

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

Kha Van Nguyen

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt  
Interpreter: Khai Nguyen

Volume 1043  
2011

This project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration through Mississippi State University-Northern Gulf Institute, Grant Number NA06OAR4320264. Louis M. Kyriakoudes, Principal Investigator.

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*An Oral History with Kha Van Nguyen, Volume 1043*

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## Biography

Mr. Kha Van Nguyen was born in 1950 in Phat Diem, in the north of Vietnam. In 1954, when Vietnam was divided into North and South, he moved with his family first to Da Nang, then My Tho and Can Tho, finally settling in Vung Tau in Phuoc Tuy Province, South Vietnam. Mr. Nguyen helped his father catch fish to sell to the market. When Mr. Nguyen was thirteen years old, his father died so he quit school to become a fisherman to help support his mother and four siblings. In 1969, at age eighteen, Mr. Nguyen was drafted into the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army) and served as a non-commissioned officer to protect the area where he lived, until 1973. After leaving the Army, Mr. Nguyen married Nu Thi Tran and together they had a daughter. He began fishing on his father-in-law's boat.

On April 30, 1975, Mr. Nguyen escaped bombing in Vung Tau port, taking his pregnant wife, daughter, and some soldiers with him, and left Vietnam by boat. After stays in the Philippines, then Guam, they arrived at Fort Chaffee, Arkansas, where his son was born. Mr. Nguyen spent time in the Beaumont, Port Arthur, Texas area before settling in New Orleans. After welding for a few years, Mr. Nguyen bought his own boat and began shrimping Mississippi waters in 1979. Mr. Nguyen's son shrimped with him for ten years on his boat, *South Wind*. Mr. Nguyen assisted Father Vien of Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church (New Orleans East) with the immediate recovery efforts in their community after Hurricane Katrina. He authored a Vietnamese language book about his Katrina experience.

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## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

KHA VAN NGUYEN

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

**Interviewer's Note:** Interviewee, Mr. Kha, speaks Vietnamese with some English throughout the interview. Khai translates/interprets Mr. Kha's Vietnamese responses into English to Ms. VanZandt. Vietnamese transcriber's English translation of Vietnamese language passages are italicized and appear in parentheses below the passage. Ms. VanZandt's responses and follow-up questions were in response only to Khai's interpretation during the interview. There is additional information revealed here, post-interview, in the italicized transcribed passages. Also, there is additional information, spoken in Vietnamese, on the recording that was not transcribed.

**VanZandt:** I'm Linda VanZandt and I'm here at the office of Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation, in their office in New Orleans East, in the Versailles Community. I'm here with Khai Nguyen, who will be offering interpretation, and here with a long-time resident of this community, who has written a book [Vietnamese language] about his [Hurricane] Katrina experiences. So we will talk about that, too. Thank you so much for being here today.

**Kha:** You're welcome. I would like to meet you and Khai today and talking about, share with you about my personal history from Vietnam to the United States.

**VanZandt:** Wonderful. We're so thankful that you're willing to share. Could you first state your name?

**Kha:** My real name my father put for me, D-O-A-I.

**VanZandt:** D-O-A-I?

**Kha:** Yeah, I mean—Khai, explain; interpret it for me. OK? Rừng gỗ quý ngoài Bắc tên là Doài nên bố chú đặt tên đó.

*(There was a forest in the northern region of Vietnam is called Doai, so my dad named me Doai.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He said his father named him Doai, D-O-A-I, after this jungle—

**Kha:** Jungle—(speaking Vietnamese).

**Khai:** —in the north of Vietnam that's had really good, it had a lot of trees that were good, good for wood, for making wood out of.

**VanZandt:** Strong. Good, strong name.

**Kha:** Yeah. Nhung khi vào miền Nam năm 1954, giấy tờ mất hết, gia đình bị tan – giống như Katrina, mỗi người đi mỗi nơi, ông bác mới đặt cho bác một tên khác: Nguyễn Đình Trung.

*(When we moved to the South in 1954, and lost all of our personal documents, so my uncle named me Nguyen Dinh Trung.)*

**Khai:** OK. And he said in 1954, when they had to move south, the paperwork for the family, you know, was lost and everything. And each person, a lot of people had to go different ways and so.

**Kha:** Hồi bác 4 tuổi bà cố công bác trên vai chạy vào miền nam. Ông bác mới đặt tên khác: Vũ Đình Trung.

*(When I was four, my great-grandmother carried me on her back to move to the South. My uncle named me Nguyen Dinh Trung.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He was four years old and (speaking Vietnamese)—

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese) OK. His uncle gave him another name. It's Trung Nguyen. T-R-U-N-G. Nguyen is the last name. Middle name is Đình. And this is when he was four. And (speaking Vietnamese)?

**Kha:** Đến năm 1975 sợ là Việt Cộng bắt được bác, bác mất hết giấy tờ. Khi vào Mỹ, chính bác đặt tên cho bác là Nguyễn Văn Kha. Tên đó là sử dụng trên giấy tờ của bác bây giờ.

*(In 1975, I was captured by the Viet Cong, and lost my documents again. So when I came to America, I named myself Nguyen Van Kha. That is the name that I use on most of my paperwork right now.)*

**Khai:** And he said in 1975, when he came to America, he didn't have paperwork then either, and so then he, himself, decided to change his name to Kha, K-H-A, Nguyen. That's the name he uses now.

**VanZandt:** Kha, K-H-A, Nguyen, N-G-U-Y-E-N.

**Kha:** Yeah. And V-A-N.

**Khai:** Is his middle name.

**VanZandt:** V-A-N is his middle name, OK. Kha Van Nguyen.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** So you've had two names before this name now that you use.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Ah.

**Kha:** And then name for, ah—

**VanZandt:** And your pen name now for your book! (laughter)

**Kha:** Pen name, yes. (shy laugh)

**VanZandt:** So four names. Is it OK if I call you Mr. Nguyen? (laughter)

**Kha:** Yes! And I would like tell you what, I mean, Văn là biểu tượng cho giống đực. Là biểu tượng cho đàn ông. Bác không muốn mất chữ đó.

*(Van means masculinity. I don't want to lose that word.)*

**Khai:** Yeah, yeah. He said his middle name is very important because—(speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** It's a usual man's middle name in Vietnamese. He wants to keep Van.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. Very important for you to carry on that tradition, Van.

**Kha:** Nhưng giờ bác nhìn người Việt bây giờ mất hết chữ đó. Cái đó là không có được.

*(Most Vietnamese nowadays don't use that word. That is not good.)*

**Khai:** He says now he sees a lot of people, they don't have that middle name. And he sees that as not good because you know he feels that's part of Vietnamese culture, having—(speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** You know, just like, that's just something that most Vietnamese, you know—

**Kha:** T-H-I, (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** —between men and women, yeah, Van is the usual middle name for men, and Thi, T H I, is the usual middle name for a woman. And so he would like people to keep doing that.

**Kha:** Bởi khi sang đây, người ngoại quốc họ không hiểu, họ xem chữ đó là sư thừa, họ cắt đi, nhưng mà không được, đó là biểu tượng cho phái nam và phái nữ.

*(Because when we came to America, foreign people don't understand the middle word, and they think that it is not necessary, but that is used to distinguish man and woman.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He was saying that he felt like whenever non-Vietnamese people saw the name, they just thought, “Oh, everyone’s named the same, so we’ll just forget about the middle name.” So he didn’t like that too much.

**VanZandt:** It sounds like it’s a way of keeping your identity.

**Kha:** Um-hm, yeah!

**VanZandt:** Very important to you.

**Kha:** Yeah!

**VanZandt:** I understand.

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

**VanZandt:** And I’m so glad you told that story because, as an American—

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** —I see many people have the common last name Nguyen, from the Nguyen Dynasty, but I don’t see the Van used very often, so I didn’t realize that.

**Kha:** Yeah. Nếu người Việt Nam không ý thức được điều này thì sẽ làm đánh mất một phần văn hóa của người Việt. Phải cố động hay sao để mình giữ được điều đó.

*(If the Vietnamese people don't realize this, they will lose a part of their culture. We need to motivate people to keep it.)*

**Khai:** Yeah, yeah. He’s saying that losing that is like losing a part of your culture, and so he would like people to recognize it more, maybe even from the Vietnamese community because the younger people—

**VanZandt:** Younger generations. Very important, I understand. It’s very easy for the younger people born in America to lose track of their Vietnamese history.

**Kha:** *Yeah, yeah.*

**VanZandt:** And that’s one of the reasons we’re doing this.

**Kha:** *Yeah.* I worry about that, that the young people, my second and third [generations], they lose, they lose—(speaking Vietnamese)



**VanZandt:** Yes, I'm so glad you said that. So you were born in 1950? Is that when you—

**Kha:** Yes. In 1950. In '54, very (inaudible) (laughter)

**VanZandt:** [The battle of] Dien Bien Phu—

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**VanZandt:** —in '54.

**Kha:** Fifty-four, I moved to South Vietnam.

**VanZandt:** Yes, Vietnam split into two, North and South.

**Kha:** Yeah, um-hm, war.

**VanZandt:** Very important year of the war.

**Kha:** From the Communists, Communists, and, I don't know, Cochinchina War, Vietnam War.

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Kha:** [Nineteen] fifty-four.

**VanZandt:** Yes. The French and the Communists, the Viet Minh.

**Kha:** Yeah. French and China and Russia.

**VanZandt:** Right, Russia.

**Kha:** For, until '75, America. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Too many.

**Kha:** Yeah, too many! (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Too many foreign wars being fought on Vietnam's soil.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** You were very young. Do you have any memories of North Vietnam? I know you were only four.

**Kha:** Four, uh-huh.

**VanZandt:** Any stories that you remember your father—

**Kha:** The only thing I remember, I *never*, I *never* forget; I think it follow me until I die, *very important*. When the airplane from France come, they put [meaning dropped] the bomb in North Vietnam. And my mother, my mother, my family break

into small group, because my family about twenty people living together in a small area. But when the war, everybody divide small group, and easy to hide, to hide [from] the bomb. And my mother take me and my first, my brother. Then, my mother have two children. And my mother take care of me and my brother, young brother. And the other uncle, my father's uncle, help my mother swim, on small boat, small, small boat; try to, looking for some, some trees and get in and hide, yeah, hide when the airplane put the bomb. And pull one more, one small boat, look like two boat, and my eyes, my look like picture. I see the airplane come, *brummmmmm*, and they put the bomb. And I see my mother (speaks Vietnamese word)—

**Khai:** Carry.

**VanZandt:** Carry?

**Kha:** —carry my young brother. And then my mother keep my hand, and my mother say, "Jesus, Maria (speaks Vietnamese); Jesus, Maria (speaks Vietnamese)." K, k, k, my mother *jumped, jumped* on the river.

**VanZandt:** In the water.

**Kha:** Yeah. Leave the boat, jump. Because of my uncle, he hide first; he run first. He leave my mother and me and my brother. And my mother going to, keep (inaudible). If don't jump under the water, maybe die from bombs; my mother jump, jump down and *pull* me, *pull* me. And I look, I look on the back and the bomb put exactly on the small boat.

**VanZandt:** Where you would have been.

**Kha:** Yeah. Four year old. I *remember, exactly*.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness.

**Kha:** *Very*—oh, my God.

**VanZandt:** *Oh*, my goodness, Mr. Nguyen. So you [had] a very narrow escape from the bomb.

**Kha:** Um-hm. Yeah. I am a witness in the war. And that picture put on my head until now about war, when I small, little boy, and I witness about—so that why my motherland, I feel hurt, hurt in my, in (speaks Vietnamese)—

**Khai:** Heart.

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** (speaking simultaneously) Heart.

**Kha:** Yeah, in my heart, I'm thinking about the, the war, in my motherland.

**VanZandt:** It never leaves you.

**Kha:** Hm.

**VanZandt:** It never leaves your heart.

**Kha:** Never. I thank you for, for you ask the question.

**VanZandt:** Yes. I'm very interested because this is not something we hear very much. And you are one of the few living witnesses still alive to tell this story. And where was your father? Was your father alive at this time?

**Kha:** My father go with another small group.

**VanZandt:** OK. So you were separated.

**Kha:** Because we have about five, six small boat. In the North Vietnam, they go by fishing boat (inaudible), so they had them.

**VanZandt:** What was your father's occupation? What did your father do, his job?

**Khai:** Bố của chú làm nghề gì?

*(What does your dad do?)*

**Kha:** Bắt cá, bắt tôm. Mà cái tàu nó nhỏ lắm. Small boat, small skiff boat, because it very poor in the North Vietnam.

*(Fishing and shrimping. But his boat is very small.)*

**VanZandt:** And I didn't ask for the record, where you grew up, where in North Vietnam. Can you say the name of your village, where you were born?

**Kha:** Phát Diệm- Ninh Bình.

**VanZandt:** Phát Diệm?

**Kha:** Phát Diệm, yeah.

**VanZandt:** P-H-A-T, D-I-E-M?

**Kha:** Right, right, right.

**VanZandt:** OK, yes.

**Kha:** You been there? You know? You been there?

**VanZandt:** I know of it. I have not been there, only in the South. But not too far from Hai Phong?

**Kha:** Yeah, not too far.

**VanZandt:** Hai Phong was a very important base and port during the war.

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

**VanZandt:** And so your father was a fisherman?

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** OK. Can you remember at all what your house looked like when you were a little child living there? Can you describe [your] house, where [you] lived?

**Kha:** Không thể nhớ được.

*(Can't remember.)*

**Khai:** He doesn't remember.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah, yeah. He said the only thing he could remember was the moment he described earlier because it was such a big memory. But everything else, he was too young to remember anything else.

**VanZandt:** I understand.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** So when you left the North to move south, what do you remember about that journey to the South? Any memories?

**Kha:** Oh, we go under, look like, somebody save for French ship, American ship. I don't remember exactly—

**VanZandt:** You went on an American ship?

**Kha:** No, no, went to South Vietnam by big ship, ship.

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Kha:** Go to Da Nang.

**VanZandt:** To Da Nang.

**Kha:** Da Nang. (speaks Vietnamese) Da Nang.

**VanZandt:** In 1954?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Do you remember that trip on the ship? Any memories?

**Kha:** I remember I swim on the sw—

**Khai:** Swimming pool?

**VanZandt:** They had a swimming pool?

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah, he said, on the ship.

**VanZandt:** They had a swimming pool? Nice.

**Khai:** And he said he just remembers swimming in the swimming pool.

**VanZandt:** Right. So you could swim!

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** You got to Da Nang.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Then where did you go from Da Nang? Did you stay there?

**Kha:** Sau này lớn lên, nghe kể lại, mình đến Mỹ Tho làm ăn sinh sống, rồi không được mới trở về Phước Tuy.

*(I heard people said that we moved to My Tho, Can Tho, then move back to Phuoc Tuy.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken is not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** He said he doesn't remember any of this himself. It's just more what other older people told him afterwards.

**VanZandt:** Sure.

**Khai:** But he said for a while his family, they went to several different villages like My Tho, M-Y T-H-O.

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Khai:** But they never really got settled there. And then afterwards—(speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese) But then they finally settled in Phuoc Tuy.

**Kha:** Phuoc Tuy.

**VanZandt:** Phuoc Tuy. Do you know how to spell that?

**Khai:** P-H-U-O-C, T—(speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** Phuoc Tuy—

**Khai:** T-U-Y.

**Kha:** T-U-Y, Phuoc Tuy.

**VanZandt:** OK.

**Kha:** Near Ba Ria. (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** B-A, R-I-A.

**VanZandt:** OK. Was that south of My Tho and Can Tho, in the South?

**Kha:** My Tho.

**Khai:** (speaks Vietnamese) South?

**Kha:** It was South, South Vietnam.

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** It was around the area.

**VanZandt:** OK. I have a map. (pulls out map of Vietnam)

**Kha:** Oh, yeah!

**VanZandt:** Would you be able to show me where that is in South Vietnam? Here's Can Tho. (pointing to map)

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah, Can Tho. There My Tho, like that, right here.

**Khai:** Right.

**VanZandt:** Right.

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** My Tho, Ben Tre, and Tra Vinh, yeah.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm.

**Kha:** From the North, go to Da Nang, and go to My Tho, then come back to Vung Tau. I grow up in Vung Tau.

**VanZandt:** Oh, in Vung Tau! OK.

**Kha:** I go to school in Vung Tau. I go to school—(speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Elementary?

**Khai:** Yeah, elementary.

**Kha:** Elementary, yeah, (chuckle) in Vung Tau.

**VanZandt:** (chuckle) OK. A fishing village, Vung Tau, fishing? Beautiful beaches.

**Kha:** Oh, yeah, very *beautiful*, Vung Tau.

**VanZandt:** Yes. And did you move there so that your father could continue fishing?

**Kha:** Yes. My father keep work on the fishing, and I go to school.

**VanZandt:** Go to school.

**Kha:** For until my father, dad die, so.

**VanZandt:** When did he die?

**Kha:** Oh, when he die, I'm about thirteen year old.

**VanZandt:** You were thirteen?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** What happened? What happened?

**Kha:** He was sick or something. Yeah. What, I'm—

**VanZandt:** Not sure?

**Kha:** I don't know what reason my father [died], but my father dead. Then I leave school because my mother cannot enough money, have. I quit.

**VanZandt:** You needed to go to work to help the family?

**Kha:** Yeah, right, exactly.

**VanZandt:** And did you take over the fishing then? Did you start fishing?

**Kha:** [Not] until I my father dead, so I go to fishing. I like go to school, but I'm not be able to go to school, and my mother not be able to help, so I have a job for help my mother. Because that's why, my mother have five children, so I need to help my mother, to help my, my—

**VanZandt:** Your siblings.

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**VanZandt:** Were you the oldest, Mr. Nguyen?

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Oldest son.

**Kha:** Yeah, uh-huh, the oldest son. Before, two my brother dead in the North. Then I go to, then I grow up, eighteen year old, I get on the Army [of the Republic of Vietnam, ARVN, or South Vietnamese Army].

**VanZandt:** Ah. (laughter) Drafted?

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Oh.

**Kha:** (inaudible)

**VanZandt:** OK. Well, a lot happened in your—

**Kha:** (chuckle) Say a lot happen. (shy laughter)

**VanZandt:** Can I back up a little bit?

**Kha:** Oh, yeah.

**VanZandt:** So you said you liked school?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And I'm interested because you wrote a book. What kind of subjects did you like in school? What were your favorite things to study?

**Khai:** Lớp gì chú thích nhất? Subject.

*(What was your favorite class?)*

**Kha:** Bác học không thông minh mấy, chỉ thích đi học.

*(I was not very smart at school, but I liked to go to school.)*

**Khai:** He's saying that he wasn't a very good student, he just liked going to school, having to learn things. At this point he didn't know what he really liked, what subjects he really liked. But he just liked, just going to school.

**Kha:** Bác còn một năm mới xong trung học, nhưng mà bố mất nên không học được nữa.

*(I had one more year until I could finish middle school, but I couldn't go to school anymore because my dad died.)*

**Khai:** And he said he only had one year to finish up that level of schooling, but since his father died, he didn't finish it.



**VanZandt:** So you went through elementary school, up to what grade? Maybe seventh grade?

**Khai:** Lớp mấy ah?

*(What grade was it?)*

**Kha:** Tại vì level của VN và của Mỹ khác nhau, bác chỉ biết nó là đệ ngũ.

*(Because the level in Vietnam is different, I only know that it is called De Ngu.)*

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** He's saying that he doesn't know the grade in Vietnamese, but in Vietnam, that certain level is called De Ngu. I don't know what grade it goes up to, compared to English.

**VanZandt:** What was it called?

**Kha:** Khoảng lớp 10 bên này thôi.

*(About 10 grade here.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. It was about tenth grade, probably around tenth grade.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK.

**Khai:** Over here, so. And then, that was the first level, I guess, going from first grade to tenth grade, I think. But that would be either first, well, I guess scale. I don't know what—

**VanZandt:** That's OK, yeah. Can you just tell me what—paint a picture for me—what daily life was like growing up in Vung Tau? What kind of things did you like to do as a boy, young boy?

**Khai:** Ở Vũng Tàu thì chú thích làm gì?

*(What did you like to do in Vung Tau?)*

**Kha:** Thích đi học về rồi tắm biển, mùa nghỉ hè thì xin bố xuống tàu giúp bố, gỡ cá dính trong lưới, bán lấy tiền giúp cho bố mẹ.

*(I like to go to the beach after school. In the summer, I asked to come help my dad on his fishing boat, take the fishes out of the net and sell them for money.)*

**Khai:** He said it would usually be, he'd go to school, and then he'd go to the beach, go swimming in the ocean, and in the summers he would help his dad on fishing trips;

help take the fish that were stuck in the nets out, and then after that, help his father sell the fish.

**Kha:** Với bác thích ai cho tiền thì bác đi xem phim, như 007 của Mỹ, phim về điệp viên..

*(I like to go watch movies like 007. I like movies about spy.)*

**Khai:** Oh. (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese) (chuckle)

**Khai:** A spy?

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese) James Bond.

**Khai:** James Bond. Yeah, yeah, yeah. (laughter)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. He said whenever he got some money, he loved going to the movies and watching American movies. I mean he said, “007,” which I figured was that, but I just wanted to make sure.

**VanZandt:** Very good! You know James Bond. (laughter) Great movies. And so you got a little money and went to the movies and watched James Bond.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And fantasized that you were a spy, that you were James Bond, 007, secret agent. (laughter) That’s great.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese) (laughter)

**VanZandt:** That is great. So that was your introduction to America, James Bond movies? (chuckle)

**Kha:** Yeah. Sang đây mình học được rất nhiều cái hay.

*(I learned a lot of interesting things since I came here.)*

**Khai:** He said ever since he’s moved over here, he’s found a lot of great things about what possibilities are, from just seeing movies and stuff is one thing, but then actually seeing all these, hearing all this stuff that’s outside Vietnam, it’s good.

**VanZandt:** Broadening your horizons, leaving. Well, you were twenty-five years old—

**Kha:** When I come to United States.

**VanZandt:** In 1975, right. And you said that you were drafted into the Army, South Vietnamese Army.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Tell me about that. How old were you when you were drafted into the Army?

**Kha:** Eighteen year old.

**VanZandt:** Eighteen.

**Kha:** Cái luật 18 tuổi là phải vào quân đội. Bởi vì đất nước có chiến tranh, mình phải bảo vệ xứ sở của mình. Bác không thích giết hại lẫn nhau nhưng mình phải bảo vệ xứ sở của mình.

*(The law said that we had to go to the military at the age of 18. Because we had war, we have to protect our land. We don't like to kill, but we have to protect our land.)*

**Khai:** He said at that point, once he had turned eighteen, you had to join the Army.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. He said he felt like he had to join the Army to protect their way of life.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** He said he doesn't like the killing that comes with war, but he feels like they have to do it because, to protect their land, to protect their way of life.

**VanZandt:** You must have felt very strongly because your father left, escaped the North, Communism—

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** —to come to the South. And then in 1968, very strong fighting in the Vietnam War.

**Kha:** Um-hm. Yeah. Mậu Thân, Tết Mậu Thân.

*(Yeah. New Year of 1968.)* **VanZandt:** Tet, the Tet Offensive.

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Very important year. You being drafted—

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Tell me about that, your training, and being drafted. How did you feel when you found out you were going into the Army?

**Khai:** Lúc chú mới vô linh chú thấy sao?

*(What did you think when you first joined the military?)*

**Kha:** Ngày xưa còn trẻ, mình nung nấu muốn làm một điều gì đó cho quê hương. Mình muốn hi sinh.

*(When I was young, I wanted to do something for my country. I want to sacrifice.)*

*(some Vietnamese spoken was not transcribed or translated in above passage)*

**Khai:** He says, at that age, he felt like he really wanted to do something to make a difference for his country. He wanted to be a part of it.

**VanZandt:** So you felt patriotism for your country?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** How did you feel about the *American* presence in Vietnam, fighting? Did you feel like the Americans should be there helping fight Communism?

**Khai:** Khi Mỹ vào Việt Nam chiến tranh chú nghĩ sao?

*(What did you think when the American soldiers come to Vietnam?)*

**Kha:** Chú đọc báo thấy người Mỹ, về chính trị, thì nó nhiều lắm. Theo Bác thì chú thấy người Mỹ tốt, muốn giúp quê hương mình, nhưng trong political nhiều phe phái, họ không thống nhất gây ra nhiều xáo trộn. Nhưng từ khi tổng thống Ngô Đình Diệm bị giết chết, là bác bắt đầu. Từ đó bác có cảm giác là đất nước này sẽ lâm nguy.

*(I read a lot of newspaper about the American, and politics. I think the American people are good people. They want to help our country, but there are different political groups that cause turmoils. I did not like it when President Diem got assassinated. I felt like our country was endangered.)*

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (chuckle) OK. (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** He said in terms of, in his opinion, he liked that the Americans were willing to help, were helping the Southern Vietnamese Army. But in terms of the politics, and everything like that, once Ngo Dinh Diem [South Vietnam's president] was assassinated, he felt that the Americans let that happen. He felt like it wasn't as, I guess, safe as—it was a lot more dangerous than he thought because, you know, how could the Americans let that happen? And stuff like that.**Kha:** (speaks Vietnamese) When they kill the president, Ngo Dinh Diem—

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Kha:** —then I—(speaking Vietnamese) I feel that very dangerous, very dangerous for my land, for my nation. Then—(speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah, yeah. He was saying that he knew that President [John F.] Kennedy was assassinated, too. And so that whole time period, people, it just seemed like the world was a really dangerous place.

**Kha:** Very *confusing*. That's why they, not ever control, organize, in the war.

**VanZandt:** It must have felt out of control.

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah.

**VanZandt:** A shock.

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

**VanZandt:** First Kennedy, then Diem. [President Diem was killed twenty days before President Kennedy.]

**Kha:** Um-hm, um-hm.

**VanZandt:** People were very surprised. And so what did you feel like was the danger? What could happen then? That the Communists might have better control then? Because there was a *new* president after Diem. How did you feel about the new president?

**Kha:** Um-hm. They keep (chuckle), they keep—Các tướng tranh chấp nhau..và dựa dẫm và người Mỹ.

*(The generals were fighting each other and relied on the American.)*

**Khai:** Everyone was trying to get power from each other and not—

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Jockeying for control.

**Kha:** Um-hm, yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. And always trying to lean on the Americans.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. He said they should've tried to shore things up on their end first, and then, instead of leaning on Americans for everything from the beginning. And that's—

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** And he was saying that if they took care of things on their end first, [instead of] the Americans for help, but you can't lean on them for everything.

**Kha:** Giống như trong cơn bão Katrina. Nhà cửa sập thì mình sửa lại, rồi sau đó chính phủ cũng giúp cho mình thôi. Đây cứ ngồi chờ thì chết thôi.

*(Like Katrina, we had to rebuild the houses, then the government also helped.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He was saying it's sort of like [Hurricane] Katrina because his community wasn't very well organized after Katrina. Everyone decided to help each other out, put money into rebuilding even before government programs were out there to help. And then having all that, having the community organize together *first*, it helped a lot because when everybody came in, it just helped them out more, instead of just waiting from the beginning and not doing rehab before, that made it a really difficult process.

**VanZandt:** Very interesting.

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** Lessons learned from Katrina and how people, like you said, worked together—

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** —to make a stronger foundation.

**Kha:** Yes, yes.

**VanZandt:** But that didn't happen after Diem was assassinated.

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** I see. So when you were drafted, tell me about your training. Where did you go for training? Do you remember any memories about being trained in the Army?

**Kha:** Oh, in Quang Trung? I register in Quang Trung, in Saigon. And I come back to my local, Vạn Kiếp, Vạn Kiếp; Army training in Vạn Kiếp, Phước Tuy [Province], six months. [Vạn Kiếp was the site of the ARVN Jungle Warfare Training Center.]

**VanZandt:** Six months training?

**Kha:** Six-month training. Actually, training three month, but we are very special, protect Phước Tuy, Phước Tuy. Look my New Orleans, protect—

**VanZandt:** Like your community?

**Kha:** Yeah. Like the community Phước Tuy.

**VanZandt:** You were security—

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** —to protect your community.

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**VanZandt:** Ah. Very important.

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** So that was *your* job in the Army?

**Kha:** Um-hm, um-hm.

**VanZandt:** So you stayed in that area, your home area?

**Kha:** Um-hm. No.

**VanZandt:** Where did you—

**Kha:** We had no home. Living in the trees, my house.

**VanZandt:** In the trees? (laughter)

**Kha:** In the tree, my house.

**VanZandt:** You mean, when you were in the Army, you lived in the trees.

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Kha:** But when I work on Army, it keep looking day and nighttime.

**VanZandt:** You moved [around]?

**Kha:** Yeah, moved somewhere. But, I mean, a month we have to go back to—hậu cứ. Sống trong rừng là chủ yếu.

*(We lived mostly in the jungle.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** Yeah, uh-huh. They pretty much just lived in the trees, and then every month, they were able to do some R and R [rest and relaxation].

**VanZandt:** Right. Go back home, or somewhere, Saigon or somewhere.

**Kha:** 1 tháng được 2 bộ quần áo, ăn cơm Mỹ tiếp tế cho ăn.. Cực lắm.

*(We got two pairs of clothes per month and got food from the American. Very tough.)*

**Khai:** Mỗi tháng 1 lần à?

*(Once a month?)*

**Kha:** Ừ.

*(Yes.)*

**VanZandt:** Sleeping in the trees, wherever—

**Kha:** Có cái võng.

*(We had a hammock.)*

**VanZandt:** A hammock? (laughter)

**Khai:** Yeah. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Sling, hang your hammock?

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** Sleep a few hours?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Always on [guard].

**Kha:** And you know, my wife; I got my wife. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** You were married?

**Kha:** Then, I'm not married. I'm talking about, look like, my gun; my gun is my wife. (chuckles)

**VanZandt:** Is your wife, oh, I see! (laughter)

**Kha:** I got M16 [rifle].

**VanZandt:** Your M16 was your wife, best friend.

**Kha:** And M16, *boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!* (demonstrating how he would shoot his gun up in the air) But I worry about kill some people or something. (laughter) I don't want to kill people. I *boom, boom, boom, boom, boom!*

**VanZandt:** To scare.

**Kha:** To scare.



**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (chuckles) (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. He didn't want to kill anyone, so he just shot up in the air just to scare them.

**VanZandt:** Just to scare them. You were very close to that gun, like your wife, in the hammock, yes.

**Kha:** Yeah. (shy laugh)

**VanZandt:** Nineteen sixty-eight, what do you remember about the Tet Offensive? What did you hear and see? Any memories of that time? That was a real turning point in the war.

**Kha:** Uh, 1969—chú mới bắt đầu đi lính.

*(I joined the military in 1969.)*

**Khai:** Oh, he didn't, he wasn't—

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** In 1968, the Tet Offensive, he wasn't in the Army yet.

**VanZandt:** Yet, OK.

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** Tết Mậu thân 1968 lúc đó đang ở nhà, nhưng mà nghe ngoài Huế chết mấy nghìn người. Đau xót lắm. In Hue, they kill about four thousand, four or five thousand people in 1968, Tet, Vietnam, Tet.

*(I was at home in Tet of 1968, but I heard they killed a few thousand people in Hue.)*

**VanZandt:** Right. That's what I wondered, what you heard, or saw, anything on television or heard about that. And what did you think about that?

**Kha:** I feel bad. I hurt heart.

**VanZandt:** It was horrible.

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** What was your rank in the Army? Were you infantry, soldier, or officer? Were you ever an officer in the Army?

**Khai:** Cấp của chú là gì?

*(What was your rank?)*

**Kha:** Trong quân trường chú làm đại diện trưởng quá trình (100-120 người), sau đó lên bậc, hạ sĩ.

*(In the military camp I was a class representative, then I moved up the rank, to an officer cadet.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** A sergeant?

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. He said he doesn't know what the English version is. He was able to, he was promoted once, so. I don't know what that—

**VanZandt:** OK. Probably sergeant, or—OK. What is the word in Vietnamese?

**Khai:** Hạ sĩ [non-commissioned officer].

**Kha:** Hạ sĩ.

**Khai:** H-A-S-Y[I].

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Do you have any experiences to share about interaction with American soldiers or with VC [Viet Cong], at all? Anything to share while we're still talking about the war? It was a very confusing time. Distrust, not knowing who to trust, who might have had sympathies for the South or the North. Any experiences with that?

**Kha:** Khai, could you [translate]?

**Khai:** Chú có chia sẻ gì không, về tin tưởng ai trong cuộc chiến tranh?

*(Do you have any thoughts about who to trust in the war?)*

**Kha:** Bác mất tin tưởng. Bởi vì lúc đó bác chỉ tin tưởng Ngô Đình Diệm. Bác nghi ngờ người Mỹ luôn. Bác không muốn tiếp tục chiến đấu nữa.

*(I lost my trust. I only trusted Ngo Dinh Diem. I was skeptical about the American, too. I didn't want to fight anymore.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** Yeah. He was saying that before Ngo Dinh Diem was assassinated, he believed in the president. But then after that, it was very hard for him to trust anyone, even Americans, because he didn't know exactly what was going to happen in the end.

And he didn't trust any of the political leaders after that. And then after the assassination, he kind of wanted to stop fighting.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. You know, that's just his opinion.

**VanZandt:** Absolutely. That's what we want.

**Khai:** It became hard for him to trust anyone after the assassination.

**VanZandt:** How long were you in the Army? When did you leave the Army, 1975?

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** He was in the Army for four years. But [19]73 was— sau đó bác đi đâu?

*(Where did you go after that?)*

**Kha:** Bác bỏ. Không phải vì bác sợ, nhưng vì nó quá hỗn loạn nên bác bỏ.

*(I abandoned. Not because I was scared but because it was too chaotic.)*

*(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He was saying that he decided to leave. They didn't catch him, of course, because if he was caught they probably would have put him in jail. But he just felt like, the result of the war wasn't—he just wanted the war to end. It wasn't much use fighting anymore. Not much use, but, *why* are they fighting, you know?

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. He said he wasn't afraid of dying, but he didn't see why there was much use in fighting.

**VanZandt:** I think a lot of people felt that way. What was the point?

**Kha:** Many people, they—Nhiều người họ cũng không muốn đánh nhau nữa, bởi vì không muốn mình bị lợi dụng.

*(Some people did not want to fight anymore, because they don't want to be used.)*

**Khai:** He's saying that a lot of people felt that way, but it wasn't because they were cowards, because they felt like all these people in power were using them to play, to do their games. And so they just felt like, "Why are we doing this?"

**VanZandt:** Costing a lot of lives, for politics.

**Kha:** *Yeah.* Um-hm.

**Khai:** And because the people in power were, they were confusing each other as well.

**Kha:** Bác thì luôn nói sự thật vì có nhiều người họ luôn nói là họ chiến đấu đến giờ phút cuối cùng. Cũng chẳng làm gì cả. Cuối cùng cũng bỏ chạy.

*(I always tell the truth because a lot of people said we were fighting until the last minute. We did nothing and all ran away at the end.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He was saying that he wants to speak the truth because there are a lot of people that would say, “I fought to the end.” But then what did they really fight for?

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Yes, absolutely.

**Khai:** And in the end, they still had, they still [were] defeated.

**VanZandt:** Yes. Thank you so much. It must have been a very difficult decision to make—

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** *Very* difficult. And the Americans had left in 1972, '73. They were gone, and it was very bad.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** So can you tell me about deciding to leave in 1975, how you made that decision, and why you decided to leave?

**Kha:** OK. Then I went; I leave Army. I go back. I get married.

**VanZandt:** You got married?

**Kha:** Yeah, I got married.

**VanZandt:** And what is your wife's name?

**Kha:** Trần Thị Nữ.

**VanZandt:** OK.

**Kha:** Trần Thị Nữ.

**VanZandt:** Can you spell that? I'm sorry.

**Kha:** Yeah. Trần, T—

**Khai:** Nữ is the first name.

**Kha:** T-H-I.

**Khai:** N-U—

**VanZandt:** N-U.

**Khai:** T-H-I, T-R-A-N.

**VanZandt:** OK.

**Kha:** Yeah. I get married, and I have a first daughter. So I need to help. (chuckle)

**VanZandt:** Aw, a baby to feed.

**Kha:** (laughter) Yeah, a baby to feed. And then I work on fisherman with my father-in-law. He have a boat.

**VanZandt:** Small boat?

**Kha:** Yeah, small boat to work.

**VanZandt:** So you started fishing with him.

**Kha:** (chuckles) Start fishing with him.

**VanZandt:** How was that? Tell me a little bit about that because we want to talk about that, what life was like fishing in Vietnam. Very different from here.

**Kha:** Yeah, very different. Then I have a life, look like peace in my community. But 1975, war duty(?) again.

**VanZandt:** Again?

**Kha:** Again.

**VanZandt:** To Vung Tau?

**Kha:** Yeah, to Vung Tau. And they put the bomb and go to Vung Tau port, Vung Tau. But we weren't in Vung Tau, so we one more time keep hiding war.

**VanZandt:** Keep hiding—

**Kha:** Keep hiding war. (chuckle) By go on the boat, go out sea.

**VanZandt:** Out to sea.

**Kha:** (chuckle) Out to sea.

**VanZandt:** While they were bombing?

**Kha:** Yeah. They bombing in, some by airport Vung Tau, they bombing.

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Kha:** On day, four thirty [April 30, 1975].

**VanZandt:** Four thirty, in the morning?

**Kha:** Yeah, four thirty in morning, at nighttime. [Mr. Kha was referring to the date the bombing took place, not Ms. VanZandt's question referring to time.]

**VanZandt:** And you went out to sea—

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** —but could you see it happening? Did you see the bombing?

**Kha:** Yeah. I see bombing and smoke, smoke, black smoke, and *boom, boom, boom, boom, and*—Bác phải cứu một số lính nhảy dù lên tàu của bác. Định là trốn chiến tranh rồi về nhưng đâu có về được. Sau đó tàu Mỹ tới, rồi lên tàu thôi.

*(I had to send some parachute troops to my ship. We were planning to escape the war, then come back, but we couldn't. Then the American ship arrived then we have to go aboard.)*

**Khai:** Oh, he said on one of these times where he was going out to the sea to just wait until the bombing was over—(speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** He is saying that before he went, they were fighting in the city, and the South was retreating, so he took some soldiers with him on the boats to go out to the sea and to wait until the bombing was over. But then while they were out there, the American ship was out there and said, "If you come back, they'll kill you." And so they just took them then.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness.

**Khai:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Was this before April 30 [the fall of Saigon]? Do you remember the date?

**Kha:** Yes.

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** Lúc đó là khi tổng thống Dương Văn Minh nói đầu hàng nên tôi mới bỏ chạy.

*(Yes. That was when President Duong Van Minh surrendered, and I started running away.)*

**Khai:** It was, it was the thirtieth.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** *On April 30?*

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** So you were already out on your boat and were picked up by an American ship.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Ah. Very lucky.

**Kha:** Hm. But one more week the ship.

**VanZandt:** One week on the ship?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**Khai:** Chú chưa tính đi vượt biên?

*(You didn't plan to escape?)*

**Kha:** Chưa, chưa.

**Khai:** He said he wasn't meaning to, on refuge, but he—but when he got out—

**Kha:** Mình tính đi rồi trở về thôi, vì lúc đó chưa có telephone, đài phát thanh bị cướp, không biết đi đâu, cứ lênh đênh trên biển.

*(Not yet. I was going to go, then come back because we didn't have telephone back then. The radio station was stolen. I didn't know where to go, so I wander around on the sea.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. Yeah. So when they were out there, they didn't have any radio contact, so they didn't know what was going on.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness. So where were your wife and child? Were they in Vung Tau?

**Kha:** No. I pick up; they go together with me, with my father-in-law, and my brother and sister-in-law.

**VanZandt:** They were all with you on the boat.

**Kha:** Because they have a big boat, many people, about forty people. And twenty soldiers(?), my (inaudible), I save them. When I have first daughter and another boy (motioning to stomach)—

**VanZandt:** Pregnant.

**Kha:** Yeah, pregnant.

**VanZandt:** With a boy.

**Kha:** Look like half moon. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Ah, half moon! (laughter)

**Kha:** Half moon. United States. My wife, (laughter) see.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness!

**Kha:** Oh, yeah; very.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness. And how old was your daughter? At what age?

**Kha:** About two years.

**VanZandt:** Oh, just two, little.

**Kha:** Because I got married in 197—(counting) about two years.

**VanZandt:** Two years old, and pregnant with the second. Where was your mother? Did your mother stay?

**Kha:** Yeah. My mother and my cousin, my relative, my mother and my father, all, they stay in there. Only in my wife, my wife and my relative of my wife go to leave United States. That's why I don't want to come to United States because my mother, my brother and sister, *all* them stay; *lot* of people, about two hundred *people*, my relative.

**VanZandt:** You were leaving behind.

**Kha:** Sure. I don't want to come to United States.

**VanZandt:** You *didn't* want to come?

**Kha:** But when the big boat, the big ship, the United States, bring me go to island, Ph—

**Khai:** Philippines.

**VanZandt:** The Philippines?

**Kha:** Yeah, Philippines. I try to come back by that boat. And I hide *all* the way down, *all* the way down I hide there because I thinking they would go back to Vietnam, and I will go with them and save my mother, my brother, my sister, my relative. I'm thinking about that. But they looking for me. (laughter) They catch me, say, "Oh, you come with [us to] Philippines." (laughter) "And go to island Guam," yeah, island Guam.



**VanZandt:** (chuckle) They found you.

**Kha:** (laughter) Yeah, they found me.

**VanZandt:** How far out did you get? Did you leave?

**Khai:** No. He was on the American ship. He thought the ship was going to go back to Vietnam.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese) Yeah, he was in the American ship.

**VanZandt:** Thinking you could stay and go back and save them and bring them.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** But no.

**Kha:** (laughter) Go back to. (laughter) (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** So when were you able to get word to your mother that you were OK? She must have been very worried about you.

**Kha:** Yeah. Very worried about. They don't know I'm living or dead, or some—no telephone, no mail, no nothing.

**Khai:** Khi nào chú mới liên lạc được?

*(How long did it take for you to contact her?)*

**Kha:** After two year.

**VanZandt:** *Two years.*

**Kha:** Um-hm. After two year.

**VanZandt:** You were able to get word to her.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness.

**Kha:** Because of the way the Communists come over my land, they very, no good. Very confusing.

**VanZandt:** How did your mother do after you left and the Communists took over? How did that affect your family who was left in Vietnam?

**Kha:** Oh, my next brother, he help my mother. He leave Army.

**VanZandt:** He left the Army.

**Kha:** Yeah. He left Army, go back home and try to work anything, get some food, get some bread, and get some food for help, and do anything. Very confusing. Very poor. Then when I receive my letter from my mother, I send money.

**VanZandt:** Sure.

**Kha:** I try to working hard in the United States, and yeah, get the money, get the money and help—

**VanZandt:** Help the family.

**Kha:** Help the family. Big family in Vietnam.

**VanZandt:** Yes. So I know we need to further this along. There's so much more I can ask you about this time—

**Kha:** *Oh, yeah.* (chuckle)

**VanZandt:** —that we may have to do this in two parts.

**Kha:** Yeah. (chuckles) Lot of things.

**VanZandt:** *So much.*

**Kha:** (chuckles) Lots, so much.

**VanZandt:** How long were you in the Philippines, the camp there?

**Kha:** About, around a few days.

**VanZandt:** Oh, just a few days, ah.

**Kha:** Just a few days. Then I go to island (inaudible).

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** Island (inaudible). Then island (inaudible), I go to, go to Arkansas.

**VanZandt:** To Fort Chaffee?

**Kha:** Fort Chaffee.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK.

**Kha:** Yeah, Fort Chaffee.

**VanZandt:** How long were you at Fort Chaffee?

**Kha:** After Fort Chaffee, about, when my first son was born in Fort Chaffee, he named Fort Chaffee. (chuckles) He name after Fort Chaffee.

**VanZandt:** He was named after Fort Chaffee?

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** What is his [full] name?

**Kha:** My son?

**VanZandt:** Yes.

**Kha:** Yeah, I put (laughter) Fort Chaffee.

**Khai:** Fort Chaffee.

**VanZandt:** (chuckle) Fort Chaffee?!

**Kha:** Yeah. But now he don't like, he change. Nguyễn Văn Phi. (laughter) Same thing, hah! (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Tradition. I love it. And he was born at Fort Chaffee, and then—

**Kha:** Yeah. After Fort Chaffee I have sponsor. My sponsor take me go to Beaumont; Beaumont, Texas.

**VanZandt:** Oh, Beaumont? Beaumont, Texas.

**Kha:** Beaumont, Port Arthur.

**VanZandt:** Sure.

**Kha:** Exactly. Port Arthur. I living in there about, over one year, so I go looking for my cousin, because only my relative, cousin, living here.

**VanZandt:** You had one cousin living here.

**Kha:** Yeah. And so I leave my sponsor, come here living together with him until now.

**VanZandt:** In New Orleans? Your cousin was here?

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** Ah, so that's why you ended up coming here.

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** Can I just ask, when you *first* landed in America, you'd seen the movies, 007, (chuckles) what did you think about America?

**Kha:** (chuckles) Very great. Very great. And very God bless—sing for the—America. So I would like America blessing help for Vietnam, my country.

(laughter) Yeah, I very love here. I very love here, the United States. Very *beautiful* country and very—(speaking Vietnamese)?

**Khai:** Um-hm.

**Kha:** —wealthy(?) people.

**Khai:** (Inaudible)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. A lot of people with good hearts.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** He said there's some bad, but there's also a lot of really good people that want to help, too.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm.

**Kha:** Chú cũng muốn cảm ơn bà bảo trợ của chú. Bà ấy rất tốt, bà ấy không muốn bác đi khỏi.

*(I want to thanks my sponsor. She was very nice and did not want me to leave.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He said he met a lot of great people, especially his sponsor. He said she was a very good lady. And she was very sad when he decided to leave.

**Kha:** Thank you, America. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** (laughter) What was her name? Do you remember your sponsor's name?

**Kha:** Ms. Diana Rinehart(?).

**VanZandt:** Diana Rinehart. OK.

**Kha:** Um-hm. Diana Rinehart.

**VanZandt:** And that was in Beaumont?

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** OK. And so when you came to New Orleans, did you start fishing then? Tell me about finding your first job here.

**Kha:** Oh, I work in Avondale.

**VanZandt:** Avondale?

**Kha:** Around in, work a job around in welding helper.

**Khai:** Welding.

**VanZandt:** Welding. Ah, OK.

**Kha:** Around about, I work in welding about two, three years. Then my friend told me, “Hey, go to fishing, make a lot of money.”

**VanZandt:** Good money in fishing?

**Kha:** Hm. Good money in fishing. I say, “OK, I try.” And so I like work on the fishing. Work on the fishing, I like it. I like it.

**VanZandt:** What do you like about it?

**Kha:** Mm, water; looking for Gulf of Mexico and along Coast. It’s *beautiful*.

**VanZandt:** To be out on the water, seeing the Coast—

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah. Um-hm. See the Coast (chuckles), yeah. And working in the land, too many people. (laughter) Go outside, looking for shrimp, for fish, *hey* (mimics looking out for catch), good; drive boat. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Driving, quiet, peaceful.

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**VanZandt:** Except when there’s storms, but, yeah, in good weather.

**Kha:** And I like it when the sun, the sun rise up in the morning. Yeah, *beautiful*.

**VanZandt:** Right. *Aw*.

**Kha:** But go out sea, on the boat, sea. See the sun rise, it *beautiful*. I like that.

**VanZandt:** And did you have your own boat, Mr. Nguyen?

**Kha:** Yes, yes.

**VanZandt:** You owned your own boat?

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** How did you get that boat? Did—

**Kha:** Oh, I don’t have enough money for buy the boat. The first boat nine thousand dollars, but the bank never, they never help.

**VanZandt:** The bank wouldn’t help.

**Kha:** No, no. Because I am not have credit.

**VanZandt:** Right.

**Kha:** When I come from Vietnam, come here, only two hand. (laughter) And the relocation money give me forty dollars for each people. So I have four people, a hundred sixty dollars. How do I (chuckles) buy the boat? The man help me to have a van(?); I have nothing (laughter), so nobody—

**VanZandt:** Silly question.

**Kha:** So I build by my hand.

**VanZandt:** You built it?!

**Kha:** I grew up, migrate(?) by my hand. But look like, the culture, Vietnamese culture, helping together. I ask my cousin, my cousin, “I like boat. I looking for a job, but I like old boat. The man don’t give me money, so can you help me?” Yeah. He helped me save about two year. One thousand dollars, he give to me. And he asked for his friends, his—

**VanZandt:** Wow.

**Kha:** Yeah. Give me money, yeah, yeah.

**VanZandt:** Pooling together.

**Kha:** (laughter) Yeah, yeah, pooling together. So I bought, but I bought together with my friend. I have four thousand dollars to help, and my friend had (chuckles) four thousand dollars. Go together, buy the first boat.

**VanZandt:** Wow.

**Kha:** The first boat in the United States.

**VanZandt:** Did you give it a name? Did you name your boat?

**Kha:** *South Wind*.

**VanZandt:** *South Wind?*

**Kha:** Yeah, the boat *South Wind*. The first boat, small boat. Thirty feet long and nine feet wide. Yeah, the first boat.

**VanZandt:** Good size boat.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And so tell me what it’s like going out there. You were shrimping?

**Kha:** Yeah. Shrimping in Mississippi, in Island Cat.

**VanZandt:** Cat Island!

**Kha:** And Half Moon, yeah. I worked there about ten years, in Mississippi.

**VanZandt:** And why did you go that direction? More shrimp? Why go to Mississippi, not Louisiana?

**Kha:** Oh, because Louisiana, it so far from here to Empire, Grand Isle, and Venice.

**VanZandt:** Right.

**Kha:** So my cousin living in Pass Christian, and he have a small boat. He call me come here work. Very close, long Coast.

**VanZandt:** Sure.

**Kha:** Yeah. See, working in Mississippi very easy; small boat, very easy and nice, very nice. Island Cat and Half Moon and Long Beach. Good part, very nice, and long Coast, I work that.

**VanZandt:** Pass Christian.

**Kha:** Yeah, Pass Christian. And uh—

**VanZandt:** Biloxi?

**Kha:** Biloxi so far.

**VanZandt:** Yes. So you stayed, Bay St. Louis?

**Kha:** Yeah, Bay St. Louis.

**VanZandt:** OK.

**Kha:** I know my, sell food.

**VanZandt:** Ah. So is that where you would sell your food, too? To Mississippi?

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** OK.

**Kha:** I sell shrimp in Mississippi.

**VanZandt:** OK. So tell me about shrimping. Was that good for a while? You started shrimping what year when you came here? What year would that have been when you started?

**Kha:** That's, I went by, [19]78 or [19]79, I start working.

**VanZandt:** OK. And you shrimped up until now?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Until recently?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** OK. So just kind of tell me about, moving up to maybe Hurricane Katrina, since I'm not sure how much time we have. How much time do we have, Khai? Do you need to head out?

**Khai:** I'm going to stay here for a while because we have a meeting tonight, but it depends on—

**VanZandt:** You do? How are you doing, Mr. Nguyen? Do you have maybe a little longer to tell us about Katrina? Or do we need to come back another time? Is it OK to continue?

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Maybe twenty minutes?

**Khai and Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese; Khai begins to ask Mr. Kha about his Katrina experiences.)

**Kha:** Bác phải đổi đến 5 con tàu mới đến con tàu 9000. Bán và mua thêm, cái tàu bị đắm là con tàu thứ 5. Đó là con tàu con bác làm chủ.

*(I had to change five ships until this nine thousand. I had to buy more. The ship that was sunk was the fifth one. That was the ship that I owned.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** He said from the first boat that he owned, to Katrina, he actually upgraded like five times. He kept making enough money to buy a bigger boat, and so he sold the boat, and so he kept doing that until Katrina. And I think—Con tàu đó bị sao?

**Kha:** Bị lật.

*(It was flipped over.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** Yeah. He said that Katrina damaged the boat that he had. By that point, he said that his son was owning the boat, and he was the captain of the boat, so.

**VanZandt:** OK. So and when did your son start shrimping with you?

**Kha:** 10 năm.

*(Ten years)*

**Khai:** Probably ten years ago.



**VanZandt:** Ten years with you?

**Kha:** Yeah, he work with me about ten year.

**VanZandt:** OK. How old was he when he started shrimping with you? What age?

**Kha:** Học xong trung học. Không nhớ là bao nhiêu tuổi.

*(When he finished middle school. I don't remember how old he was.)*

**Khai:** He said he doesn't remember how old, but it was after he had finished high school. He'd found a few jobs, but then it wasn't going for him, so.

**VanZandt:** OK. So he came to shrimp with you, like you did with your father.

**Kha:** Yeah. Bác muốn cho anh ấy đi học, mà anh ấy không muốn, lại muốn làm nghề với bác. Bác thì muốn đi học thì bỏ lại mất, không được đi học. (laughter)

*(Yeah. I want him to go to school, but he doesn't like to do it. He wants to do my work. I want to go to school, but I couldn't.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He said it's weird because he wanted his son to go to school and not do fishing, but he went into fishing instead. And where he [Mr. Kha] want[ed] to go to school, but had to go fishing because when his father died.

**Kha:** Hm.

**VanZandt:** Does he [son] like fishing better than school?

**Kha:** I don't know. (chuckles) Sometimes, yeah, he say "Good." Sometimes he say, "No good," so I don't know.

**VanZandt:** Yeah, yeah. But good money you were making, and things, fishing and shrimping was a good living, sounds like.

**Kha:** Yeah. But very difficult. If the boat damage or sometimes we lost the net, the engine broke, and the wind broke on the set(?), broke. And sometimes hurricane and tornado, (laughter) and a whole lot, but I like it. *I like it.*

**VanZandt:** Yeah.

**Kha:** With me, OK. With me, OK.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm. So tell me about Katrina, then. I'm looking at this book that you've written. This beautiful book and this photograph, on the cover, of this street right outside where we are, after Katrina, and it was flooded. And this community had an *amazing* recovery after Katrina. So would you tell me about, a little bit about your experience during Katrina, and then maybe about how you decided to write about your experience in this book.

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Maybe [begin with] what he did before; did he evacuate or stay, and that kind of—

**Khai:** Bão Katrina thì chú chạy bão thế nào?

*(How did you evacuate for the storm?)*

**Kha:** Bão tới là bác thấy nguy hiểm rồi, bác muốn gia đình phải đi hết. Bác ở đây trông coi tài sản, sợ người ta phá hoại, vì bác cũng ở volunteer security của nhà thờ. Vợ bác ở lại với bác.

*(I wanted my family to leave when the hurricane arrived. I stayed to look after our properties and volunteer to be the security at church. My wife stayed with me.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He said he told his kids to go because he felt it was going to be very dangerous. He sensed it was going to be a bad storm, and so he told his kids to go. And he was going to stay back to make sure all the property, his house, was going to be OK because he was part of the security for the church [Mary Queen of Vietnam Catholic Church]. And so he was waiting to see what the pastor [Father Vien Nguyen] was deciding. In the end he stayed back, and his wife actually stayed with him, too.

**Kha:** Um-hm. Lúc đó có khoảng 30-40 người già trong trường, bác không muốn bỏ họ mà đi.

*(There were about thirty or forty old people in the school. I did not want to leave them behind.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. And there's about thirty or forty of the elderly people in the community that was taking refuge in the school by the church, and he said he didn't want to leave them, so.

**VanZandt:** Sure. You felt protective of them, so you stayed at the church during the storm.

**Kha:** Um-hm. Yes.

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** Ở rồi bị kẹt ở đó luôn. Sau đó bác chứng kiến hết sự việc rồi mới viết sách.

*(I stayed and was stuck there. I observed what happened and wrote the book.)*

*(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)*

**Khai:** Yeah, yeah. He said he went home to make sure all the house was OK, but when the storm hit, he was in the school of the church, and so he was able to see things, and so he was able to write things down to see what, as things were happening, to keep things in mind.

**VanZandt:** So that's when you started writing? During the storm you started writing?

**Kha:** Oh, no.

**Khai:** No. I mean, he got the memory.

**VanZandt:** Oh, I see. Afterwards.

**Kha:** After about three months, three months, I let everything, let go because my house, everything (chuckles) damage. My boat sank.

**VanZandt:** Your boat sank.

**Kha:** Yeah, sank. Nothing to do. Many people go, many people go *everywhere*. Go to Houston—

**VanZandt:** Left.

**Kha:** Left, everywhere in the United States.

**VanZandt:** Baton Rouge.

**Kha:** I living in a small trailer in Morgan City [Louisiana], in (inaudible). So I'm thinking about my life. And I imagine my father, my father dead, my mother dead, and my relative, many people left, left on the earth. And I'm thinking about them. And I'm thinking about my life, and what a day I let go (chuckles) everything, let go. But I don't know where I going. So I feel so sad, so I don't know nothing. So I only thinking, smoke, and thinking about. So I said, "No. I need to do something. I need to do something. Better start writing and leave it for my son, my nephews in the future. They, he (chuckles) read my book." And even I work with the radio and magazines with (inaudible). And when you come back from Katrina, the magazine before Katrina like that, but after Katrina like that, nobody write. (chuckles) Nobody know anything. So I start writing to give the message for the—

**VanZandt:** The community.

**Kha:** —the community.

**VanZandt:** Ah, wonderful.

**Kha:** Yeah, that why I try to write about Katrina, so everyday I be work, be work, be work, look like (inaudible).

**VanZandt:** To (inaudible).

**Kha:** Yeah. I wrote with my hand. I'm not be able to—

**VanZandt:** You weren't typing on the computer.

**Kha:** To work on the computer. (chuckles) A very hard time for—I do nine months. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Oh, my goodness. Lots of paper, writing.

**Kha:** Yeah, lots of paper, yeah.

**VanZandt:** And did that help you in your mind, in your heart, the writing, thinking about it? Was that helpful in healing?

**Kha:** Oh, *yeah*. I very surprised about that. I think it's some special power from the, even from—yeah, help me, help my mind, thinking; thinking about that. I mean—(speaking Vietnamese)—rememory.

**Khai:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Yeah.

**Kha:** Rememory, rememory, every day, rememory, little bit. Every day, every day. But keep working, keep working *every* day.

**Khai:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** That was important; to keep working.

**Kha:** Yeah, keep try, keep trying.

**VanZandt:** And you saw that making you feel better? More hopeful? Did it make you more hopeful about the future?

**Kha:** Um-hm. Oh, yeah, because they concerned with the three hundred people living in here. And a hundred people, colored people, we sleep in that [out]side. We sleep here.

**VanZandt:** You slept here?

**Kha:** Outside.

**VanZandt:** Outside.

**Kha:** Because the water come, they build up about two, three, four feet all; look like [Lake] Pontchartrain. (laughter) Yeah, look like Lake Pontchartrain.

**VanZandt:** Like Lake Pontchartrain here. (chuckles)

**Kha:** Or water(?), (chuckles) very beautiful.

**VanZandt:** Right.

**Kha:** Water, everywhere. The only highway (inaudible).

**VanZandt:** So you have to find a dry spot, a high point.

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

**VanZandt:** And that's where you slept, outside.

**Kha:** Yeah. Yeah, because they have to move here and waiting for a boat come here and pick up. So we have a small boat, small skiff boat run around in, around church area and go to my house and my friends.

**VanZandt:** And I know because I've talked to Father Vien. I came very early after Katrina to the church.

**Kha:** Oh, yeah.

**VanZandt:** And met Father Vien. And he's told me some of these stories. So did you ride around in the boat checking on—

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** —people who lived around here to see if they were OK?

**Kha:** Yeah. Me, me do that.

**VanZandt:** That was you?

**Kha:** I do that, yeah.

**VanZandt:** And what kind of things did you see as you went along in the boat? How were people doing?

**Kha:** Oh, they don't know where they living. Even, they don't know nothing. Because no electric. My cell phone, no electric. And no TV, no nothing.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm. Where do you get food?

**Kha:** Oh, we have a lot of food.

**VanZandt:** Who provided food? How did you get food?

**Kha:** Oh, because the water it not so high, so on the freezer, we get some my house, and my friend open the door and get some food to bring to the church. The church have a (speaking Vietnamese)—

**Khai:** A stage.

**Kha:** A stage, it is so high, so we save on top, on top school.

**VanZandt:** OK. So everyone brought—

**Kha:** Everyone come here.

**VanZandt:** —food from their freezers and brought it to the church.

**Kha:** Um-hm. And then we living together four or five days. So we cook by gas, gas stove. Not electric.

**VanZandt:** No power then. No electricity.

**Kha:** Yeah, no power or electric.

**VanZandt:** Tell me about your boat. Where was it in the storm? Where did you have it docked?

**Kha:** I docked in Leeville, [Louisiana]. It's so far from here, in Leeville. Do you know?

**Khai:** Leeville.

**VanZandt:** Leeville?

**Kha:** Yeah, Leeville, Houma.

**VanZandt:** How far is that from here? Oh, near Houma?

**Kha:** Yeah, near Houma [southeast of Houma].

**VanZandt:** Oh, long way.

**Kha:** But, after one week, somebody call me, my boat sink.

**VanZandt:** So that's how you found out? Someone called you?

**Kha:** You see, in the United States, very quickly for communication, notify, but one more week, now I can call somebody, know what happened. But one week, one more, after one week. No electric, no nothing. (chuckle)

**VanZandt:** That's right. No nothing.

**Kha:** And my sister in Florida tried to call my family, communicate, then my wife, one week. She don't know where—

**Khai:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Didn't know where you were, or what happened.

**Kha:** Where I am.

**VanZandt:** There was no news.

**Kha:** Yeah, no news.

**VanZandt:** Nobody could get news about *this* community.

**Kha:** She think I'm dead. She think I and my wife dead in here. But I'm not dead. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** You were OK. But on TV, people outside, all they were seeing was the Superdome—

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** —[New Orleans] Convention Center; didn't know about what was happening elsewhere.

**Kha:** Yeah. Even my son and my daughter, they cry about, "Oh, my father gone. My father never come back. Oh!" But I stay here.

**VanZandt:** You were here on your boat.

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Checking on people and making things happen. Well, tell me. You mentioned the Superdome. Did you end up staying in the Superdome or Convention Center?

**Kha:** Oh, I go by truck. I'm leaving here by big truck, go to Convention Center.

**VanZandt:** OK. To send help there, or to stay there, or what?

**Kha:** Stay there for a few days. When the President [George W.] Bush come—

**VanZandt:** You were there when President Bush came.

**Kha:** Um-hm, um-hm. Then they pick up by airplane, by (speaking Vietnamese)—

**Khai and VanZandt:** Helicopter.

**Kha:** Yeah. Go to Armstrong—

**VanZandt:** Louis Armstrong Airport [New Orleans International Airport].

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** What was that like staying in the Convention Center? Lot of people.

**Kha:** Yeah. A lot of people. About, somebody say ten thousand, or twenty thousand, or something. I not know, I do not know how, exactly about. But a lot of people. But almost, the colored people, almost 90 percent.

**VanZandt:** And you were there with your wife?

**Kha:** Um-hm. With my people, about three hundred people.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. When were you able to leave there? How did you get transportation? Did you have a car, your truck? You said your truck.

**Kha:** Yeah. I keep my truck available. I am be able to leave to pick up my wife, and about few people go to Houston. But I don't know, to left all my people, I don't left them. I need to stay here and try to help them a little bit because a lot of people, they get weak and very—

**Khai:** Mostly they're elderly.

**Kha:** Yeah. And the old, yeah, and the old people, so I don't leave them. So that's why I keep, stay here.

**VanZandt:** You stayed here.

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)—Convention Center then.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Oh, he was saying like, it was a big truck that came around, that brought everyone to the Convention Center. But he was saying that he could have left on his own because he had his truck, but.

**VanZandt:** OK. I wondered that, if you could've, because a lot of people were stranded.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** He was saying, it wasn't even like a city truck, or government truck, it was some company truck that—

**VanZandt:** Yeah.

**Kha:** Lúc đó kinh khủng lắm, công an cũng không còn. Không còn gì đứng vững trong thành phố này.

*(It was scary. Polices were not there anymore. Nothing was able to stand still in the city.)*

**Khai:** He was saying that, like, it wasn't a good time because there was no police and there was no, nothing to help them at that point.

**Kha:** Vùng này im lặng, không một tiếng động. Kinh khủng lắm. Bác có viết vào sách.

*(This area was so quiet. Very scary. I wrote that in the book.)*



**Khai:** Yeah. He's saying that it was very, like, it was like silent. There's no cars going around in the area, or anything like that.

**Kha:** Không nghe tiếng con muỗi luôn. Muỗi cũng chết hết.

*(We could not hear the sound of a mosquito. There was no mosquito.)*

**Khai:** He couldn't even hear the buzzing of mosquitoes or even anything like that.

**VanZandt:** Gone.

**Kha:** Everything let go. I feeling I'm own; I'm own a big area. Nobody do nothing. I work around here. I check for the people, for some people. I try to save them, bring them, go to the church. I work all that area.

**VanZandt:** All of this area. Many people stayed here, didn't they?

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Some people were in bad shape.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** Bad health after Katrina. And I'm so curious because you wrote this book. Can you just, for the recording—what made you decide to write this and publish this book? And also, what is so special about this community? And can you just talk about, because there was no help, government help yet, for a while, this community came together with people like Father Vien and yourself to be a model for other communities of how to come back and recover? It was *amazing* what you did.

**Kha:** Hm. Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** So just anything you want to share about what's so special about, if it's part of the Vietnamese culture? The closeness of this community? What is it that helped you-all help this community come back so well?

**Kha:** OK. Quan trọng là đức tin của người công giáo.

*(The Catholic faith.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** OK. He said a simple explanation would be a lot of people around here have strong faith, and just having the church there, the church, everyone was able to just come together and get some news from the church. And like people, just because of that, since everyone went to church, when people were coming back, everyone was able to come together and keep up with things. I mean, he was saying, that's a simple thing. Just a strong faith.

**Kha:** Nhờ có thánh lễ mình mới quy tụ lại được, mới giúp đỡ lẫn nhau.

*(Because of the masses at church, we could gather together and help each other out.)*

**Khai:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Having like the church back, having people go to church after the storm gave them a chance to see each other and sort of give each other news and maybe like plan how to rebuild quicker.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. There was so much uncertainty. What was going to happen next? Like you said, “What do I do now?”

**Kha:** (chuckles) Yeah.

**VanZandt:** So maybe the church—

**Kha:** (chuckles) Yeah. Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** —and faith helped people support each other. And at least feel a little better—

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah.

**VanZandt:** —that they had each other to lean on, and the church and their faith.

**Kha:** That why we, we rose up.

**VanZandt:** Rose up.

**Kha:** We rose up.

**VanZandt:** That’s important. And then Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corp[oration] happened. This great program here was started. And so now, years later, the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill happened. Another tragic disaster, especially for the fishermen, the seafood industry workers. So last year, can you tell me—I know you weren’t fishing anymore, it sounds like, when the oil spill happened. Were you? Had you stopped shrimping last year, by the time of the oil spill?

**Khai:** Nói về sự tràn dầu thì lúc đó chú còn đi câu không?

*(Do you still go fishing when the oil spill happened?)*

**Kha:** Sau cơn bão này 3 năm, thử đi làm mấy job kia nhưng mà thấy nó làm sao ấy. salesman manager for furniture – tiền lương không đủ sống, lại mua tàu trở lại, thì lại gặp biế cổ. (laughter)

*(Three years after the hurricane, I tried to work other jobs but did not feel right. Salesman for furniture, not enough income. So I bought another ship, then ran into this situation.)*

**Khai:** Yeah, yeah. He said after a few years, he was working as a salesman for a furniture company because after the storm a lot of people needed furniture, but like, he

felt like the wages weren't good, and so he decided to buy a boat again. And then he went fishing for a few years until the oil spill happened.

**VanZandt:** Ah. So you *did* start fishing again after Katrina. You went out again fishing until the oil spill.

**Kha:** Um-hm.

**VanZandt:** And then tell me about how the oil spill affected you and this community.

**Kha:** Oh, I'm so sad about that. Many, many things happened in Louisiana, so we stop. (chuckles) We stop my job. So now the shrimp, not enough, not too many look ready for Katrina.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. Not many shrimp out there?

**Kha:** No, not many, yeah. Not many shrimp.

**VanZandt:** Yeah. So when is the last time you went out? Have you been out since the oil spill at all, out shrimping?

**Kha:** I was sick, and I feel so tired, was sick. And another accident, automobile accident, so I get in hospital. (chuckle)

**VanZandt:** Aw. Oh, my goodness.

**Kha:** So I left my boat for the captain; the captain run my boat, so.

**VanZandt:** OK. And was your son shrimping, too, still?

**Kha:** Sometimes he work; sometimes he work on—he tried to make another job; tried to build a shop, automobile, automobile shop.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. Like mechanic work?

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** Ah, great. Um-hm. So this community has been hit hard again since the oil spill. Do you think you'll ever go out again fishing, if things get better?

**Kha:** I like it, but I think my health now not look like strong power; look like when I come to United States. (chuckles) Come here twenty-five year old, (makes muscle flexing sound) everything I can *do*! Now, everything I can leave. (laughter)

**VanZandt:** Those days are gone, you say.

**Kha:** Yeah. Not go back to twenty-five year old. But now OK, I like go—

**Khai:** Chú có đi biển được nữa không?

**Kha:** Không chắc nữa. Đi mấy ngày thì được, đi lâu quá thì không được.

*(Not sure. Could only go for a couple days.)*

**Khai:** Yeah. He said he feels he can go for a few days, but if it's a long trip, he probably wouldn't be able to.

**Kha:** On the freezer boat, work one month. Every trip about one month.

**VanZandt:** One month long.

**Kha:** Four week. Yeah, long.

**VanZandt:** So you would go out one month at a time, and then come back.

**Kha:** Um-hm. Freezer boat. But ice boat about every week come back home.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm. It's a different life, isn't it? You said you liked it very much. And I just wondered; I didn't get to ask you. When you first came to New Orleans and started shrimping in the 1970s, how were you accepted as a Vietnamese fisherman by other fishermen who had already been here fishing? Was it difficult, or were you accepted, and it was no problem?

**Khai:** Khi chú mới qua Mỹ mấy dân tộc khác có làm khó chú không?

*(Did people from other races give you a hard time when you came to America?)*

**Kha:** Có. Chú bị phá tàu mấy lần, bắn sung vào tàu, lấy đồ đạc. bác thấy có sự tranh chấp, người làm được nhiều người làm được ít. Bác thì không muốn làm hại ai hết. Nhưng mà họ không thích người Việt Nam làm điều đó.

*(Yes. My ship was hacked a couple times. They shoot, and steal stuffs from my ship. I saw competition. I don't want to harm anybody, but they don't like the Vietnamese to do that work.)*

**Khai:** He said sometimes there were times where his boat was vandalized. He actually noticed that some people shot some bullets into his boat. And he had some stuff stolen sometimes, but he didn't want to—he felt like he was just trying to make a living for himself. He wasn't trying to hurt anyone else's business. But he understands people are competing against each other sometimes out there.

**Kha:** Cái chính là vì người Việt Nam chịu khó làm, kiếm được nhiều tiền hơn họ. Nên họ không thích và phá lẫn nhau.

*(The main thing is the Vietnamese are willing to work and make more money than they do, so they don't like us.)*

**Khai:** He was just saying like, Vietnamese people, they just try to work hard, too, because they see that they can make a good living out of it, so. And they just, other people at the time, they didn't like that. They were coming into with some—

**VanZandt:** Competition. Competition, sure.

**Kha:** Um-hm. But now OK, now very nice, very peace. Now we working together. Not like—

**VanZandt:** Understanding—

**Kha:** Yeah, understand.

**VanZandt:** —each other. I know we need to wrap up, and there's so much more I could ask you. (laughter) But I know it's getting late. So you've had an extraordinary life, Mr. Nguyen. And I would love very much to be able to read this [book] sometime, if I can buy an extra copy. And have someone translate it for me. (chuckle)

**Kha:** Oh yeah. I would like to biếu (speaking Vietnamese) [Mr. Kha presents a copy of his book he brought for Ms. VanZandt.]

**Khai:** Gift.

**VanZandt:** Ah, sign it? Autograph?!

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** OK, OK.

**VanZandt:** You would autograph it for me?

**Kha:** Yes, yes.

**VanZandt:** (tears up) Thank you. That's wonderful.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** I have a pen.

**Kha:** (takes pen) Oh, yeah, OK.

**VanZandt:** And this is for *me*? Do you have an extra one, an extra?

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** Thank you very much.

**Kha:** Bây giờ bác Viết bằng Tiếng Việt nhé. Kính tặng.

(*Yes. Let me write in Vietnamese, "Respectfully yours."*)

**Khai:** L-I-N-D-A.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Maybe Angel [Phan] can start reading it to me on our drive back.  
(chuckles)

**Khai:** So y'all came together?

**VanZandt:** We did.

**Khai:** OK.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese quietly as he writes an inscription inside the book)

**VanZandt:** Wow. Khai, is there anything that I haven't asked that you can think of? There's so much more, I could just go on.

**Khai:** Nothing I can think of. I've worked with him for other stuff, and that's basically his story. At least after Katrina, he's not going on fishing trips that often anymore, but he's running captains and letting them do fishing for him, but he's still getting a lot of income from that. And right now his sons are trying to open up the auto shop.

**VanZandt:** The auto shop, that's great. Is that around this area?

**Khai:** Yeah, I think it's right around the corner. I haven't seen it myself, but it's around here somewhere.

**VanZandt:** Oh, good, OK. That's great; that's great for (inaudible).

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** L-Y-N-D-A.

**Kha:** L-I—

**VanZandt:** Should I write it? Do you want to write it for me, Khai?

**Kha:** (inaudible)

**VanZandt:** And I'm just going to say for the recording, Mr. Nguyen is—

**Kha:** (reading the spelling of Linda) Oh, Linda!

**VanZandt:** —autographing the book for me as a gift. I'm very anxious to read your story, and to see the photographs.

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Can you read it?

**Khai:** He said, (reading inscription) “I would like to gift this with my heart feelings.”  
(speaking Vietnamese)

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Yeah. He said he’s really enjoyed the conversation today.

**VanZandt:** Me, too. Me, too. Thank you so much, Mr. Nguyen.

**Kha:** You’re welcome.

**VanZandt:** I can’t tell you how much that means to me. And for the recording, and because you wrote this book for your children, grandchildren, and for people a hundred years from now to hear this, is there anything you would like to say about what freedom means to you, about your life, about what you hope for Vietnam, coming to America; anything at all you’d like to say for people to hear?

**Khai:** Chú có muốn nhắn nhủ gì với con cháu của chú sau này không?

*(Do you want to send any words to your kids and grandkids?)*

**VanZandt:** Advice for his children?

**Kha:** Chú nghĩ là những người đó họ vẫn sống ở 1 nơi vô hình nào đó, những người đó vẫn luôn đồng hành giúp đỡ chúng ta trong những lúc nguy nan.

*(Do you believe they still live somewhere, and still helping us in tough times?)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** Yeah. He just wanted to share a story. He said on one of the worst nights of the storm, he went back home, but he was stuck at home because of everything that was going on around. And it was one of the worst nights because he didn’t know what was going to go wrong, but then in his dreams he saw his mother, and she was very soothing and gave him, was able to calm him, and sort of gave him a chance to remember that, he felt like she made him feel like things were going to be OK.

**Kha:** Chú có những hình ảnh về mẹ là vì nhớ lại mẹ như ngày ở ngoài Bắc.

*(I had some memories about my mother because I remembered the days I was in North Vietnam.)*

(some Vietnamese spoken not transcribed or translated in above passage)

**Khai:** Yeah. Because the image of his mother comes to mind, because of the memory that he had when he was in Vietnam when he was four years old, when his mother was protecting him from the bomb. So when Katrina happened, when winds were strong and things around his house were falling down, he had a vision of his mother, as well, there, too. And it seemed like she kept him safe.

**Kha:** Thank you, Khai.

**VanZandt:** She saved you—

**Kha:** Yes.

**VanZandt:** —the first time, and saved you again.

**Kha:** I believe that.

**VanZandt:** Um-hm. Is your mother still living?

**Kha:** Oh, my mother dead over ten years.

**VanZandt:** Over ten years.

**Kha:** That in the United States. I sponsor my mother, come here.

**VanZandt:** You did?!

**Kha:** And I sponsor, after over ten years, about fifteen years, I sponsor my mother, and my brother and sister. (chuckles)

**VanZandt:** (chuckles) Oh, how wonderful!

**Kha:** (chuckles) Yeah.

**VanZandt:** I bet that reunion was *very* exciting.

**Kha:** You didn't ask me about that. So now I—

**VanZandt:** No! Can you tell? Do you have a minute to tell about that reunion?

**Kha:** Oh, yeah. Over ten year I keep looking for Vietnam. And then I talk on phone, when the (speaking Vietnamese)—

**Khai:** Vietnam?

**Kha:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** Clinton?

**Kha:** After Ford.

**VanZandt:** President Clinton?

**Kha:** Yeah, President Ford.

**VanZandt:** Ford.

**Kha:** Ford. After few years, we keep communication with Vietnam. And I sponsor—



**VanZandt:** You were finally able to bring her.

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah. Sponsor my mother.

**VanZandt:** To come here to New Orleans? Did she come here?

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah. But the other, my young brother in Denmark, now I have one in Denmark, and one in Georgia. And three here; two brother and one sister living in New Orleans.

**VanZandt:** Wow.

**Kha:** And I sponsor four, only one in Denmark, with his wife, because Denmark boat pick him up, and he must go to Denmark.

**VanZandt:** Yes, OK. Have you been able to see him in Denmark?

**Kha:** Yeah. I been to Denmark, and France, and go to Lourdes, Lourdes, to thank you for, Mary. In Lourdes. In Lourdes, Lourdes. In France. (speaking Vietnamese)

**Khai:** (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** In France—

**Kha:** In France. (speaking Vietnamese)

**VanZandt:** Lourdes? L-O-U-R-D-E-S?

**Khai:** He said it's where the Virgin Mary appeared in France; I don't know.

**VanZandt:** Oh, yes. OK. Ah. You got to make a trip there.

**Kha:** Yeah.

**VanZandt:** How wonderful. Lourdes.

**Khai:** Lourdes.

**Kha:** Yeah. Go to Germany, and yeah, I went to visit my brother, and he rent the van and drive me; go on Europe, everywhere in Europe, after Katrina.

**VanZandt:** After Katrina, you needed that.

**Kha:** (laughter) Yeah, I needed that.

**VanZandt:** You toured Europe. How fantastic. You need to write a book about that. That's your next book. (laughter)

**Kha:** (chuckles) I don't know.

**VanZandt:** Did you like it? Beautiful.

**Kha:** Yeah, yeah. Beautiful.

**VanZandt:** Much history.

**Kha:** France, yeah, Paris. Beautiful.

**VanZandt:** Did you know French, growing up in Vietnam? Did you speak much French?

**Kha:** Oh, very a little bit, but now I forgot because everyday we not talk about it.

**VanZandt:** Absolutely, you're not using it. OK. Well, I know; we'll finish. What was the reunion like when your mother first came here and you saw her?

**Kha:** Oh, yeah.

**VanZandt:** How has she adjusted to life here? Was it difficult leaving Vietnam, coming here, for your mother?

**Kha:** Oh, very difficult. Look like two, three times, three times, my mother, I'm thinking my mother, look like a big eagle fly, bring my brother, sister come here, living together with me. And God keep, bless us about them. And the American very, very good.

**VanZandt:** Bringing you together.

**Kha:** Yeah, bringing.

**VanZandt:** Oh, OK. I know you need to go, Khai. Thank you so much, Mr. Nguyen. I might have to call you again. (Laughter) And we might have to pick more of this up. (chuckles)

**Kha:** Depend on Khai. (shy laugh)

**VanZandt:** Thank you, Khai. (laughter)

**Khai:** Um-hm.

(end of interview)