanZandt:** OK, that we met.

**Phan:** That we met. He has his own home.

**VanZandt:** That's great. But he still comes back to see Mom. (laughter) That's good.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)



**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** He's a good boy.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He comes back home to visit.

**VanZandt:** Comes back to see you, yeah. Well, Hang, I'm very curious to know what it's like to be the wife of a fisherman, because they're gone a lot, and she has a lot of responsibility, the children and the house. Could she just talk about the challenges, maybe, of being a fisherman's wife?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She said, "I like it. It's not that hard. You just get used to it, him being away like every two weeks. Then he comes home." (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So she said she gets used to it because when he's away, he might be away for two weeks, but when he comes in, he can stay longer, too, if he wanted to, and that there's—(phone ringing)

**VanZandt:** Sure, we can stop. That's OK. (brief interruption; end of part one, beginning of part two) OK, picking up again. Hang, you were talking about being the wife of a fisherman and how you like it and taking care of the children. It sounds like you've had the life that you wanted, being at home. Then tell me about, just a little bit about your work. (laughter) The dog wants out. (laughter) I have one of those, too, who scratches at the door. So you went to work at the seafood processing plant. Which plant? Does she remember the name? The one—is it still around?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Lesso.

**VanZandt:** Lesso? OK. What did you do?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, she sat where the belt was, and she had to just pick out the shrimp heads and the fish.

**VanZandt:** OK. So mainly shrimp, or shrimp and fish.

**Phan:** Just separate—

**VanZandt:** Separate the shrimp.

**Phan:** —the fish and the heads from the shrimp.

**VanZandt:** OK. And how long did you work there?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Around four of five months.

**VanZandt:** Oh, not long. OK. And why did you leave?

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

**Phan:** No more shrimp.

**VanZandt:** No more shrimp? Really? When was that? What year?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Before Katrina or after?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Nineteen ninety-eight, '99.

**VanZandt:** OK. So bad year for shrimp then?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So she said around July, August, there was just less shrimp, and so she—it wasn't worth it for her to be there. She'd rather be at home. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Casino.

**Phan:** And then she applied for the casino.

**VanZandt:** OK. That's when you applied at the Beau Rivage, 1998, '97.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** In 1999.

**VanZandt:** OK. I can't remember when it was built. I guess it had been there for a while. And you worked in the kitchen, preparing food?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm, yeah.

**VanZandt:** How did you like that?

**Nguyen:** Good.

**VanZandt:** Good. Did you get to eat some, too? (laughter)

**Phan:** Of course!

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. She said they fed us well.

**VanZandt:** Did they? Was it a good place to work?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She liked it there, but it was not a lot of hours. She worked for five years there. She stayed with them for five years.

**VanZandt:** Not enough hours, part time?

**Nguyen:** Full time.

**VanZandt:** Full time, OK.

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

**Phan:** She was full time, but yet they (inaudible) her a lot, like during the times it's busy, she'll stay, but during times the casino would get slower, they would let people go home, so it's less time for her.

**VanZandt:** Well, and your children were in school then? So you would come home and take care of the children, or were they—

**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:** Well, her youngest is sixteen now, and all her other ones are like twenty, twenty-something, so.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm. So they could take care of themselves pretty well. Well, let's get to Hurricane Katrina. And were you working at the Beau Rivage during Hurricane Katrina? No. You had already left.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** OK. And staying at home then?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** OK. Well, just, if you would, just talk about Hurricane Katrina, whatever you'd like to share. Did you know it was coming? Did you evacuate? Just tell me your Katrina story, whatever you'd like to share.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** During that time she went with her husband, and they had the boat, and they went into exit thirty-eight [off I10]. That's Cowan-Lorraine [Road], right?

**VanZandt:** Back Bay, Cowan-Lorraine, in Back Bay?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Where all the boats went?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** You were on the boat with your husband? What about your children? Were they with you?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** The two older ones, they evacuated through the car, and the two younger ones—(a portion of the audio not related to the interview has not been transcribed). And the two younger ones, they went with us on the boat.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. And what was that like? Just tell me—we've heard stories how bad it was. Tell me about what that was like, riding out the storm on your boat.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. She said, "I mean, I'm so used to being on the boat that it was just like being at home. We just ate on the boat. It wasn't anything hard."

**VanZandt:** 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:** (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:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, yeah, OK.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. She said that, well, during the time when the hurricane was coming in, the trees and everything, it was going back and forth, and the water rose, and her boat had rose with it. But they were tied together with other boats, and so she wasn't scared. She just knew that they were just going to overcome it.

**VanZandt:** You had faith, again.

**Phan:** She had faith.

**VanZandt:** Just like when you left Vietnam.

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

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** No fear.

**VanZandt:** That's amazing. And was the boat damaged at all?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Her boats, they were mushed in a little, but they fixed it.

**VanZandt:** You were able to repair it and use it, again? Oh, so lucky. Yeah. Well, how long were you in Back Bay? Were you stuck, trapped back there when the [draw]bridge closed, or were you able to—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** —to get off of the—

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

**Phan:** Yeah. She said it's fun being on the boat. To her it was fun.

**VanZandt:** It was exciting, fun?

**Phan:** It was exciting. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Wow!

**Phan:** She has an adventurous soul.

**VanZandt:** Yes. You do.

**Phan:** Very adventurous soul.

**VanZandt:** In your house that we're sitting in right now, there's water this way, the Mississippi Sound south of us, and Back Bay. We're surrounded by water. Did you live in this house during Hurricane Katrina?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** The home that she was living in is actually still—well, when she had came back from evacuating, her house was still there, but it had moved. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Wow. Their house, she remembers there was just mud in it, and they could not get anything. And she tried to, just tried to get several of her clothes, but even with that, it was just smelly, and it was bad. So she had to toss all of it. So they actually lost their whole home, lost everything, their photos and everything that they had. All they had left was the boat. But they did buy this home prior to that, so they were able to fix this one up and move in this one.

**VanZandt:** So you moved into this home.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And was it damaged, too? Did it—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** So she bought it for maybe—(speaking in Vietnamese) two years?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**Phan:** Two years, and she had insurance on this home, so they had to redo *everything* in this home. It was like rebuilding a brand-new home, house.

**VanZandt:** And what happened to the other house that you lived in?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** They just have a piece of land there now, and they just go and maintain it by cutting grass.

**VanZandt:** You still have it. Well, tell me about those days right after Katrina, Hang, if you will, just what that was like. You had lost everything, and there wasn't much help here yet, early on. Where did she find help? And just about recovering those first few weeks afterwards, if she could talk about that.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)



**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** So she said help came three or four days after Katrina, and they were able to get water and food—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** —and clothes right after—

**VanZandt:** And what kind of help? Who was that from?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. She said that Red Cross was there, and many clothing companies actually brought down truckloads of clothes, and we were able to pick up water and ice at different places.

**VanZandt:** And I wonder, too; we're just off of Division Street, and the Buddhist temple is not far from here. And I remember they had a lot of goods to distribute. They were a lot of help. Did she go to the Buddhist temple at all for relief?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. The Buddhist temple, they provided her with noodles and fish sauce, and she was able to go there whenever she got a call from her friend.

**VanZandt:** That's good. Are you Buddhist, Hang?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. I'm Buddhist.

**VanZandt:** I thought so. I noticed your beautiful altar here. And I see some photographs, too. Is that your father, grandfather? Who are the photographs of?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Can I walk over and see, and you tell me?

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Oh, I'm so curious to see your family. Who is this?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. That's my husband's mother.

**VanZandt:** Your husband's mother. Is she still living?

**Phan:** No. Everyone on here is the ancestors that have passed away. And she actually just passed away.

**VanZandt:** And that's why you have the altar. She just passed away.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** My husband's father.

**VanZandt:** The second photograph.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) my father.

**Phan:** And that's her father.

**VanZandt:** This is your father with the smile? (laughter) You have the same smile.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** And that's her grandmother and grandfather.

**VanZandt:** OK. In the last picture frame? Do you know about how old your father was in that photo?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Sixty-five.

**VanZandt:** Sixty-five?!

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** We had the same reaction. He looks so young.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah, um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Was the photograph taken in Vietnam?

**Nguyen:** No. In Seattle.

**VanZandt:** Seattle, OK. And can you just talk a little bit, for the recorder, about your altar here, and what this means to you as a Buddhist?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She said, it's tradition. My parents did it. My grandparents did it. And so it's just tradition for me to do that in remembrance of them.

**VanZandt:** And the incense that you have lit, when do you light the incense, and what does that symbolize?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

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

**Phan:** She said, I just do it because of tradition. I know that some people, they pray. But for her it's just tradition.

**VanZandt:** Tradition, OK. And does it stay lit—I guess is my question—all day? Is that something that she does every day?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Every day.

**VanZandt:** OK. It's beautiful.

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

**Phan:** She just light whenever—well, this one right over here—

**VanZandt:** I wondered about this.

**Phan:** —is for wealth and fortune. And I always light up an incense prior to going to the casinos. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Oh, you do? (laughter)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Does it work?

**Phan:** Well, she said, no, it don't work. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** It doesn't work?

**Phan:** She said, but I do it because of tradition. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Tradition. (laughter) Of course, because some day it may.

**Phan:** Well, for some people it has more meaning to them.

**VanZandt:** Right, absolutely.

**Phan:** They pray, but for her it's just a tradition.

**VanZandt:** It's tradition.

**Phan:** It's strictly tradition. She doesn't believe that by burning an incense that it could bring her wealth or bring her good luck going to the casino. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** It's just something that you do. Yeah.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Routine and habit.

**Phan:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** It's beautiful. Well, tell me about—we can keep talking as we walk over here. So you still go to the casinos. Fairly often? You like that? And that's been a place for a lot of Vietnamese to be able to find jobs, too; it sounds like. Do you have friends who work in the casinos?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yes, I have friends that work in the casino.

**VanZandt:** OK. So like getting you into the movies, do they give you any free perks?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** She said, gosh, they just—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yes. They send me things in the mail all the time, every month, but it's a way of tricking me to go. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Well, you have been through a lot with Katrina. I'm just looking at your beautiful house. It must be nice to have a home again after six years now, six years since Katrina. How did your husband do, fishing after Katrina? Can you talk a little bit about that? I know we'll talk to him another day, but just briefly, how shrimping was after Katrina.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Right after Katrina he did not go for a year until the season started again, around—(speaking in Vietnamese).

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** The season started again in—was that—

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Two thousand and six is when he started going again, in May, 2006. And that year it was a prosperous year. He actually caught a lot that year.

**VanZandt:** And what is that like when he comes home? Does he bring some of his catch home for you to cook and process?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** And what kind of dishes do you make with that, Hang? What are some of your favorite seafood dishes?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** She has a variety of food that she cooks, but she doesn't have anything in particular that she leans towards. And that was her answer.

**VanZandt:** I wondered, since you cooked and prepped at the casino in the kitchen, and then cooking a lot at home, if you had any special things your family likes.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Just like, I have a lot of seafood, so she likes to eat meat.

**VanZandt:** Oh! You get a little tired of seafood. (laughter) OK. Well, do you think your children, any of the boys in particular, would consider going into the seafood business, fishing, following in your husband's tradition?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** She said no.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** They just want to go to school or work for a company, but I don't think that they're going to be fishing.

**VanZandt:** How does your husband feel about that? Is that OK with him, or would he like them to learn the trade?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** He's fine with it now. Yeah. And she also said that he's not shrimping right now, either.

**VanZandt:** He's not shrimping, OK. And I know we'll talk to him more about that, but is that because of the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill, that he's not shrimping right now?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Oh, OK. After the oil spill, so they just sold their boat maybe a month ago.

**VanZandt:** Oh, just a month ago.

**Phan:** A month ago, so they won't be fishing any time soon, but they have plans to buy another boat when things get better.

**VanZandt:** OK. So the decision to sell the boat was because nothing's happening now because of the oil spill, but you're hopeful that later, things will pick up and get better?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Well, they just gave me a good price for my boat, and so I just decided, me and my husband decided to sell it, but—

**VanZandt:** Was that to another shrimper here?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** In Alabama. They're from Alabama. (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. They were fishermen, as well, and they just gave them a good price, and so they sold it. And they're looking and hopeful to find another one.

**VanZandt:** Well, how has the oil spill impacted you and your husband, his job, and your family?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** It did at first; it affected us because we weren't able to go fishing. But they were able to provide us with jobs to clean up, and so—

**VanZandt:** Your husband worked in the cleanup?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm, yeah.

**VanZandt:** What did he do? Was it the Vessels of Opportunity program?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah, the Vessels of Opportunity.



**VanZandt:** So he used his boat and went out?

**Phan:** Right.

**VanZandt:** Laid the boom.

**Phan:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And how long did that last? Does she remember how long he had work through that program?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Maybe two months.

**VanZandt:** And that was hard to get. I understand not many fishermen were able to get those jobs. So he was very lucky, it sounds like, to have that. And so you're kind of waiting now to see what happens. But it sounds like he plans on going back out and continuing shrimping.

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

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. Well, she experienced whenever there are waves, the places that they thought that there was no oil, they would shrimp there, but when the waves came in, the oil started appearing again. And we had shrimp, but the company wouldn't buy it, and so we can't go there to fish or shrimp.

**VanZandt:** Was that in Mississippi waters where the oil was?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, he had to go to Louisiana because Mississippi have no shrimp. It's a bad season for Mississippi.

**VanZandt:** But there was actually oil on the shrimp? And brought it to shore and was not able to sell it because of the oil?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** They smell it on their seafood.

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** And so they would not buy it.

**VanZandt:** And who was that? Who would he have sold to? Who does he usually sell to?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese) Lesso.

**Phan:** Lesso.

**VanZandt:** Lesso, OK. Well, is he still hearing that that's what's happening? Is that still an issue for his friends who are out, shrimping?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, they said that in Louisiana there's still a lot of oil out there, and a lot of fishes are dying because of the oil.

**VanZandt:** And your husband's boat, what size would you say it is? How long? How many feet?

**Nguyen:** Oh. My boat?

**VanZandt:** Um-hm.

**Nguyen:** Seventy-three.

**VanZandt:** Seventy-three feet.

**Nguyen:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Oh, that's a good size. Is it a freezer boat?

**Nguyen:** Oh, no.

**VanZandt:** No freezer boat, right. So that's why you stay closer in.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** OK. And where does he dock? I know you've sold it, but where did he dock it? Back Bay or the [Biloxi] Small Craft Harbor? Where did he keep it?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Back Bay.

**VanZandt:** Back Bay, OK. And what was the name of it?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. It's where we went to last time. Do remember what that—

**VanZandt:** Yeah.

**Phan:** What's that called?

**VanZandt:** Well, I meant the boat, the name of the boat.

**Phan:** That's Back Bay?

**VanZandt:** That's the Back Bay.

**Phan:** The Back Bay Harbor.

**VanZandt:** Right.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Well, when they had it, it was called *Captain John*, her third son's name.

**VanZandt:** I think I've seen that boat out there. I've been there a lot around the docks. So he had that a long time, that boat.

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** How many years? Was that the same boat that he had when he first came from Tampa?

**Nguyen:** About ten year.

**VanZandt:** Ten years, wow. Through Katrina?

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Well, I guess we ought to maybe finish up here because I'm sure you have things to do. And I just wanted to ask you if there's anything at all that you would like to say to your children or grandchildren, years, a hundred years from now, family who may hear this. You've been through so much, and you've made it through a lot of adversity, hard times, and a lot of fun times. And anything at all, favorite memory, advice for your children, anything at all that you'd like to share that we haven't talked about.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

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

**Phan:** Yeah. She said if they're able to just listen to this and just hear her story, that's all she has to say is everything that she's put into this.

**VanZandt:** Thank you so much. You have the best laugh. I love your laugh and your smile. I'm so glad they'll get to hear that. (laughter)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** And the joy in your heart, they'll hear.

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Can I ask one more thing? I'm sorry. I usually don't do that. But I just wondered, thinking about your children, what freedom means to you? Your life would have been very different if you had stayed in Vietnam with your father. Any thoughts about that, about how your life here has been different, and what freedom might mean?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Well, she said she's went back to visit, and her heart is here. And while she was there, she just couldn't wait to come back home. And she calls this home now. Yeah. And she said that, I don't think I would have as much freedom there as the freedom that I have here in America.

**VanZandt:** How's your mother doing?

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

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

**Phan:** Yeah. Well, her mom is doing well in Vietnam. She's not doing much, but [she said], I do send her some money sometimes.

**VanZandt:** I'm glad she's doing well.

**Phan:** And then I said, "If she doesn't have that support, what do you think she would be doing?" And she said, "She probably in sales, again."

**VanZandt:** In sales, going to the market. Is she still in Can Tho?

**Phan:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Nguyen:** Um-hm.

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

**Nguyen:** (speaking in Vietnamese)

**Phan:** Yeah. So the house that she used to live in, that's where she lives.

**VanZandt:** The same house, wow.

**Phan:** Same house.

**VanZandt:** I'm glad you still have that to visit. Thank you so much, Hang. I appreciate it.

**Nguyen:** OK.

(end of interview)