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

Reverend Suong Ngoc Nguyen

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt Interpreter: Angel Truong Phan

Volume 1043 2011

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An Oral History with Reverend Suong Ngoc Nguyen, Volume 1043Interviewer: Linda VanZandtInterpreter: Angel Truong PhanTranscriber: Stephanie Scull-DeArmeyEditor: Linda VanZandt

Biography

Reverend Suong Ngoc Nguyen was born, one of four children, in 1944 in Cambodia (to Vietnamese parents), but was raised in Tay Ninh Province in South Vietnam. Her grandfather was a leader of the Cao Dai religious group in Tay Ninh Province. Her father sold goods in a market and disappeared one day in 1946 during the French-Viet Minh war. Reverend Nguyen graduated from high school with honors and began working at Vietnam Airlines at Tan Son Nhat Airport in 1962. She worked there until 1976.

Reverend Nguyen married Daniel Quan Nguyen in Tay Ninh, Vietnam, and he served as an infantry commander in the Seventh Division, Mekong Delta, from 1968 to 1975. After his imprisonment in reeducation camp in 1975, Reverend Nguyen worked selling clothes and jewelry at the flea market to support their two children. For twenty years the Nguyens built and pastored Vietnamese Assembly of God underground churches. In 1995 she and her family came to the United States. They adopted the young daughter of Mrs. Nguyen's sister, who had passed away, and first lived in San Jose, California, raising four children together. In 1996 the Nguyens moved to the Mississippi Gulf Coast to pastor the Vietnamese Christian Assembly of God church in Biloxi, Mississippi. After losing the church building to Hurricane Katrina, the Nguyens moved the church north of Biloxi to D'Iberville and continued to pastor the congregation as of the date of this interview.

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

REVEREND SUONG NGOC NGUYEN

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Reverend Suong Ngoc Nguyen and is taking place on August 30, 2011. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. English/Vietnamese interpretation is provided by Angel Truong Phan.

VanZandt: Today is August 30, 2011. This is Linda VanZandt, and I'm in Biloxi, Mississippi, with Angel Phan, who will be providing interpretation today, and with a member of this community. Could you state and spell your name, please?

Nguyen: My name is Suong Nguyen, Suong Ngoc Nguyen. Last name Nguyen.

VanZandt: Last name Nguyen.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And could you spell your first name, please?

Nguyen: Suong, S-U-O-N-G.

VanZandt: S-U-O-N-G. OK. Nguyen, N-G-U-Y-E-N. OK. Thank you, Mrs. Nguyen, for being here today. And we just want this to be a history of your life. And anything that you would like to share, please feel free. I'll just ask a few questions, but anything at all that you remember, that you think is important for history, people to know, and I think you'll be speaking in Vietnamese, primarily.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So that you can feel comfortable speaking in your language.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And if we could start by, if you could, tell me where you were born and what year you were born?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Tay Ninh, Vietnam.

VanZandt: Tay Ninh?

Phan: This story is going to be about Suong Nguyen, and she stated that she was born in Vietnam in Tay Ninh.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Cao Dai.

Phan: She stated that her family worships God in Vietnam.

Nguyen: No, Cao Dai.

Phan: Cao Dai (speaking Vietnamese).

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah.

VanZandt: I know about Cao Dai. It's spelled C-A-O D-A-I. And I visited a Cao Dai temple in South Vietnam.

Nguyen: Yeah, in Tay Ninh, near Long Ngai. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Can you tell about, for the recording, what worshipers of Cao Dai, what they believe?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: She stated her grandfather in Vietnam was a leader of the group.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: OK. In Tay Ninh Province. Was he at the temple, the large temple there?

Nguyen: Yeah. I will show you. We have a picture.

VanZandt: You have a picture to show later. Wonderful. And what year were you born, Mrs. Nguyen? When were you born?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) (laughter)

Phan: She says she was actually born in Cambodia, but the Cambodians had told them that they need to exit Cambodia. And so they needed to redo her birth certificate

in Vietnam. So she was actually born in 1944, but when they redid her birth certificate, it stated that she's born in 1950.

Nguyen: Forty-five.

Phan: Forty-five instead of 1944. So that's one thing that she wanted to share.

VanZandt: And so you were born in Cambodia.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Were your parents Cambodian?

Nguyen: No. Vietnamese. So this reason, because (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: She said the Vietnamese and Cambodians, they have a competitive spirit between each other, and so whenever one nation rises, there's always a battle. And so they pushed them out of Cambodia.

VanZandt: How long had your parents lived in Cambodia? Do you know?

Nguyen: I think (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: Her grandparents had lived there for a very long time, and her parents were able to stay there after they got married, but after they got married, maybe five to ten years after marriage, they were kicked out of Cambodia, and the Cambodians had taken their land.

VanZandt: So they had to start over in Vietnam. Is that right?

Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So after they—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So after they relocated in Tay Ninh, they didn't go to school because her grandmother wanted them to go and worship in the temple with her grandfather because he was such a spiritual leader. And he want to influence the grandchildren the same way. So they sacrificed that for following their God.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Right. She said they are very devoted and very faithful and very loyal in their worship, their rituals.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. She's talking about the three different religions that are the main religions in Vietnam at the time, which is Cao Dai—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Buddhism and (speaking Vietnamese).

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Confucius?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Well, Cao Dai is a combination of Taoism, Confucianism, and Christianity? Is that right?

Nguyen: I don't—(speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: Yeah. She said that—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Right. She said, "I'm not sure, but it's the worship of the universal Gods." Yeah.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: And I remember when I went to the temple, everyone worshipping was dressed with scarves around their head and a robe. Is that what you wore when you worshipped? Can you describe what you wore?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: She said she was wearing ao dai, a white one.

Nguyen: Dress.

Phan: A white dress, a Vietnamese dress, and that's what they normally—

VanZandt: Nothing on the head? No head scarf?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: It had to be the priest or in leadership role to wear that. And so the person that you saw was in leadership role in the temple.

VanZandt: OK. So when you were a child, you spent many hours in the temple there. (chuckles)

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And I want to mention, too, for the tape, that you are now a pastor in the Vietnamese Assembly of God, so we'll talk about that later, how you made that conversion to Christianity, and came to have such a relationship with Jesus.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. She said at that time, that's when she was younger, and she didn't have a choice, and she was just worshipping universal Gods, and she didn't know Jesus at the time. It just because the family and the tradition and the culture, but later on, she found Jesus.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: She said after April 1975, she had taken a job with, I guess, the concentration camp, during—and then they made her pick the weeds and cut the grass. They gave her very little money, but she was unhappy with the work that they gave her.

VanZandt: The reeducation camp?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So you worked at a camp?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So what they told her while her husband was in the reeducation camp, like he told you yesterday, during that time, they were always questioning her, along with feeding her information like, "If you do this, he can come home sooner." And they kept on feeding her different stories and telling her, "If you do this, then we'll do this." And none of it was factual.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) OK?

Nguyen: OK.

Phan: So she said that she felt very oppressed during that time when her husband was in reeducation camp, and they were telling her this, and if she'd continue to work and listen to them, that her husband would come home soon. She was very, very oppressed. She didn't have Jesus to turn to at that time.

VanZandt: It must have been very frightening. Did you have your children then, Mrs. Nguyen, three children?

Nguyen: This time? Yeah.

VanZandt: All three children.

Nguyen: Just two.

VanZandt: Two children then.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: How old were they? Ages?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Six and seven.

VanZandt: Six and seven.

Nguyen: The last one, when my husband come from the camp, after they believe him, I have another one.

VanZandt: Then you had the third one. OK. Well, it must have been a very frightening time because you didn't know where your husband was. How did you survive in that time? They paid you, you said, a little bit.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Was it enough to feed your family?

Nguyen: And then they send (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: They paid her very little. At the same time, she wanted to share that, they also sent her a letter laying her off, and that they would have nothing to do with it.

VanZandt: Why do you think they laid you off? Was it because you wouldn't do what they wanted?

Nguyen: No. Because I have a husband belong to the South government.

VanZandt: Yes. And we spoke yesterday with your husband who was in charge of a—he was a commander of the South Vietnamese Army, so people of his rank were sent—

Nguyen: He was in a small group only.

VanZandt: Yes, yes. So you were persecuted because of his service in the South Vietnamese Army, which was their enemy.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: She was a flight attendant, and many people asked her if she was afraid of them, but at that time she did not know what fear was. She just thought that she was just doing her job.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So while she was a flight attendant there, there were her friends that were also flight attendants, but they had many opportunities to get on a flight and travel to different countries, and she just remembers seeing her friends leaving. And they just kept on disappearing, kept on disappearing.

VanZandt: So they were escaping. Is this before the Communists took over, or after? Did they know what was coming?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) Yeah.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So it's right before April 30, 1975, is when a lot of the Vietnamese decided to stay or leave, and it was their opportunity to stay or leave. And a lot of them had taken the opportunity to escape.

VanZandt: Well, let's back up then, a little bit, if we can, Mrs. Nguyen, to before April 30, 1975. Can I first ask, because we kind of jumped forward a little bit, if it's OK for me to back up?

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: What was your parents' occupation? What did your father do?

Nguyen: My father?

VanZandt: Yeah.

Nguyen: He's a ordained minister missionary from (speaking Vietnamese), just my sister, (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) convenience store.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) She said, "My father, he sells in a market," and her mom owns a convenience store. But after some time—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: —her father had disappeared, and they were not able to find him or locate him.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: He normally goes out to the market to sell, and one day he just never came home.

Nguyen: Because this time—

VanZandt: When was that? What year? Was that during the war?

Nguyen: Yeah. Maybe nineteen forty years, 1946 or '47. My sister—

VanZandt: So you were two years old.

Nguyen: —just twelve(?), yeah.

VanZandt: OK. Very young. So did you ever find out what happened?

Nguyen: No. We don't. (inaudible) he's new from this day. And because the situation very complete this time, the Communists. And before the Communists, we have our group, Vietnamese group, they fight against the French, French government, you know, because after the Chinese come to our country and dominion over one thousand year, and then the French come about one hundred year, so they are the group. They (speaking Vietnamese) American later. You know?

VanZandt: Yes.

Nguyen: After Dien Bien Phu [battle].

VanZandt: Dien Bien Phu, 1954.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So from 1945 to '54 was how long, the French and Viet Minh war.

Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese) Geneva. (speaking Vietnamese) They contract with the other nation—

VanZandt: Yes, yes.

Nguyen: —in Geneva—

VanZandt: Geneva Convention.

Nguyen: —Truce?

VanZandt: Yes, Geneva Truce.

Nguyen: Switzerland, yeah.

VanZandt: Right, 1954.

Nguyen: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: And that's what split Vietnam—

Nguyen: Yeah, you know about that.

VanZandt: —into North and South.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: So I wonder, do you think your father was taken to fight?

Nguyen: Yeah, because so, so many time the French take him to jail because they think he's belong to, uh—

VanZandt: Viet Minh?

Nguyen: —Vietnamese Communists or Vietnamese—this time, they have a group, the men (Minh?) against the French government, something like that.

VanZandt: Yes, Viet Minh, yes.

Nguyen: Yeah. But because my father, he can speak French fluently, so two or three time they arrest him, but he can explain everything with the French and they release him. But *this* time, we don't know. So my grandmom think that he will go because (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: So after her dad was lost, her grandmother and a group of people had went out to the North to try to look for her father. And her grandmother, she remember her grandmother just taking her to look at all the men's faces to see if she—

Nguyen: Yeah, to see if—

VanZandt: Could recognize.

Nguyen: —recognize father.

Phan: Recognize her father, but—

Nguyen: Because she have only my father, the only son, so—

VanZandt: Only child. Only son.

Nguyen: No daughter. So she cry; she cry every day, yeah, when (inaudible).

VanZandt: (heavy sigh) That must have been so very hard to never find out.

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: And your mother then had to raise you.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And how many siblings, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) My sister, only sister, my second brother, but—

Phan: So three altogether?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So three girls and one boy.

VanZandt: OK. And you were second to youngest, almost youngest?

Nguyen: Yeah. My oldest sister, my brother, and then me, and my younger sister. (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. So she said her older brother, she asked for his advice during that time; she was a flight attendant. He's three years older than her. And she asked him because her husband was away in the reeducation camp. And so she asked him, "I have the opportunity to go to America. What do you think?" And her older brother said, "How do you know what's going to be a better place for you?" And so she decided not to go, but what she felt *so* bad about was her older brother end up taking that opportunity and fleeing with his wife, but they ended up getting lost.

VanZandt: How did they leave?

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. On a boat.

Nguyen: Yeah. It's my brother.

VanZandt: OK. So you're showing his photograph.

Nguyen: He's older than me, three years older, and his wife and two sons, and they missed on—we missed them on the news from 1978, because after my husband, they release him from the camp, and because of my father, he's a civilian, but he had a lot of very important (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: Post office.

Nguyen: Post office?

VanZandt: Post office.

Nguyen: Yeah. And because he live about the communication, back when the province in Vietnam, he live in American and in New Zealand. So they put him, important. This time when the Communists come, they give him a car to go to work, you know, so he's very important(?), because he work and he see the Communists (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: So he tried to escape Vietnam with two attempts, her brother, and the first attempt was during the time that she had her first daughter named (name?), and he came to say his goodbyes, but at that time he could not go, so he end up coming back home. The next time he was called to leave by the captain, he got lost.

Nguyen: He was (inaudible).

Phan: He was missing, and his whole entire family was missing, and they have not heard from him since, so they—

VanZandt: And that was in 1978 that he left by boat?

Nguyen: Yeah. Yeah.

VanZandt: And you never heard—with the two children?

Nguyen: Yeah, all the family with—

VanZandt: The two children and his wife?

Nguyen: —his friend, because he had his friend is a captain. They buy a boat to go together, but—

VanZandt: And when was this picture taken? Do you know what year this picture was?

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: A year or two prior to April 30, 1975.

Nguyen: (speaking simultaneously) This my grandfather and my grandmother. (chuckles) (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: The Cao Dai priest?

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Nguyen: And this my mom. (laughter)

VanZandt: That's your mother? (laughter)

Nguyen: Yeah, my mom, and this the mom of my sister-in-law, yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh! That's her mother.

Nguyen: This my oldest sister and my youngest sister.

VanZandt: Oh.

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: And her baby.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Your grandfather, was that your mother's father or father's father?

Nguyen: My father's father.

VanZandt: Father's father, OK, on your father's side.

Nguyen: Yeah, and his wife.

VanZandt: And his wife, OK.

Nguyen: Yeah. They are very rich when they been in Cambodia. They have many farm, many (speaking Vietnamese).

VanZandt: A lot of land?

Nguyen: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Well, Mrs. Nguyen, I would like to hear about your job in the airlines, but how did you get such a good job? Tell me about school. You said you didn't go to school when you were young because you were going to the temple. Did you have any schooling later?

Nguyen: No, but after that (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: She did go to school after; she stayed in the temple for two years, and she was two years behind in school, but she did go to school.

VanZandt: How many years did you attend school?

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Saigon (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: OK. So she went to elementary school and she passed, and she had to take a test to go to the most popular purple school in Vietnam, and she passed that, and she was able to go to the middle school there. And she graduated with honors in high school.

VanZandt: Oh, and she went through high school with honors, very smart. What were your favorite subjects? Did you have a favorite subject?

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) (laughter)

Phan: She was good at math.

VanZandt: Oh, math, OK. Well, then—

Nguyen: Yeah. Our high school is female (speaking Vietnamese).

VanZandt: All girls?

Phan: (speaking simultaneously) It's all-female school.

VanZandt: All female.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Was it a Catholic school?

Nguyen: No. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Not Catholic.

Phan: Elementary.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) From class six through twelve, I, this school.

VanZandt: Sixth through twelfth. Did your family have to pay for you to go to school in Vietnam?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: Or was it free?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: As long as she passed the tests, then they pay for it.

VanZandt: OK.

Nguyen: And my (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: Yeah. So there was her mom's cousin that she stayed with in Saigon during the time that she was going to school.

VanZandt: Going to school.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Mrs. Nguyen, what do you remember about—I mean, you lived in Saigon in Tay Ninh Province, very important during the Vietnam War, which, you were in high school when the war was really, when the Americans were around. Just share any memories that you have of that time when the Americans were there and what you experienced during the war, what life was like.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So the school was very well known, and she said that it was all-female school, and they had high expectations of them, so it was well known. So when she got out of school, she knew she was going to be able to have a job or be able to apply for whatever job that that may be. But after high school, she attended the flight attendant class.

VanZandt: So were you a stewardess and flying, or did you work in the office at the airline?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: What did you do?

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) We checked the flight, domestic flight and international flight with the other companies like China Airline, Air France, sometime Pan American and Singapore Airline, like that, and—

VanZandt: And this was Vietnam Airlines.

Nguyen: Yeah. We are Vietnam Airlines, but we have a contract with the other companies, so—

Phan: So she checked their tickets.

VanZandt: OK, I see. And you have a picture of you in your uniform at Vietnam Airlines in your ao dai.

Nguyen: Uh-huh, (laughter) I show you yesterday.

VanZandt: You're beautiful. (laughter) Is that in this book?

Nguyen: Yeah, because we have the blue dress and the hat, the color.

VanZandt: The blue and white with the gloves.

Nguyen: Yeah, for the uniform.

VanZandt: Right, for the uniform.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: How old were you when you first got that job? Do you remember?

Nguyen: I think 1962.

VanZandt: Nineteen sixty-two? OK.

Nguyen: Because when [19]69, I have time to go to Hong Kong and Tokyo, and then when I come back in 1975 (chuckles), when the Communists come, and we quit. (laughter)

VanZandt: So you didn't go anywhere else then?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So you got to fly to Hong Kong?

Nguyen: Yeah, and Tokyo.

VanZandt: And Japan, Tokyo. That must have been very exciting.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Were you married then?

Nguyen: Not yet.

VanZandt: Not yet, OK. So you were young and single. (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) Having a good time?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Was it a good job? Did you enjoy—

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: What did you like about it?

Nguyen: I get money every month. In Vietnam they have a month for, the month of, a thirteen month. That mean after twelve months, you have another salary for the extra month.

VanZandt: Extra. A bonus.

Nguyen: Yeah, bonus.

VanZandt: Ah, nice.

Nguyen: And every month we have many money, a little from the beginning of the month, and then in the middle, and (laughter), yeah, we have very—

VanZandt: That's a great job.

Nguyen: We go shopping every day. (laughter)

VanZandt: I was going to ask, "What did you do with your bonus money?" Shopping.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Where did you shop, in Saigon?

Nguyen: (laughs) Clothes and everything, but this time I don't like gold or ring, but I have a friend, she like it, and she buy everything. (laughter)

VanZandt: She would buy jewelry?

Nguyen: (laughter) Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, tell me, 1962 you started working. How long did you work there, till 1975?

Nguyen: Where?

VanZandt: At the airline, the Vietnam Airlines?

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, we worked at the airport. Checked, give the boarding pass for the domestic flights and lead them to the airplane, how many because, for example, you go to Danang or Dalat, I will give you the boarding pass.

VanZandt: Boarding pass.

Nguyen: And when we announce a departure, and they go to the gate, and we had to collect how many, if you checked on the list and you close about fifty person for this flight, or when you get at the gate, you must count if you have enough, fifty. And if you don't have enough, you have to call and call again on the (inaudible).

VanZandt: Right, find people. You worked there thirteen years?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: That's a long time.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Until 1976. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: About fourteen years. That's a long time. OK. So you-

Phan: Around thirteen, fourteen years.

Nguyen: Eleven year.

VanZandt: Eleven years, OK. At the Tan Son Nhut Airport.

Nguyen: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Which became very important during the war. What kind of things did you see happen at that airport during the war?

Nguyen: Oh, so many GIs, American GIs, because they come to Vietnam to fight the Communists, so when they have a holiday and the government give them the ticket, military flight or something like that, and they can fly to Bangkok or Hong Kong and then come back.

VanZandt: Um-hm. So you saw a lot of GIs.

Nguyen: Yeah. We had to check the list or give the boarding pass, because with the American Army soldiers, they don't need the passport, just the ID.

VanZandt: Just an ID. So they would come through your airport going on holiday?

Nguyen: Yeah, because the other company, if they contract with our Vietnamese Airline, we had to show up, one or two of us, to do for the boarding pass for them, umhm, and we check the list.

VanZandt: Sure. Well, do you remember any special memories about during the war there and the soldiers, anything that happened—funny or scary or happy or sad?

Anything that you remember about working there. That was a very important place during those years.

Nguyen: Yeah. OK. With Vietnam Airline, we have many souvenir because our plane we bought from China (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) Taiwan?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Shanghai maybe?

Phan: Shanghai?

Nguyen: What do you call the island of Chinese, the new one after the Communists come to China? You know?

VanZandt: Right. Taiwan?

Nguyen: And they separate the island here?

VanZandt: Uh-huh, Taiwan.

Nguyen: Taiwan, OK.

Phan: Yeah, that's what I said, Taiwan.

Nguyen: You remember.

VanZandt: Um-hm. So you remember. What do you remember?

Nguyen: Because in Vietnam we bought the airplane, (laughs) the old one from Taiwan, so many trouble. And every time departure about nine o'clock, and then delay about twelve (laughter) or something like that. And we had to invite the passengers go upstairs to the restaurant for refreshment or for lunch, if it is time for lunch.

VanZandt: While they fixed them. (laughter)

Nguyen: And every time because we announce or we go to invite them, but some of them, they don't want to go up there. So after that, we boarding and we get, and we count, and if we have a number of them don't go to upstairs, so we take them, and we

show to the restaurant, and we can have a big meal together. (laughter) And if you do this plan, we will call your birthday this day. (laughter)

VanZandt: (laughs) Your birthday.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) They will take a piece from the boarding pass, you know.

VanZandt: Yes, yes.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) They will, we can use this one.

VanZandt: Yeah.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Could be called a perk.

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughter)

Phan: Right.

VanZandt: A perk in America. (laughter) A nice perk of the job.

Phan: So the one thing—you understood.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Once thing she just remember, like before she was saved [found Jesus], is like, there was grief there. She was chasing after money, and money was her motivation. And at the time, being a flight attendant, they didn't have to charge for kids. (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) What their incentives, being a flight attendant, is if they *do* charge for kids, then they were able to keep it. But after being saved, she saw that that was wrong. She would not have done that if she was saved.

Nguyen: Yeah. But this time we see this very, very good for us. (laughter)

VanZandt: Made some money.

Nguyen: We can, yeah, get some money, and we can enjoy together. (laughter)

VanZandt: Go shopping and buy jewelry. (laughter)

Phan: Yeah. But at the time when she *wasn't* saved, it was about her girlfriends; it's about going shopping; (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) it's about buying pretty things, and she laughs at those moments where she didn't know any better.

Nguyen: (laughter) But now sometime I have to ask God to forgive. (laughter)

VanZandt: Yes. You've asked for forgiveness since. I'm sure he's forgiven you for that. (chuckles)

Phan: Right.

VanZandt: Well, I'd like to hear how you met your husband. Can you tell that story?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So it's a long-distant cousin for her that she was staying at in Saigon to go to school. But at the same time, the long-distant cousin, the lady was *her* cousin on *her* side, but the man was a long-distant cousin on *his* side. And he had came to visit?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: *Oh.* So the husband of her long-distant cousin was actually her husband's older brother, and that's how they met.

VanZandt: Ah, OK.

Nguyen: Yeah, because we have a few years we live together, but this time I still little. (chuckles)

VanZandt: He was a few years older than you.

Nguyen: Yeah.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) How old was he?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So he was twenty.

VanZandt: He was twenty at the time.

Phan: Time. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) So he's four years older than her, forty-five, and he was forty-one.

VanZandt: So you were about sixteen?

Phan: Sixteen.

VanZandt: When you met? And he was twenty?

Phan: Yeah. That seems about right.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) When they first met, yeah, when she was sixteen, and he was twenty.

Nguyen: But this time, I still a little girl. I don't—(laughter) So I don't care about anything.

VanZandt: You didn't care about him.

Nguyen: Just learn.

VanZandt: So when did you fall in love? (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) Do you remember?

Nguyen: I remember one day he invite me to go to a coffee store, and he tell something, but this time I don't understand, you know. (laughter) I remember. (speaking Vietnamese) (laughter)

Phan: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Sounds like he was in love before she was. Is that right?

Phan: Yeah, I think so, yes. She said that, yeah, he was trying to court her, and he asked her to go on a date, but at that time she was so innocent.

Nguyen: He was six years older than me.

VanZandt: Yes. You weren't even thinking about-

Phan: She said, "I was so innocent, and the stuff that he was saying, I did not understand because I was so focused on school."

Nguyen: Yeah. The first time he invite me go to the café there, and he buy some. And this time because he begin to work, and sometime he buy some clothes for me. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, he had some money to spend on you.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Was he in the army then?

Nguyen: Not yet, but after that because our country at war, you know, so after, when they grow up and the time for them go to the army. And the government will hold them.

VanZandt: How old did they have to be to go into the army? Do you remember? Sixteen years old?

Nguyen: Yeah. Maybe twenty.

VanZandt: It may be twenty. OK.

Nguyen: I don't remember exactly.

VanZandt: Did your brother join the army?

Nguyen: My brother, because he keep a shop, very important for the government, and the post office, so he, yeah, because they send him go to Vung Tau or Nha Trang or—

VanZandt: Oh, Nha Trang and Vung Tau.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. So that was for the government, not the army.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Well, so how did you get married? How did that happen? You weren't very interested, but you ended up together.

Nguyen: Oh, yeah. And after that, my husband go to the army, and a few year later he has a class to go to the United States for six months.

VanZandt: Yes, in Kentucky?

Nguyen: He told you the other day?

VanZandt: Yes.

Nguyen: Yeah. And I wait, (chuckles) and I remember this time. He asked me, "What do you, I want to buy, in the United States?" And, because my sister, my cousin, I live with her. She have a cosmetic store and she write out all the name of the cosmetic: Max Factor, Revlon, everything. (laughter) And I write to him, you buy for me all. (laughter) And then when he buy, and because his brother, he work in the army, too, with the American soldier, American officer, and he can use his friend address, and my husband can send out—

VanZandt: Your cosmetics, yeah.

Nguyen: Yeah. And then I give to my cousin, and she will pay me back, you know. (laughter) And I have this money for our wedding later. (laughter)

VanZandt: Max Factor, that was very popular then, Angel. That was before your—that was the makeup to wear, Max Factor and Revlon. That's funny. Good story.

Nguyen: Yeah, but this time I don't know about Jesus. I don't care about that.

Phan: Yeah.

VanZandt: Sure.

Nguyen: Some of my friends in the airport, they belong to Jesus. Some of them Catholic, but I said, "OK. I don't care about Jesus. I don't know him. Who is he? I don't know." We are Vietnamese, so we worship our ancestors, and everything like that. And because my mom is Buddhist, too, and I think that I will worship Buddha because when I go travel to Japan I buy a Buddhist statue, and because I think he's a good man, everything, because we don't know about God. But after 1978, my brother that I love him very much, and he go with his wife and two children. So we missed his news from that day. And sometime I cry. (chuckles) I cry, and my husband say, "It's OK. It's enough," because every night—in the day, it's OK with me, but at night, I don't sleep, and I stand up, and I cry, cry. And he say, (chuckles) "Are you crazy? If you are crazy, you see somebody crazy, they go out on the street, and they (speaking Vietnamese) naked, something like that. You like that?" I'm very angry, and, "OK." Because at this time I love my brother, and the missing is very, very sad to me, very painful.

VanZandt: Yes, I can understand. And not knowing what happened.

Nguyen: Yeah. After we have—my husband, he have a cousin, she believe in Jesus in Vietnam, and this day he told me that he wanted to save(?) himself, and when he call God, "Save me," and then after that he—because I don't know about that because I had to go to the flea market because this time I had to buy, to sell clothes, the old clothes.

VanZandt: Sell your old clothes.

Nguyen: Yeah, to help my family because in Vietnam they give me the paper to stop working at this time. But I don't cry. I receive this paper, and my friend in Vietnam, she said, "Why you don't cry?" I say, "No. I don't cry because it's (phone ringing) not for me to cry."

(brief interruption; end of digital file one; beginning of digital file two of four)

VanZandt: OK. So you were just telling me about after the Communists took over. Where were you April 30, 1975? Can you just tell about that day when South Vietnam fell? What happened to you personally and your family?

Nguyen: Um-hm, our family? (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. She said that during that time, like she stated before that she had many opportunities to go to America, but she was not able to contact her husband, and then she asked her brother, and her brother said, "No, don't go." But when her friends reached their destination, whether it be America or wherever they may have went, Australia, they had wrote her letters and she started crying. She said, "I should have taken the opportunity to go during that time."

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. So at that time (speaking Vietnamese).

Nguyen: No. (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. So at that time she had two children with her husband, and she remember that she had to sell a lot of—she sold things at the flea market, and she had to sell—

(phone ringing, brief interruption, end of digital file two, beginning of digital file three of four)

VanZandt: OK, so continuing. So you had two young children, and you couldn't get in touch with your husband. So you decided not to go.

Nguyen: No. When we visit him at the camp, I bring them with me.

VanZandt: Yes, to visit him. But when you had to make the decision whether to leave Vietnam, you chose not to go, like your friends did, because your husband, you were married and had family? Is that why you decided to stay in Vietnam?

Phan: No. She decided to stay on the most part because of her brother's advice.

VanZandt: Because your brother had suggested that you stay and not go.

Phan: Um-hm.

VanZandt: And looking back on your life now and all that God has done, do you think that was God's hand in your life? Did you make the right decision?

Nguyen: Yeah. When I look back, and I thank God, because I don't go this time, April 1975, so that when I stay and when I sell many thing in house, go to visit my husband, and then—(knocking no door).

VanZandt: Sure, we'll stop.

(brief interruption, end of digital file three, beginning of digital file four of four)

VanZandt: OK. Go ahead Mrs. Nguyen. So April 30, you had a chance to leave but decided to stay.

Nguyen: Yeah, because sometime—

VanZandt: And you were saying that was the right decision.

Nguyen: —when I hear any news from my friend, they go by boat or by paper, and I cry. Sometime I cry because this time, many thing happen; send money. A few months they change money and everything, and I don't have work so I cannot earn the money. I had to go to the flea market to sell the clothes. I take all our marry ring.

VanZandt: You sold your wedding ring.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Jewelry, everything.

Nguyen: Yeah. (chuckles) I had to sell to have money to see him and raise our kids, and I had to go to the flea market. (laughs) You know, I remember one time, because I have one friend from Vietnam, and she and me, we together, we have a place to sell the clothes. And this morning she come late, so my brother, my youngest brother, he bring for me the big bag of clothes because we send the clothes to my friend house. And every morning, we had to take out to the place—

VanZandt: To set up, display it.

Nguyen: Yeah. And the big one, but this time I don't know why, one kid, he tapped you, and he said, "OK. I have five Vietnamese piece," I should, turned, and when I turned back, and my big bag disappeared.

VanZandt: It was gone.

Nguyen: Yeah, gone. Oh, yeah, I cry because there many clothes from my friend, one of my Air Vietnam friend. She have a relative in the United States and send the clothes, the new one for me to sell, and I can have a commission from that. And I cry that I cannot, how I can repay her. But this day she come to my house, and she buy a beef(?) for us. And she say, "OK. Don't worry about that." (laughs) "It's OK."

VanZandt: Oh, you must have been relieved.

Nguyen: Yeah. [The friend said] "I don't ask you to pay me back." (laughter)

VanZandt: So someone just took them, just took them from you when you weren't looking.

Nguyen: Yeah. Many—

VanZandt: People were desperate.

Nguyen: This happened in the market, in the flea market at this time. They are hungry and, yeah. It's—

VanZandt: A terrible time.

Nguyen: —very difficult for them, yeah.

VanZandt: So while your husband was away in reeducation camp, you really learned how to survive, it sounds like, and take care of your children.

Nguyen: Um-hm. You know, our friend in Vietnam, they said, "Oh, Suong, now she can go to the market, the flea market." (laughs) They don't believe that I can do it. (laughs) Because this time, I speak a little. (laughter) But now my husband say, "You speak now. You speak much, very much." (laughter) "When I marry you, you don't speak." (laughter)

Phan: Yeah.

VanZandt: You were shy.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Quiet.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: But then you had to learn to—

Nguyen: And I told him, "Because I have three kids to raise." (laughter) So I had to talk too much. (laughs)

VanZandt: You had to do what you had to do.

Nguyen: Yeah, because sometime now, when I believe in Jesus, and sometime I talk on the phone with somebody, and I tell about Jesus. One time when I just come to the California, and one of the cousin of my husband, and I talked to him, and I share about Jesus. And she say, "Sister Suong, do you know that in the United States when you share about Jesus, the police will put you in jail?" (laughter) Yeah. He told me that. And I said, "It's OK." But after the few months in the church in California, I went up to him, and he come to the Lord. And before we go to the Biloxi, he receive baptism in water. Yeah. (laughter) And everytime I told, "So you must tell about Jesus to another." (laughter)

VanZandt: "Now you have to go spread the word."

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, it makes me think about Vietnam and how your mother was Buddhist, you said. And the Communists were terrible to the Buddhists and didn't allow any freedom of religion.

Nguyen: Yeah. But, you know, with the women it's easier.

VanZandt: The women, it's easier. Why?

Nguyen: Yeah, because this time the men go out, they had to, if they go from this place to another province, they have a paper with them, but with the women they don't ask the women for the paper or everything, so we can go easier and share the Gospel.

VanZandt: So you didn't have to carry identification.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: That said you were a pastor.

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughs)

VanZandt: Ah, interesting.

Nguyen: You know, I remember one time in one province in the north Mekong Delta, when we come back there and we go to the house of one home(?) there. And the people in the market, they said, "Hi, Viet Kieu, Viet Kieu." That mean, you are Vietnamese from the United States come back—

VanZandt: Viet Kieu, yes.

Nguyen: —to Vietnam. Some of them, they are very proud, and the people, they say, "Viet Kieu, Viet Kieu." But some of them say, "No, no, no. It's (Vietnamese word)." That mean that we belong to Jesus. We are Christian. So I'm proud to hear about that. (laughter)

VanZandt: Uh-huh, very proud.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, Mrs. Nguyen, tell me about when you left Vietnam. Tell me about you and your husband's journey here to the United States, if you would.

Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: She came to America in 1995, was when she came,

Nguyen: Because I adopt one of my, the daughter of my younger sister. She died. So I adopted her, and I had to go to the—

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: About seven years old.

Phan: She was seven when her mother died, and so she adopted Minh Tam, and she became her fourth child.

VanZandt: How do you spell that, just for the record?

Phan: M-I-N-H T-A-M.

VanZandt: She was seven. How did—

Nguyen: This time she only seven years old.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: She had lung, I guess lung cancer.

VanZandt: Lung cancer.

Nguyen: Um-hm, because she live in (speaking Vietnamese) Because she live in Cao Dai, Tay Ninh, where my grandfather and grandmom lived there. And they give them a house. So my sister, because before 1975, my brother, he worked in the post office, and she asked one job for her in Tay Ninh. So she had to move from Saigon to Tay Ninh to work. And there she marry and she have a daughter, and then because she live there alone. So when she is sick, she don't tell us, and yeah, because my sister, she very, she's (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese) Nice.

Nguyen: Nice. And she—

VanZandt: Didn't want to worry anyone.

Nguyen: And when she sick, and she don't tell us, because she always, before, she live with us when I have children, and she take care of this. And I told her I can work and I can help her go to school. But she said, "No. I don't like to go to school. I want to stay home to help you." So after that, my brother get a job for her in Tay Ninh, and she had to come back there. And she live at my grandfather house, and she lived alone there. And after a few years, because every time she write a letter to me, she sound sad and everything, but I thank God that I bring her to the Lord but, because she something like that. And sometime my husband say, "I don't want you read her letter." Because when I read her letter, I will cry because I love her, but I said, "You must work, and you had"—(speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: Confidence.

Nguyen: Um-hm, confidence, everything. But because when she very sick, oh, (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: So she got really sick where she lost so much weight that all you could see was skin and bones.

Nguyen: And her friend bring her from Tay Ninh to my house. Oh, I'm very surprised. She *very* sick, and one day she told me, she kneel before me. And she say, "Suong, sister, please help me to raise my kid." I said, "Oh, you don't die. Don't die." I told her, but after that I send her to the hospital, but one day when I visit her at the hospital and she said, "Suong, I want to go home." And I say, "It's OK if you want to go home." And I bring her home, and after we changed her clothes, everything, and we talk with her a few minutes, and then when I just go away a few minutes, and my brother, my youngest brother say, "Oh,"—(speaking Vietnamese) She died. And very, like God bless us because she, this time, if you don't have the name in the house, because you have every family, you have a list of the family, the boat and everything.

VanZandt: What you own.

Nguyen: And when she moved to Tay Ninh, they erase her name, so when she come back and she die here, we had to declare with the police, at the police station, and we, because my husband, he take care for the burial(?) at the church, and for the funeral, too. So we have many friend, and they come to help us for her funeral at my house. And this time, because we have a home sale(?) at home, Daniel home sale, but we worship upstairs, and her—(speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: Coffin.

Nguyen: Her coffin is downstairs, so we have a Vietnamese preacher to come to preach about the funeral, and Minh Tam decide, my niece, she still seven years old; she stand in the front of the coffin, and everybody they show her, they love her so
much. And we preach, because in Vietnam we always preach the Gospel, in the funeral is a very, yeah—

VanZandt: She was lucky to have you take care of her.

Nguyen: Yeah. It's a time, the occasion for you to share the Gospel, because when you die, and if your relative die and you believe in Jesus, you meet them in heaven. So we have a hope in Christ. So her funeral very blessed(?), but because this morning I go to the police station to tell them that I have my sister die in my house, and because of this, Sunday, and this Sunday night, we have every Sunday night worship at my house. But this time, this night we have a missionary group, about six people. There are some women, too, and they are one couple from (inaudible) and many strangers. But if the police know that, (chuckles) they will arrest you. And this policeman in my (speaking Vietnamese) district we live, because we announce them in the morning, so this night he come, and my young people say, "OK, Pastor Daniel, there are police there." So he had to come to talk with him and bring him to the coffee shop because at this time we finish the worship, and our missionary, because they have (speaking Vietnamese)—if you have a group of six people, we had to have six young people, six come and one bring friend(?). And because at my house, they are this way, go out this way. So my husband bring this policeman to this way, so the young people bring our missionary this way.

VanZandt: The other way, so they wouldn't see them.

Nguyen: Yeah. This is OK. (laughter) Because this time very strict. If they know, they will invite you (chuckles) to the police station.

VanZandt: Well, and that's a good time to talk about, what were the differences after the Communists took over? Your life changed very much. Less freedom, you're saying. Things were very strict, and there was fear of being arrested, and you couldn't worship freely. So what other things were different in daily life? How did it change after the Communists took over?

Nguyen: You mean because at this time we don't worship freely? Yeah. Because if they know, they will invite you to the station, and they can arrest you three hours or one day, just depend on—they will keep your Bible.

VanZandt: And was it more to—we would say "harass" you, give you a hard time, to scare you? In other words, they wouldn't keep you very long, but they would do it over and over just to scare you and try to threaten you to stop.

Nguyen: Yeah. Sometime they ask us to pay some money.

VanZandt: Ah, bribes.

Nguyen: If we want to go home, yeah.

VanZandt: And your husband told us yesterday about ministering and going from house to house, and how secretive he had to be along the Mekong Delta. Tell me about that, what that life was like when you were ministering with your husband, and you had a family and children.

Nguyen: Uh-huh. Very simple with me. When I show one of our friend, they use their house to worship the Lord, and I think I have an upstairs; we don't use it, so we can use for worship the Lord, but we choose Sunday night because it's not hot because my house (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Because my roof—

VanZandt: Stucco.

Nguyen: —very hot with (speaking Vietnamese) the white one. You know?

VanZandt: Yes, yea.

Nguyen: Very hot when the sun.

VanZandt: Yes, sure.

Nguyen: So I choose the night to worship the Lord.

VanZandt: But it was very secretive. So did people come to your house to worship?

Nguyen: Yeah. But because sometime you live with French from (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. They had to be very secretive, but because they were neighbors and they loved one another—it was illegal, and they would have been brought down to the station to be questioned—but because of the Christian concept of loving one another that, you know, everyone kind of stuck together and worshipped during the time that she set, like at night when it's a lot cooler.

Phan: So you took care of one another.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, Mrs. Nguyen, when you left and came to America in 1995, what did you think about that trip to America? Were you happy to come? Was it sad? What did you think about life in America? Just tell me about what that was like. Thats a huge change.

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. Very excited because we pray about that, because when my husband, one time, he want to go out by ship, (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. So whenever she started to believe in Christ, she saw that everything that she prayed for came true, so when her husband said he wanted to escape from Vietnam to go to America, it wasn't in a way where it was acceptable. He went on a boat to escape, so he wasn't able to go. So he went without her because he was just anxious to get out of the place because the way that they treated the men.

VanZandt: He left before she did.

Phan: He attempted to.

VanZandt: Attempted to, yes.

Phan: But he wasn't able to, so later on they were able to leave in 1995 together.

VanZandt: Sounds like God was working, again.

Nguyen: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: To leave together.

Phan: For them to leave together.

Nguyen: And I can bring my adopted daughter, the daughter of my sister.

VanZandt: I was thinking about that.

Nguyen: She can go with us.

VanZandt: Your three children, plus your adopted daughter.

Nguyen: Yeah, three and one adopted. I have four. (chuckles)

VanZandt: So when you left, you left Vietnam on a plane and flew all of the family together, to San Jose?

Nguyen: Yeah, but I still have—no, I have one, my second daughter, she go first. She go from, she twelve years old, with another family.

VanZandt: Why?

Nguyen: But this a very, this a miracle, too, because she go by airplane, not by boat.

VanZandt: How old was she?

Nguyen: About a month and twelve years old.

VanZandt: Twelve?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Why did she go without you?

Nguyen: Because (laughs) it's a secret, but I want to tell you.

VanZandt: OK.

Nguyen: This time I have one sister-in-Christ. She have a sister-in-law. And this family, they have a paper to go to France, not America, but this lady, she have one son in France and two son in America. And this lady, she have a daughter, and her daughter has a daughter, that mean her granddaughter. And because of her granddaughter make the passport, the picture and the name in her passport, and because her daughter go by boat with her granddaughter, together, they left Vietnam and they go to Philippines and they arrive there. And so in her passport they are the name of her granddaughter, and the [birth] year like my daughter. And my friend, my sister-in-Christ, she very close friend, and she love her, and she want to help us go out. And one time she help my husband go by boat, and one time not, he had to come back.

VanZandt: He was caught?

Nguyen: And she said that, "OK. I pray, and I want to help you that if you want to let your daughter go with my sister-in-law in the paper," and because at this time, I just believe in Jesus and I want it. And I say, "I think that maybe God open the way for her to go, and then after that she can make a paper for us to go to the United States." Because at this time we don't have the program from the [South Vietnamese Army] officer, because at this time we don't know yet. So because we live with the Communists, and we have many, many troubles, many—and no more money, everything. So I think it's the way that the Lord open for us because at this time, I just a Christian. I just believe in Jesus, and I think this is good for me that God open the way for me. And I say, "OK. But I don't have money. I have only some ring, gold ring." And my sister-in-Christ, she say, "It's OK. I can tell my sister-in-law if she accept, if she say OK." So that's OK. And they bring my daughter. And I ask her, because this time she about more than twelve year [old]. I say, "Do you want to go with them?" (laughter) And she say—

VanZandt: What did she say?

Nguyen: And she say, "Yeah." And they bring them to, they have a interview in the France embassy.

VanZandt: The embassy, right.

Nguyen: And bring her, and when she come back, and she say, "Mom, I saw my friend, too. (laughter) But I don't talk to her. I just [act] like I don't see her."

VanZandt: She saw a friend there, but she had to act like she didn't know her.

Nguyen: Yeah. But I think that, and after that, because they refuse the son there because they don't have enough many thing, or money to support the family if the family come to France. And this family had to change to the United States. But because I meet my sister-in-Christ, she will go to Switzerland, because if this family bring my daughter to France, she said that she will go to France and bring my daughter, and she will raise her. And because I believe in her, because she's a good woman, and when this family send the paper to the United States, and I'm very afraid because I see, I don't have anybody in the United States to help my daughter. But when I come to the United States, and I meet my daughter here, after a few year later, my husband have a paper from the US government, and I think that God have a plan for us because if my daughter go to France, how can we meet her? Every time we want to meet her, we had to buy the ticket for the whole family to meet her. And I just, uh—

VanZandt: So your daughter was able to leave with your Christian friend to France—

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Nguyen: Yeah. She's in San Jose now.

VanZandt: —and then to San Jose. And then you were able, because your husband was an officer, finally, with the US program, to come to the US.

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughs)

VanZandt: And you were united.

Nguyen: Because this time they don't have this program, and we don't have a home(?). We just believe in Jesus, but—

VanZandt: That was so brave of you.

Nguyen: We just (laughs) the new one in Christ. Yeah.

VanZandt: That was an amazing leap of faith for you to send your daughter.

Nguyen: Because this, my second daughter, her name is Trudy, and when she live with this family and they bring her to Jehovah Witness, this her—

VanZandt: Jehovah's Witness.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: This is your daughter (referring to photograph)?

Nguyen: Yeah. And after that we had to pray for her that God will bring her out of this.

VanZandt: She had been converted to Jehovah's Witness.

Nguyen: Yeah, because they teach her many different—and when her son—

VanZandt: Who is this (looking at photograph)?

Nguyen: Her son, yeah.

VanZandt: This is her son.

Nguyen: And when her own (inaudible) sister write a letter to her that Jehovah Witness is a cult, not good like that.

VanZandt: A cult.

Nguyen: And she write back a letter, and she say, "Your Christian always said that God is love, not the punishment, hell, everything like that." Oh, yeah. But we had to pray for her, maybe three or four years, and God bring her out of this. Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, who did she live with in the United States before you came here?

Nguyen: Yeah. So now she can speak English or everything very fluently.

VanZandt: Right. And then she left that family and lived with you.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Does she still keep in touch with that family that she lived with?

Nguyen: Yeah, sometime, um-hm.

VanZandt: And now-

Nguyen: And she live in San Jose, and after [Hurricane] Katrina, we live there one year.

VanZandt: You stayed with her.

Nguyen: And we call her to go to the church with us, something like that.

VanZandt: What does she remember about that time, about leaving you-all? Does she have happy memories about leaving? Is she glad that she—

Nguyen: But because when she live here and she meet her husband, but he's unbeliever, so that why now they are divorced. And her husband get married with another woman. So see, sometime I think she have a burden, and sometime she doesn't love God so much because maybe she feel something not glad. I think so. But I just pray for her.

VanZandt: Sure. That's an amazing story.

Nguyen: Her name is Trudy.

VanZandt: Trudy, T-R-U—

Nguyen: But the Vietnamese name is Trang.

VanZandt: T-R—

Nguyen: T-R—

VanZandt: A-N-G?

Nguyen: A-N-G, yeah.

VanZandt: Yes. I have a friend named Trang. Thank you for sharing that very personal story.

Nguyen: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: (sighs) Well, do you want to—I know we've talked a long time—just talk about what it's been like living and pastoring here on the Gulf Coast? You came to Mississippi. And just talk a little bit about that. And we'll wrap it up. I know we've been here a while, but I know we could talk a lot longer. There's so much to get to. But what has life been like here on the Gulf Coast?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: So she came to—she just wanted to tell us how she came to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. She was invited by a pastor in Dallas, and she actually—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: In 1996, June 1996, is when they first stepped foot onto Mississippi Gulf Coast. And again, her husband went first and then she came afterward.

VanZandt: And that was to the church here on Oak Street that you pastored before it was destroyed?

Nguyen: Yeah, um-hm, because one pastor in North Carolina, he introduce us to here because this Easter, this year, when we just come to the United States, he invite my husband to go up to his church in North Carolina to preach for Easter. And when we hear about this church, because he want to interview a young man from Canada for to hear, but before the paper is difficult for this guy, so he asked my husband, "Do you want to go to (Vietnamese word?)?" (laughter) He say that. (Vietnamese word?) in Vietnam. You know?

VanZandt: Yes.

Nguyen: So we told him that if you want us to go there, we must see here. And the next day he rent a car and bring us to here to meet the pastor here. And we go to the church, and we pray. And the pastor in, he's Vietnamese Assembly of God in Charlotte, he have a building there. And he's very close friend of us because when he come back Vietnam, my husband guide him, go around the church there. And he have one thousand, this time, to repair the window of the church because at this time, very old, and the house next to the church.

VanZandt: That's what you were doing.

Nguyen: And Katrina, we did that.

VanZandt: Right. We saw the pictures.

Nguyen: And he told his son—he had two son come to help my husband to repair the window of the church and the restroom in the house. And they stayed three day here to help my husband.

VanZandt: Um-hm. So it was in poor shape, and you fixed it up and had a very strong church going and Katrina destroyed that, but now you've built back up, and you're still meeting in D'Iberville.

Nguyen: Yeah. Because this time the church very old, from 1949 or '47, so the outside. But we pray before Katrina, two or three year, this (inaudible), they come to help us for the outside. They replace everything and the roof, too. And some of the pastor in this district, they come to help. They go up in the roof, yeah, and they help do everything. But only on Saturday because the Christian(?), they can off on Saturday, and they volunteer to help us. They are very kind. And they remember this time we make (speaking Vietnamese).

VanZandt: Egg rolls.

Nguyen: Yeah, egg rolls for them and go buy chicken for them to eat. They are very kind. They bring the food, too, but we told them we can buy some for them. (laughs) And they help us for outside, the roof, but the inside still—and we pray, and that God send my room, the husband of my little girl here. He come to our church and believe. No, he's a Christian already, but because his father and mom would worship for a long time, and they belong to the Baptist Church in the front of the Oak Street. We have two—

VanZandt: Uh-huh, Vietnamese Baptist Church, right.

Nguyen: —Vietnamese church. Yeah. And this time he bring his father and mother to the church there, but when he come by our parking lot, and my daughter from the house go out, and she wear a Vietnamese dress, and OK, she shows it; she said, "OK. We stop here. Worship at this church." And from that day, they know my daughter. And after that the wedding. But she help us to change inside the mold because if you buy, everything is not expensive, but—

VanZandt: The labor is what's expensive, not the material.

Nguyen: He can do all. Yeah. And after that, they had the wedding at the church.

VanZandt: Oh, how beautiful.

Nguyen: And after that we have some of them (speaking Vietnamese). And she get American husband, one daughter of my [congregation] member; she get marry with American. But (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: Bridesmaid.

VanZandt: Bridesmaid, OK.

Nguyen: And her mother-in-law, she American, and she very nice. She decorate our church in the window with beautiful—

VanZandt: Glass?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Or banners?

Nguyen: Yeah. And she make a very big (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: She's just remembering a moment, a happy moment that, you know, just pastoring Lang(?); she was just telling about her wedding, too. It was her second marriage. Right?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) I mean, because the same name, she think that the old—

Phan: She's sharing about a wedding and then putting together—

Nguyen: Because she said, Lang(?), that's the one women from Vietnam, but she have four, one son and three daughter already, and she divorce in Vietnam, and this guy, she just come to our church because we have one member invite him to the church, and when she come sometime there, and this lady, she introduce her sister, her only sister. And they know, and they cry(?) later. And he want to learn Vietnamese. And my husband teach him.

VanZandt: Is teaching him Vietnamese?

Nguyen: Yeah. And every time this lady, he send later to him, and he go to my husband, and my husband must translate for him. (speaking Vietnamese) Right now we celebrate because not wedding because she already marry in Vietnam and divorce. So just declaration for her, the wedding.

VanZandt: I see.

Nguyen: Yeah. And because this man, his father and mother is doctor, and when they attend the wedding, and the mother said, "I feel the Holy Spirit is here." (laughter) Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Oh, how wonderful. What a great story.

Nguyen: We have many stories to tell. (laughter)

VanZandt: So many people you take care of.

Phan: She has—right.

VanZandt: And minister.

Nguyen: Because in Vietnam we bring many family, and now they became pastor. I'm very proud about that. And they love us.

VanZandt: And you have led the church and so many people to God, and now the Vietnamese Assembly of God is legal in Vietnam, so it's growing.

Nguyen: Yeah. The picture I show you there today, yeah.

VanZandt: Yes, that's the (inaudible; speaking simultaneously).

Nguyen: It's a very—after twenty years underground, and because we are proud, because last October we come back and attend this ceremony because the government tell them to rent a big building. They show you where. And you have a program; you had to show them which one they agree or not. But it's very—we (inaudible) a lot because there are many officials from the Communist government, they had to come because some of them have a connection with the church. They had to work(?) with them, and they had to show the outside that they let the religion freedom, everything like that. And we are very so glad because it's very difficult you invite one official, Communist official, come to hear the Gospel. And we invite the missionary like pastor (speaking Vietnamese). Yesterday, I show you the guy.

VanZandt: Yes.

Nguyen: He's the first speaker and because he told the government official, he told the congregation that I come here to bring gun, M16, but now I bring *John 3:16*. So and—

VanZandt: He said, "You came with an M16, now John 3:16," wow.

Nguyen: Yeah. Because at this time they use this gun for the war and, yeah, because he talk about the love of God, something like that, and he witnessed about his life. So I think that many visitor hear, and they will understand because sometime they think that we are from CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] or something like that. (speaking Vietnamese) If you believe in Jesus, they will give you fifty dollar. Yeah. They told the people there that if you believe in Jesus, you will get fifty dollar (laughs) from American. (laughs) Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. (laughter) Well, Mrs. Nguyen, in closing, can we briefly just touch on what's happening right now? And then I'd like to just ask you to leave a message for your grandchildren's children who may hear this a hundred years from now. But can you tell me about just right now, the community has been hurting a lot after the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill; Katrina, and then things were getting better, and then the oil spill happened. And so many people here in the Vietnamese community are involved in the fishing and seafood industry. Have you seen any of your congregation affected by the oil spill or any kind of special needs that they may have that you see or are ministering to?

Nguyen: After Katrina, we (inaudible) that God save this day because this day, I don't know why my husband, (laughter) he don't want to go out the shelter. And one pastor in Florida, he call him this night, "Daniel, you have to go to the shelter." And I hear him answer, "This pastor (inaudible)." And I say in myself, I say, "OK. If you stay, I stay. I don't care." Because we did (inaudible) many happen, but my husband—but I thank that's God that we stay at home.

VanZandt: During the storm?

Nguyen: And the next day—yeah. The next day when the storm come, and we have a table like this and a chair like this, and he told me, "OK. Suong, when the water come up here, you take the chair up here, and you sit there." (laughs) He told me. And I said, "Oh, it's OK." But when the water broke out the window, many strong, many strong. And because he go around to take something to put in the back, so high, this high, and begin to, I'm afraid. And I call my daughter, my Trang, here, about twenty minutes and because my adopted daughter, she live with us, but the day before she go to her sister there to help—

VanZandt: Put boards up?

Nguyen: Yeah, the board in the window, something like that. And she stay there. And just me and my husband at home, and the next day—

VanZandt: Staying in your house on Point Cadet during the storm?

Nguyen: Yeah. We stay at home. So I sleep under the table, (laughs) and in the morning when the water come in, "Oh! I'm wet," and then I stay and I say, "Oh, the

water beginning to come." But from the beginning, it slowly, slowly. But when they have (speaking Vietnamese).

VanZandt: The surge?

Nguyen: Broke the window, and this time, very, very strong. I just call my daughter that, "Is your house there, the water coming?" She say, "Not yet." And I say, "OK. Pray for me." (laughs) The water began to come up through the—

VanZandt: Higher.

Nguyen: Yeah. And I call one of my main, very close friend in Massachusetts because I bring her to the Lord. And her name like me, Suong. And I say, "OK, Suong, pray for me. Be oh, very, very strong. The water." And she say, "OK. I pray for you from yesterday night because we read the news in the TV." And I just told her, and I put the phone, the cell phone, and I forget on because I have a bag for every paper, the ID, everything in there.

VanZandt: Important papers together.

Nguyen: Yeah. And this time I forget. (laughs) And the water up here, and I just pray that God please help me, save me, because I know if I die, I can go to heaven, but if you want to use me more, can you save me this time? And I just pray a short prayer. And I call my husband. He's inside the room here. "Oh, come here." We open the door, the main door, go to the church because of the (inaudible). So he just open the door, and the water, oh, very strong. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Came up to his chest?

Phan: Yeah.

Nguyen: Yeah. And he close the door right away. He say, "No, no, you can't go there. If you don't, the friends from the tree phone, you don't die for this day. The water will come and the water will bring you. So I'm very afraid, and I just very, very afraid. This time my house, it's with the wood. My husband and my (inaudible), he make (speaking Vietnamese).

Phan: The wood floor (inaudible).

Nguyen: And this time the water take them like this.

VanZandt: The water's pushing at the boards.

Nguyen: And on the chair, look like this, yeah. Go around the house. And this time, my husband, he go in the hole, in the hole in the ceiling.

VanZandt: He made a hole up in the attic, ceiling?

Nguyen: Yeah. Every year he go up there. So oh, this time he, there the chair from the kitchen, put it, and he stand, and he pull out the—

VanZandt: He put you on the table and pushed up?

Nguyen: Yeah. This hole, and climbed to there. And he call me. "OK. Suong, Suong, come here." Oh, I'm very, I'm cold. And he said, "OK, climb on the chair, and I will help you to go up there." But I go to the chair, and I cannot—

VanZandt: Couldn't reach it. Too high.

Nguyen: Yeah. And he said, "OK. You go down and I will stand on the chair, and you will go on my shoulder." (laughs) And this time the water, oh, very high. And I pray, "God, in the name of Jesus," (laughs) "I will go up there. And in the name of Jesus, I go up." I think that God help me I can have the strength to go up there. And when I go up there a few minutes, and the water up to the ceiling, and there are two like this one and one chair, they flow through this hole. And my husband take this chair and put in the ceiling, and he told me, "OK. Sit down." (laughs) "Sit down."

VanZandt: Very carefully.

Nguyen: Yeah. "You are the king now! Or the queen now." (laughter) Yeah. I think that she is shock. But I feel very—

VanZandt: You must have been tired.

Nguyen: Yeah, the peace from God, because sometime I say that, I preach about the peace of God, but this time I will feel, yeah, exactly how the peace of God. And I—

VanZandt: So you preach it, but this time you really felt it.

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, you know, because sometime you preach, but you don't have experience about that, and I think about our member. I think if this woman, if she live at home, it's not good. OK. I pray for all my members. And then I just sit like this. And the water come up to my knee. And oh! I am afraid. And I told my husband, "OK. Open the roof like this." And there are the (speaking Vietnamese). I told my husband to open this. I look out, and I saw the tree in my kitchen, out of my kitchen. I see the tree like this.

VanZandt: Waving.

Nguyen: I think that the tree, but I don't know that because this time my roof (speaking Vietnamese), my wall already collapse, but I don't know. I think because

this tree move, I think because of, we move like Noah's ark. But I saw the tree, just, "Oh!"

VanZandt: You could see it through the window, moving back.

Nguyen: Yeah. And from maybe ten o'clock to this night—

VanZandt: Ten o'clock in the morning till—

Nguyen: In the morning and about five, I think five in the evening, the water down.

VanZandt: Slowly started going down.

Nguyen: Yeah. This time we can look now, and we saw all the walls fall off, (laughs) and many things. But still a little water. And my husband say, "OK. You stay here. I go to the church outside." And he go there, and he come back, and he can bring only one Coke (speaking Vietnamese). We buy many, but this time we don't have any, so just one Coke and a bag of cookies from the church. My daughter she took the children.

VanZandt: That's all—

Nguyen: And she take one and bring for me, and this night we stay in the roof.

VanZandt: You slept there that night.

Nguyen: Yeah, but very cold because we all wet, you see. And we don't have anything to (inaudible).

VanZandt: No dry clothes.

Nguyen: Yeah. So but thank God that this time (speaking Vietnamese) a big (inaudible). When my husband, he make the floor and still have a (inaudible), and he put in the ceiling, and he take it, and—

VanZandt: To keep the wind out.

Nguyen: He put outside my, and he, "OK." So it's very, very warm in this one. Yeah. I think that God protect us. And you see that—

VanZandt: Do you have pictures?

Nguyen: Not still—um-hm?

VanZandt: Uh-huh, this is gorgeous.

Nguyen: When—

VanZandt: Where were you in this? Where were you?

Nguyen: When we go from the street, Howard—

VanZandt: Right, Howard Avenue.

Nguyen: Yeah. Because the next morning when my groom(?) and my daughter, and my adopted daughter, she come to the church, and when she passed the Howard Street, and she saw every house broken—

VanZandt: Gone.

Nguyen: Not like this. And she began to cry because she said that we die.

VanZandt: Well, you were just two blocks from your daughter.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: You were—and I saw all those homes around you were gone. It's amazing that you survived that.

Nguyen: But I think that because I cannot—if very cold, I cannot—

VanZandt: Very cold, wet and cold. Where were you?

Phan: Did your sons and daughter not come and pick you up to evacuate like (speaking Vietnamese)?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) The next morning, water (speaking Vietnamese) her car. The water go up to the machine, cannot walk. She cannot use her car. So after her husband from the hospital come back home and bring them to us, and when she through Howard, and she began to cry, cry. She think that we die. But this time I go out because this morning (speaking Vietnamese), oh, everybody go outside the street. They call, "Oh"—

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: I wonder why she didn't evacuate. Did she know that it would be that bad?

Phan: Well, her husband, they said that they were going to go to the shelter, but her husband said no.

VanZandt: You stayed with him.

Phan: Yeah. She stayed with him.

VanZandt: You didn't expect it to be so bad, huh? No one did.

Nguyen: You know *Psalm 91* is my Psalm. God will send the angel to protect you.

Phan: They just have strong faith. (chuckles) But you should definitely take precaution, too.

VanZandt: Well, and afterwards, did your church help? How did you help the community and your congregation recover from Katrina?

Nguyen: Because this time, our house collapsed everything.

VanZandt: You lost everything, too.

Nguyen: And I go to my, (inaudible) daughter here, but my daughter, my older daughter in Los Angeles, she call us because she missed news from this day that we cannot contact by telephone.

VanZandt: No communication. That's right.

Nguyen: And she very afraid. And when she contacted us, and she told us that, "OK. Mom and Dad, come with us here."

VanZandt: So you went to San Jose for a year.

Nguyen: Yeah. And then my little daughter here, "OK. Mom and Dad, you must go there." (laughs) (speaking Vietnamese) And when we come to Los Angeles, and one church in San Jose invite my husband come. Yeah. And we stay there one year to help them.

VanZandt: And came back.

Nguyen: And the district here, (laughs) the superintendent called my husband, "Do you come back to Mississippi?" (laughs) He say, "Yes. I want to come back."

VanZandt: Did you think about staying in California and not coming back?

Nguyen: No. We plan only one year there.

VanZandt: You wanted to come back. OK, OK. Well, in finishing up, anything that you'd like to say, is there anything about since the oil spill happened? Anything about your congregation and any of the fishermen who've been hurt or out of work? Is there anything that you would like to share about that?

Nguyen: Yeah. The next day after the hurricane again, we come back to the church to—

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. She said that there are fishermen, and they have gotten their [BP oil spill] claims, and then some of them work in the casino. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. I would like to tell you that the next day, two days after Katrina, we go back to the church because we think that we can collect some. And my husband he can find the ID because he put the ID in the pocket of his pants because after the service in Sunday, and he put in the room, our bedroom. And this morning he take the bicycle to come back here and he find his ID. And when he come back to my daughter house, and he told me that, "OK. I find my ID." I said, "Oh, how about mine?" And he says, "OK. Next day I will go there." (laughs) And he go again, and that God protect my purse that when the water there, and hang on the wall. And oh, he show it! And he open, and he show my ID.

VanZandt: Your purse was still hanging on the wall. Oh my goodness.

Nguyen: Yeah. And I think it's a miracle. And two days later we come back to the church, too, and because the family, the father and mother of my groom(?), he come to see us, and he ask us that if we want to go back to the church. And we go with them. And then with my son, my daughter, and my adopted daughter. And when we go to Howard Street, and they have some food for the, you know. And my daughter said, "OK. Stay here. I go to get some food." And we go and this time there one car from the other state, NBC from TV.

VanZandt: Oh, sure, TV.

Nguyen: And the young man, he stop and with another man with a camera, and he told that, "This is Vietnamese village, this street?" And my husband answer him about that we are pastor of the church and now our church was lost, something like that. And he told him on (inaudible) pastor one day there. OK? And then I say, "OK. I want to tell my story that we preach the Gospel among the Vietnamese people." And I tell that—

VanZandt: You told the cameraman your story.

Nguyen: Yeah. And I told that with God I'm already finish our job because we preach about the Bible, about the last day, and they must believe in Jesus. And I told them about that God save me, how he save me this day, and how I pray that if I die this time I will go to heaven, but if you use me, please help me, and I see that God open the door for us. And I see the young man, he cry. (chuckles) Yeah. And then he asked us, "OK. Can you show me the way to your church?" And we showed him.

VanZandt: Did you?

Nguyen: And he go to see everything.

VanZandt: How wonderful.

Nguyen: And this time, they put on TV. And my friend in Massachusetts, her son say, "Oh, it's Suong!" (laughs)

VanZandt: He saw you.

Nguyen: I show on the TV. Yeah.

VanZandt: That's wonderful. So they knew you were OK.

Nguyen: Yeah, I think.

VanZandt: That's a difficult time.

Nguyen: Sometime when I remember that day, I say, "God, "You save me the second time. The first time when I believe in you and Jesus and (inaudible) your children, that the second time you save me from the water. And when I come back Vietnam, I go to the church and I witness, but I think that God save us because many people pray for us. They said that, one woman, she say, "Oh, when we hear about the news from Biloxi, we pray for you." And I think that God answer their prayer. And I want to cry because I see that they love us. (laughs) Yeah. But the important thing that when you share the Lord, that you blessing to everybody, everyone. And now, yeah, we are very proud that we bring many, many family, and they became pastors, and they preach the Gospel. And now my superintendent in Vietnam underground church, his family, we bring to the Lord. And yeah, he's like a (inaudible) of my husband.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Nguyen: Yeah. Now, he take care for the Mekong Delta, for the rest of the Mekong Delta.

VanZandt: That's a wonderful legacy that you've left.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, Mrs. Nguyen, you've been a blessing to me just sharing all of these stories that are amazing; your resilience and faith, strong faith. And I'm thinking about your adopted daughter and all of your children. And is there anything that you'd like to say to end this? (Mrs. Nguyen laughs) If someone were to hear this a hundred years from now, advice to your grandchildren, (laughter) great-grandchildren.

Nguyen: (laughs) Yeah. I think that when I meet God, Jesus will say, "Good job." (laughs) And I will have a room with many prize(?) from God, but in the world now I have the blessings. And we will retire in a few year, because we pray that we will have a young pastor to replace, because my husband now seventy-one years old now. And yeah, we think that we have enough time to serve the Lord.

VanZandt: You're ready to retire.

Nguyen: But we would like to have a young pastor for the next generation, but we still serve the Lord in our retiring time, but we pray that we will have a building church, 1904 Oak Street, we rebuild. So that for the Vietnamese community can know about Jesus, and our goal is to continue to preach the Gospel for Jesus Christ until we die. And we pray that we have a building, and we pray that we will have a garden of prayer because when we do the light of Pastor (inaudible) from South Korea. Did you know about Dr. Jung(name?)? Yeah. He has a big church; more than seven hundred fifty thousand member.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Nguyen: Yeah. His the biggest church in the world.

VanZandt: Biggest church in South Korea?

Nguyen: Not in the United States. Yeah. And he have a mountain of prayer. And because when we begin to start the underground church in Vietnam, we have many from his work, and he allow us to translate to Vietnamese, so we share the way he shared the Lord by his home sale(?), use the house like us.

VanZandt: Sure.

Nguyen: And I think that because he's an Asian like us and his country Communist, and yeah, like Vietnam, the North and the South, but with Korean four people, one believer with Vietnamese. One hundred people, about two people mission, so we ask God to bless our Vietnamese community because Dr. Jung (name?), he said that God no have a—I don't know (speaking Vietnamese) the children.

Phan: A favorite.

Nguyen: A favorite children because he love us.

VanZandt: Sure, everyone.

Nguyen: Yeah. He love the Korean American. He will love Vietnamese. So we pray that God will save our Vietnamese community because now we are American, but we are all the citizens of God, yeah, when we meet him in heaven. But we want to because of Dr. Jung(name?), believe in him, he is like, I adore them because their ministry very successful. And Dr. Jung (name?) he have picture, and his congregation, they have a lot of prayer, and they have a mountain of prayer. And when I been in San Jose, I visit one garden of prayer of one lady, a pastor, a lady pastor of Korea. She build a garden of prayer, very, very nice. I been there many time, and every year I come to San Jose to visit the church there, and I go up there and pray with my friend. And one in Atlanta of one Korean pastor, and one of our friend pastor here, and we use—he guide us on the, go around the garden. Yeah. And I, my husband, we have a vision for Vietnamese garden of prayer in Mississippi, in Biloxi, but I think it will, maybe two years more, three, but we have this vision. And we pray, and we like you and Angel—I share with her already to pray for us about that. Just pray, and God will answer. And we believe it. (laughs)

VanZandt: I believe it, too, Mrs. Nguyen.

Nguyen: Yeah. Hallelujah.

VanZandt: Angel, is there anything that you wanted to add or ask?

Phan: That's pretty much it. I wanted to ask her a little bit more about the congregation, what they went through during the oil spill. Has anyone came for prayer about their claims or anything.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Because in our church we have one lady. She from Catholic now, but when her husband, we pray for her husband, and God healed him. And now she show us to share the Lord, and she has a work for—

Phan: (inaudible) administration.

VanZandt: Administration.

Nguyen: Yeah, to help the Vietnamese community when they come to her and—

VanZandt: So she helps them, maybe. (asking Angel) Is that what she was saying to you?

Phan: Yeah. Just like if they have problems with their claims, or they have problems with their mortgages, or any of that, she'll help them, along with their language barrier, she'll help them with that, with praying with them through their suffering.

VanZandt: What is her name?

Nguyen: (name?) She from Catholic Church.

VanZandt: Yes.

Nguyen: But when her husband had brain, uh—

VanZandt: Brain tumor?

Nguyen: Yeah. And her (inaudible) and bring to the hospital, and she meet one of my member before Katrina, so she asked her if I can invite your pastor to come to pray for my husband. And this lady say, "OK. I will tell them." And when we heard about that, then we come to the hospital, and we pray for him, and in the hospital there, they asked the pastor to come, but that God heal him. But when my husband go to the room, when he lie down, he closed the eye, but he told him that, "If I told you, and you believe in Jesus that you just make your eyes like this." And he said, and he you know, that he believe in Jesus and that the Lord knew him, and now he can drive the car, everything. And this lady, sometime we invite her to the church, sometime, for the big Christmas and things like that. But after we come back from San Jose and we use the house in D'Iberville to worship the Lord because we don't have a place. And

this time we don't rent the building yet, so one day I told her that, "OK. If you go to the Catholic Church, it's OK for you, but only you with God, but if you want to share the Gospel and walk with us, you can help us because your walk is very, you have a fellowship with many Vietnamese people. So from that day she agreed, and she bring many people to the Lord, but because I think that if they don't, for a long time with God, but I told her that, "OK. Continue and you pray and you pray that one day you have one from two, thirty, sixty, one hundred like Jesus."

VanZandt: Multiplied.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Right. Multiplies just like the loaves of bread.

Nguyen: Yeah. I think that. (laughs)

VanZandt: Wow, that's great.

Nguyen: Are you pray now? OK? (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Sure.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: (asks Angel) Did you have anything else?

Nguyen: The building and the—

Phan: She just wants me to pray, because every time—

(end of interview)