

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

Hoa Thi Pham

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt
Interpreter: Angel Truong Phan

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.

©2012

The University of Southern Mississippi

This transcription of an oral history by The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage of The University of Southern Mississippi may not be reproduced or published in any form except that quotation of short excerpts of unrestricted transcripts and the associated tape recordings is permissible providing written consent is obtained from The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. When literary rights have been retained by the interviewee, written permission to use the material must be obtained from both the interviewee and The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage.

This oral history is a transcript of a taped conversation. The transcript was edited and punctuation added for readability and clarity. People who are interviewed may review the transcript before publication and are allowed to delete comments they made and to correct factual errors. Additions to the original text are shown in brackets []. Minor deletions are not noted. Original tapes and transcripts are on deposit in the McCain Library and Archives on the campus of The University of Southern Mississippi.



Louis Kyriakoudes, Director
The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage
118 College Drive #5175
The University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
601-266-4574

An Oral History with Hoa Thi Pham, Volume 1043

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt

Interpreter: Angel Truong Phan

Transcriber: Stephanie Scull-DeArme

Editor: Linda VanZandt

Biography

Mrs. Hoa Thi Pham was born in 1953 in Duc Pho, South Vietnam. In 1966 she went to live temporarily with her grandfather's brother in Vung Tau to be protected from the dangerous fighting in her home region. Mrs. Pham's father grew rice and potatoes on their farm and her mother had a convenience store. Mrs. Pham had one younger brother. She married Mr. Luu Thai, who was from her village. Mrs. Pham worked repairing fishing nets in Vung Tau while her husband was away serving as a soldier in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army). After being drafted to work on Viet Cong boats after the war ended, Mr. Pham decided to escape Vietnam by boat with Mrs. Pham and their three young children. Fifty-three other people escaped on the boat with them in 1978. Mr. Pham was the captain.

After a brief stay in Singapore, a nun sponsored the Pham family to Waterbury, Connecticut. In 1981 they settled in Biloxi where Mr. Pham could make a living fishing the Gulf waters. Mrs. Pham enjoys taking care of their home and garden while her husband is away at sea, usually one month at a time.

Table of Contents

Personal history.....	1
Growing up in Vietnam	5
Moving to Vung Tau in 1966 for safety from soldiers, battles.....	6
Parents.....	7
Fear of American soldiers.....	8
Bombing, gassing by American soldiers	10
Fear of South Vietnamese Army soldiers	13
Meeting husband.....	15
Husband served in South Vietnamese Army	18, 22
Mother-in-law evicts her and her daughter	19
Repairing nets for a living in Phu Quoc.....	19, 23
Fall of Vietnam to Communists, 1975.....	25, 28
Husband drafted into Viet Cong military.....	30
Flight from Vietnam	31, 33
Sponsored to come to United States	31
Dangers refugees faced on voyages out of Vietnam.....	33
Decision to leave Vietnam.....	34
Goals of new lives for her family	35
Children.....	35
Sojourn in Singapore.....	36
Adjusting to life in Connecticut.....	36, 40
Moving to Biloxi, Mississippi, 1981	37
Husband brought fishing skills from Vietnam to United States	38
Happy as Vietnamese-American in Biloxi	40
Being the wife of a fisherman.....	41
Weathering Hurricane Katrina, 2005, on fishing boat in Back Bay, Biloxi	43
Witnessed neighboring boat break ropes, sink; occupants drowned	44
Recovering from Hurricane Katrina	47
Shrimping after Hurricane Katrina	47
Repairing home after Hurricane Katrina.....	48
BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster, impacts on fishing community	48
Comparison to Exxon <i>Valdez</i> disaster in Alaska	50
Did not want children to become fishermen	50
Message to her descendants	50

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

HOA THI PHAM

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Hoa Thi Pham and is taking place on September 22, 2011. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. English/Vietnamese interpretation is provided by Angel Truong Phan.

VanZandt: It's so good to be here. Thank you for having us in your home and showing your pictures of your children. We just want to give you an opportunity to tell your story, anything that you'd like to share. Life in Vietnam to life here on the Gulf Coast.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: OK. Well, I'll start. Today is September 22, 2011. This is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History, and I'm here in Biloxi with Angel Phan, who will be offering interpretation. And we're here in the home of a Biloxi resident. And if you could state your name, please.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Could you spell that for the recording?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Or if you want to write it.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: OK. I want to make sure this is—

VanZandt: OK. Angel's writing it down so we'll have it.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Pham, Pham.

Phan: OK. Her first name is H-O-A. Her middle name is Thi, T-H-I. And her last name is P-H-A-M.

VanZandt: OK. Good. Thank you, Mrs. Pham, for being here today. And I'd like to just start by asking you where you were born.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: OK. Can you spell that?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: OK. Is that in South Vietnam?

Pham: Yeah.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Duc Pho is spelled D-U-C, P-H-O.

VanZandt: OK. In the south of Vietnam.

Pham: Yeah.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Where in relation—most people only know Saigon. Where in relation to Saigon is Duc Pho? Oh, sure. Let's pause for just a minute. Go right ahead. Stop, sure. (end of part one; beginning of part two) OK. Testing, good. I see now. I just pulled out the map. So you were raised in Quang Ngai?

Pham: Quang Ngai, yeah, Quang Ngai.

VanZandt: Q-U-A-N-G, N-G-A-I, south of Danang. OK.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: Beautiful. On the water?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Did she say on the water? Was it a coastal town?

Pham: Yeah, right.

VanZandt: It's kind of hard to tell from the map. OK.

Pham: She was just naming the different places that you had to go to, to get to where she lived.

VanZandt: OK, sure.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) Danang.

VanZandt: Danang, very close.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: I think we went there. I think we went. Is it beautiful?

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, tell me about growing up there. What was it like?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She was born in 1954. So she said she was very little. I'm sorry, [19]53.

VanZandt: Fifty-three, OK.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So she said her family was, her grandfather was really rich in Vietnam, and they had a lot of property and a lot of land. And whenever he died, he left a lot of land back to her father. And when she was younger she lived with her mom, her dad, and her grandfather. Her grandfather passed away, and it was her mom and herself. But after the war, she went down to Vung Tau to live with her grandfather's brother. And she lived there with her grandfather's brother, his wife, and they had a small child that she took care of in Vung Tau.

VanZandt: OK. And you said "after the war." Was that 1975 that you moved to Vung Tau?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Around thirteen years old, if we could figure.

VanZandt: Oh, she was thirteen. OK. So 1966, about. OK. And why did you leave to go to Vung Tau?

Phan: The reason why she left—

VanZandt: She left her family to go.

Phan: I asked her why she left. Well, she had answered that in her statement earlier. And she said she left because it was a battleground there, and so they left because the war, and she just left, and her parents stayed. But she went with her granduncle.

VanZandt: Did they just think that it was safer for her to be in Vung Tau?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So they were pretty well off, so her mom and dad had their farm and everything. They could not go. And plus I asked if they had like ancestors' cemetery. A lot of the Vietnamese say that they would stay just to watch over their land and the ancestors, the cemetery.

VanZandt: Sure.

Phan: Yeah. So they stayed. And they said if they go, they're just going to be working for other people, and so they didn't want to go. The main reason why she left was because of the war.

VanZandt: Yes. And where you lived, near Danang, it was very bad, a lot of fighting there. Big base in Danang. I'd love to get to the war in a few minutes. Can we back up a little bit to when you were very young? First of all, what did your father do for a living?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Her mom had—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —a convenience store, and she would sell goods such as food and grocery and beer. And then she also helped her father in the farm, also. And he was a farmer, and he grew rice.

VanZandt: Rice. A rice farmer.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. Any other crops, or just rice?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: And potatoes.

VanZandt: Potatoes, OK. So you helped when you were young?

Pham: No.

VanZandt: No. (laughter) Just your mother?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said that she was too young at the time, and during the war her parents were afraid that she was going to get raped by the soldiers, and so they sent her off with her granduncle.

VanZandt: (heavy sigh) So it must have been very dangerous where you lived.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. It was very chaotic during the war. It was a battleground, and so my mom said that I had to go because there were a lot of people that were raped then.

VanZandt: So it was too dangerous for you to be out in the field alone; too dangerous.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said during the time of the war, they would just kidnap ladies and just rape them.

VanZandt: And who was doing that? What soldiers?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. It was the American soldiers that were getting the—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. (heavy sigh and pause) So did you have brothers and sisters? Did you have other sisters that they worried about, or brothers? Or was she an only child?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: A little, younger brother.

VanZandt: Just you and a younger brother.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. And your mother had a convenience store, and your father was farming the land. Well, did your father ever serve in the military?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: No, just a farmer.

VanZandt: OK. Well, who could you depend on for protection where she lived, then, because it was so dangerous?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. Most of the people, they just ran. And people that owned land and property, they stayed, but mostly everyone ran, so I couldn't really depend on anyone for protection. Just had to protect myself and just run.

VanZandt: Just left.

Phan: Left.

VanZandt: That must have been *horrible*, very frightening.

Phan: Yeah. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said that she remember, *yeah*, she was very, very afraid. And she would use this face paint and just paint her face black and dark, and she put it all over her body so she could look ugly so that they would not do anything to her.

VanZandt: And so it must have made you very afraid of American men.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: And she's looking down at the floor, and she's saying that every time there was an American soldier, she couldn't even look at them. She just looked away.

VanZandt: (heavy sigh) And did you go to school during this time?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) (phone ringing)

VanZandt: Do you want to stop?

Phan: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. Sure. (brief interruption; end of part two; beginning of part three)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She mentioned she had a younger brother, and she was telling me about a story of her brother leaving that area, and how scary it was to not see him come home, but his friends came home before him. Her brother did not go into the [South Vietnamese] Army or anything. He actually was handicapped, you know. He was handicapped. He stutters, and he couldn't speak well. And at that time she was very afraid for her brother, as well.

VanZandt: Yeah. I bet.

Phan: A lot of fear.

VanZandt: A lot of fear you lived with.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. And she saw a lot of bombing, and it was very near there. She thought she was going to die, but she didn't die.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. *Wow*. She was like right in the middle of the war, and she remembered a point where—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —they bombed the area just to destroy all the houses. And they put gas everywhere, and she remembers, I guess there was a basement that she could get into, and she covered herself in the basement. And after they put the gas everywhere, and before they lit it—(speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Right. So she stayed in the basement, but she was able to look out at the plane pulling down to put gas on the houses, and every time that it would go down, she would hide, but every time that the plane would go back up, then she would run to safer shelter.

VanZandt: And who was doing the bombing and gassing?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: The American soldiers were doing the bombing and the gassing.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: I'm just, I'm so glad that you're sharing this because what most people in America know about the war is from the *American* side and not the Vietnamese. So you were a witness, living on the ground through this. And the Americans were supposed to come to *help* the South Vietnamese and protect them and help them fight this war. And yet what she experienced, sounds like was great fear and suffering from the American presence. Is there anything she wants to add about that?

Phan: Where she's located, that would be considered right in the middle.

VanZandt: It was South Vietnam.

Phan: It was South, still South Vietnam.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Phan: OK.

VanZandt: See, the North was moving in, and then the VC [Viet Cong]. So the Americans were helping fight the Viet Cong. How would *you* explain it (asking Mrs. Pham)?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: The war. Who was fighting who? For the younger generation to understand.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Well, from her perspective, she said the soldiers in the South were very mean, and they would influence the American soldiers to rape the girls, kill the chickens, eat them; and from her perspective, she was *very* afraid of the soldiers.

VanZandt: The South Vietnamese Army.

Phan: The South Vietnamese Army.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. And she said she did not see a lot of North Vietnamese Army, for her to say anything about them. She didn't see them.

VanZandt: OK. Or the VC, Viet Cong. Any experiences with Viet Cong where she was?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said, I was in the battleground, and so that was just battleground, and they battled there. And so I just needed to leave that area, but I didn't have any experience with the Viet Cong. I was only experiencing, had experience with American soldiers and the South Vietnam soldiers.

VanZandt: Which were allies [of the U.S.].

Phan: Which were allies.

VanZandt: So she felt like the South Vietnamese soldiers were influencing the Americans in that way.

Phan and Pham: Um-hm.

VanZandt: And so when you left, Mrs. Pham—

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: —what was that like, leaving? Did you understand why you were having to leave? Was it difficult to leave your parents? Or just talk about how you felt about leaving.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: To go down to Vung Tau.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) Luu Thai.

Phan: Her husband's name is Luu Thai, but for two years she lived in—Saigon or Vung Tau?

Pham: Vung Tau.

Phan: For two years she lived in Vung Tau, after leaving, and then after that she went home with her mother because she was crying so much; she missed home. But it was still in the battleground, so it was still really bad. So she had to leave *again*, and that's when she met her husband that was also from her same village, and that's when they got together. That's when she met Luu Thai. That's her husband.

VanZandt: And we'll spell that. Is it L-U-U?

Pham: Yeah, L-U-U.

VanZandt: T-H-I?

Pham: Yeah, T-H-I.

Phan: T-H.

VanZandt: Or T-H—

Phan: A-I.

VanZandt: A-I, right. I'm sorry. OK. And so what attracted you to Luu Thai? What did you like about him when you met him?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. So his grandma actually knew her. They were from the same village, so they knew her, and they knew that she's a good girl, and she cooks. And then—

VanZandt: Good catch. You were a good catch.

Pham: Yeah.

Phan: Yeah. And so—(speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Oh, OK. So his grandma asked her granduncle if they could get married, because she was just so sweet and a good cook and a good girl. They know her from that area. So that's how they were able to get married.

VanZandt: So would you call that an arranged marriage?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Yeah. It was an arranged marriage.

VanZandt: How did she feel about it? Did she feel—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Yeah. So she had many people come to ask for her hand in marriage, and every time she would say no. And every time she would say no. And she would even say no to her husband, but her granduncle said that, “He’s a good man. You should marry him. If you don’t marry him, you might end up with someone bad.” (Linda laughs) And so she accepted that. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Right. She was nineteen at the time when her husband had asked for her hand in marriage, and the older people had brought gifts to give to them, and—(speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: And she wasn’t ready for marriage at that time, so she said, “Just engagement.” Yeah. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Yeah. And after they were engaged, they didn’t wait that long to get married because—(speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: OK. So he was afraid that she would change her mind, (Linda laughs) so he wanted to marry her right away, so that she does not change her mind. And there were many people that were interested, so they did it quickly after the engagement.

VanZandt: And what was your wedding like? Did you have a big wedding, traditional wedding?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. And he wasn't that well off, yeah.

VanZandt: Yeah. OK. Does she have any pictures?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She doesn't have any.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

Phan: Yeah. He wasn't that well off, so they didn't have any. They didn't take pictures, not a lot. Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, American children would find that very distasteful that parents would make that decision for them, but it's different in Vietnam. That was common to have your parents or grandparents arrange and pick your suitor.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Oh, my God!

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said when she got married, his grandmother liked her, but his mother was really, really mean to her, you know. Whenever he—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —went into the Army, she kicked her [Mrs. Pham] out. And—

VanZandt: Did they live together in the same house?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah, in the same house.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah, right.

VanZandt: Where did she go?

Phan: And (speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Wow! (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: And she had a daughter at the time when she kicked her out, and his grandmother actually went with her and helped her, took care of the baby. And then she actually—(speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Well, the nets on the fishing boat, well, how she was able to make a living was she was able to repair the nets.

VanZandt: And so at this point are they back in her hometown or Vung Tau?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Wow! Wow. So on his side, he had four—(speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Her husband's side, there's three girls and two boys, and when her husband had left, the mother-in-law was very evil and mean to her. She actually had them beat her up and treated her really hostile.

VanZandt: Umph. How frightening. And how old was your child then, Mrs. Pham? She had a baby.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: It's only two months old.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: It was only two months old, and my mom took care of the baby, not his mom.

VanZandt: OK. And do you know why she treated you this way?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. It was over money. Her mother-in-law wanted her son to continue to work to give *her* the money, but now he has his own family, you know, he has to take care of *his* family. And she did not agree with that because she has to go and buy things for their family now, and since then, she just treated her really bad over money.

VanZandt: And you said they were not rich. They didn't have a whole lot, so yeah. Were you in Vung Tau, at that point, or close to your family up in Duc Pho? I'm confused about when she was married and this time when her mother-in-law was mistreating her. Were they living—

Phan: In Vung Tau.

VanZandt: In Vung Tau.

Phan: Yes.

VanZandt: So you were far from your family.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Or did they live in—

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Her mom had lived in Duc Pho, but she came down for a month whenever she gave birth to her first child, and she helped her for one month because she was afraid her mother-in-law would treat her really bad, and she might *die* during the time that she had a baby.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So she came to America in 1978.

VanZandt: Seventy-eight, OK.

Phan: Yeah. Her mom passed away in 1987.

VanZandt: Ah, OK. Well, so you were living in Vung Tau, and your husband was in the Army. How long was he in the Army? How many years?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Maybe a year.

VanZandt: Oh, just a year, OK, in the South Vietnamese Army. Was he a soldier? What was his rank and position? What did he do in the Army?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Right. He was a soldier in the battlefield, but he didn't have a lot of rank.

VanZandt: So he was away from home, away from you, fighting. Did you see him very often during that year?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yep, she just talked about how he—I'm just still meditating on a lot of the stuff that she—

VanZandt: Sure. Anything that you want to ask, too, that you're thinking. I was just wondering; he was away for a year, it sounds like. I mean, some of the men that were in the Army stayed, like they said, they were security in the town, and they were able to be home. But was he—he was gone?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: He couldn't come home, no.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: And she had very little—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She couldn't go visit him because she didn't have any money at the time, either.

VanZandt: How did she support herself during that time?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Well, she stayed (inaudible) after she left her mother-in-law's house.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She stayed at another lady's house, and she was able to provide for her for a little while until she was able to repair nets.

VanZandt: Repair nets, OK. And Vung Tau was a big fishing village, so there were lots of nets to repair, I imagine, and that kept you busy. It must have been very difficult not knowing where your husband was, because many men were killed and never came back. What was that like, being away for that time, being apart?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. She had lost a lot of weight because she was very sad and depressed. And she couldn't gain any weight, and she remember she fainted because she had lost so much weight because of how bad she was treated, even with her husband being gone.

VanZandt: Yeah. Well, in Vung Tau there were many GIs, many American soldiers. Did you feel any safer after moving to Vung Tau, and especially being on your own, than she did up when she lived in Duc Pho? Was it any safer there?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said this is the battlefield, battleground.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: In Vung Tau there was none of that.

VanZandt: Right. Yeah. I guess I meant, there were so many American soldiers around, and there was that fear when she lived in Duc Pho near soldiers, raping, and there were so many GIs and other military at Vung Tau. I wondered if she—

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She was only afraid of them while they were fighting in the battlefield, but she wasn't afraid of them when they were in Vung Tau.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said there was a lot of Americans that lived there, and she was not afraid of them. It was just during the battlefield, in the battleground that, that was when she was really scared of them.

VanZandt: And when did you have your other children? We know about your one child. When were the others—were they born in Vietnam?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She had a four year old, a three year old, and one that she just gave birth to during that time she came to America.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: The baby was only three weeks, and I took her with me.

VanZandt: When she left Vietnam; so we're talking about 1978.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. So she went on a boat, and the American boat passed.

VanZandt: OK. Well, let's talk about that, then, you leaving Vietnam. Well, first, what year did your husband come back home from the war, from fighting.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: In the fall of Vietnam, during 1975, that's when he came back home.

VanZandt: Was it that April that he came back?

Phan: Yeah. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Tell me about that, seeing him for the first time. What was that like when he came back?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Oh, OK. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So when he came home, she was very glad for him to come home, and then they moved to Vung Tau. They were in Phu Quoc then.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Phan: Yeah. She was in Puc Quoc with her husband then. And then they moved to Vung Tau.

VanZandt: Phu Quoc, and that's P-H-U, Q-U-O-C?

Pham: Vung Tau.

Phan: Phu Quoc (speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: Phu Quoc (speaking in Vietnamese).

VanZandt: Let's see. Here's Vung Tau (referring to the map).

Pham: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, Vung Tau.

VanZandt: OK. Was it Phu Quoc, because of the province? Did she say that?

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, still Vung Tau. OK, I just wanted to make sure you hadn't moved somewhere else.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Phu Quoc's an island, isn't it?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Oh, you lived there, too?

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, no wonder. OK. So when did that happen? (laughs)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Just trying to trace her journey.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: And then moved to Phu Quoc.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: OK. And then America. So.

VanZandt: OK. When did she move to Phu Quoc, and why did they leave Vung Tau to go to Phu Quoc?

Phan: When she left her mom, her mother-in-law, is when she went to Phu Quoc.

VanZandt: OK. I see.

Phan: And then when her husband got out—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —in 1975, then—

VanZandt: That's where they were living.

Phan: That's where they were living. And then she went back there with her husband.

VanZandt: Back to Vung Tau.

Phan: Back to Vung Tau.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She bought a house there in Vung Tau.

VanZandt: OK. All right. And you had three children then.

Pham: Yeah.

Phan: Yeah.

VanZandt: And so (sigh) tell me about April 30, 1975, during the fall of Saigon. What are her memories about that?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So she said that her and her husband planned, whenever they went back to Vung Tau, to tell them to get the paperwork done that he wasn't in the Army because they were afraid that he would have to go to the reeducation camp, and they would capture him again. So they just told them that he wasn't in the Army, and so he was able to stay; they were able to stay together.

VanZandt: *Who* did they tell?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Oh, the Viet Congs.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: After the fall of Vietnam.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So after the fall of Vietnam, the Viet Congs, they reported to the Viet Cong that he wasn't in the Army, and so he was able to stay home, but she had to bear the burden of having him and two kids, and she went to work and repaired nets while he stayed home. And there were times where they had to hire a babysitter, also.

VanZandt: Is that because he wasn't able to get work because—

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Oh! (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Wow.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Right. OK. It's a long story.

VanZandt: Sure. Take your time.

Phan: Do you want me to repeat it all in English?

VanZandt: Well, or just whatever you think. I mean, I'd hate to miss any good detail, but if it's easier to sort of summarize.

Phan: OK. What had happened is after the Viet Cong asked them, they planned to not tell them that they were in the Army for the South. So what happened with her husband, even though he didn't go to reeducation camp, but they had drafted him to be a soldier for them.

VanZandt: After the war was over?

Phan: After the war was over.

VanZandt: For the VC.

Phan: So it was like two choices they had to make, either reeducation camp (brief noise interference) or being drafted. So he got drafted for a while, and she went home to her mom. And then he went—(speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: OK. So he didn't want to be—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —a soldier for them, so he sneaked away. But then she had this plan to go ahead and go tell them that, “Hey, I have two kids. I need him home with me.” And so he was able to stay home after that. They let him.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Phan: And after that, her husband was hired on to be a captain for the Viet Cong boats. And they had like fifty-three people on the boat, and they just left, left Vietnam.

VanZandt: So the VC left, too?

Phan: Um, no, (speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: It was three or four o'clock at night, in the a.m., is when we took their boat, and we left with fifty-three other people that wanted to leave. They weren't Viet Cong. They were—(speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Chinese people from the South.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So she went to Singapore, and the Americans had sponsor her to come to America.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said she was sponsored by a nun in—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah, a nun that brought her over. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Connecticut.

Phan: Connecticut.

VanZandt: Connecticut.

Pham: Yeah, Connecticut.

VanZandt: OK. So the whole family was able to leave together?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah, because her husband was the captain of the boat, and—

VanZandt: Right, right, so your children—what about his parents and her parents? Did they have to leave them all behind?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: OK. So his mom did not go, and her mom did not go, either. It was just his brothers and sisters. They went, and their entire family.

VanZandt: OK. What about your younger brother? Did he go, too?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Right. He stayed back there. They were not in touch.

VanZandt: You left him, too.

Phan: She had a new life with her husband.

VanZandt: Yeah. What was that trip like? Can you talk about actually leaving on their boat? And were you able to tell anyone? Just about how those preparations—what they took with them, and what she felt like, leaving.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: No, they just brought themselves.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: They went in the middle of the night, and—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —to save their lives. They didn't—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Just my outfit.

VanZandt: Just what was on your back.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: They didn't bring anything. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She didn't bring *anything* with her; she just left everything behind. And she remember, like, there were so many people that wanted to go, and some of them, they fell into the water, and there was just pushing and shoving, and she didn't want them to shove into her. And she was like, it's not worth taking anything and being left behind, so she didn't take anything with her. She had her son with her, three weeks old. And she had his diaper bag, and that's all she had with her.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Oh, God. She said that—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —she was walking up to have the American boat rescue them in one day, but there were other boats that they didn't have any food, and they would kill each other and just eat each other's bodies.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah, eat.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: So you heard those stories? You knew about that?

Phan: Yeah. And she said that—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She's lucky that she didn't encounter that. And then she also mentioned that other boats that, you know, there were pirates that would rape the girls, and a lot of them had just rather jump in the water and die than being raped.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. And she said that those were the fears that ran through her mind during the time of leaving.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Her husband has not went back to Vietnam because he actually took the Viet Cong's boat, so, to come to America, and so—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —he still lives with the fear of like, “If I go back to Vietnam, they're going to just put me in prison for that.”

VanZandt: That's understandable, sure. Well, (sigh) I'm just thinking, having just given birth, you must have still been recovering from having a baby when you had to

leave. And knowing that it was so dangerous out there, Thai pirates, and people were dying and drowning, was that still better, taking that risk, than staying behind and what they were going through under Communism? Was that a difficult decision to make, about leaving?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said, of course leaving was a better route—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —because there's nothing, no skills in Vietnam. I couldn't make any money. It was just better to go.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So his father, he had another wife, and he took care of his new wife, but his mother, he had to take care of her. And most of the money went there. It was just better for them to leave.

VanZandt: And so when you left, Mrs. Pham, what were your hopes and dreams? You had three young children, family together. What did you hope your new life would be like? And *where* did you want to go?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. Education for her children.

VanZandt: And they have done so well. You've shown us pictures of your children, and they're pharmacists and a doctor in the family. You must be so very proud that that happened for your children. You were able to make that happen. The risk that you took was worth it. Well, you left and went to Singapore. How long were you in Singapore? Was that just a quick stopover before America?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Three months. (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So she had stayed in Singapore for three months, and she was able to come to America and the fifty-three people that were with her.

VanZandt: All at the same time. You all ended up coming together.

Pham: Yeah.

Phan: And she did remember staying in a hotel when she got here.

VanZandt: Where did you land in America?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Connecticut.

Phan: Yeah. The nun that had helped her in Connecticut; they were able to get a home and get on the assistance programs.

VanZandt: Where in Connecticut? What city? What town?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Waterbury?

Pham: Waterbury.

Phan: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. Water?

Pham: Waterbury.

VanZandt: Water Valley?

Pham: Bury, like—

Pham: Waterbury.

VanZandt: Oh, Waterbury.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, I think I know. Waterbury, Connecticut. OK.

Pham: In Connecticut.

VanZandt: So what did you think? Very *cold* in Connecticut.

Pham: Yeah, cool, yeah.

VanZandt: (chuckles) Different weather from Vietnam. Was that a difficult adjustment, or did you like it?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Oh, wow! God, that's awesome. So it's so cold up there, but she heard about this area, Biloxi, Mississippi, from her friends. And her husband and his friend, they

didn't know, they just heard, but they wanted to relocate here where they could go fishing.

VanZandt: Wow!

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Well, I didn't ask that. Was your husband a fisherman growing up?

Pham: He used to be, yes.

VanZandt: OK. OK. So he already had those skills. How long were you in Connecticut before you moved to Biloxi?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: She was here. Well, she came to America in 1978, and she was there for three years, and she came here in 1981.

VanZandt: Eighty-one. And what did your husband do to support you in Connecticut? What kind of work did he find?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: He likes fishing, and so he moved here.

VanZandt: Did she say what he did when he was in Connecticut?

Pham: Up in Connecticut.

VanZandt: For three years?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Oh, this war-like material.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Like in a factory? Was it factory work?

Phan: Yeah, in a factory. They manufacture like, I guess things for war, like—
(speaking in Vietnamese).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Everything for the war, you know, the (inaudible).

VanZandt: OK. But he wanted to fish, and so he came to Biloxi, to the Gulf Coast.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: He was the boss in that company.

VanZandt: Wow. OK.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: He was just really, really good at what he did there. I mean, he didn't know a lot of English, but he got promoted in the company really fast.

VanZandt: Oh, how wonderful. He had a good experience there. Well, before we get to life on the Gulf Coast, I'm just curious if she would like to share any of her challenges when she first came to America, not knowing the language and a different culture, completely different culture. What were some of the, any funny moments, difficult, just those early days adjusting to life here?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said she liked it in Connecticut because there was not a lot of Vietnamese there, and they really adored her and her family, and they would cook and have meals together, and she remembered those moments, and she really liked that.

VanZandt: And did your children go to school, start school in Connecticut or Biloxi?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: They did go to school up there, and they moved down here and went to school, as well.

VanZandt: Well, you came here in 1981 to the Gulf Coast. And was it everything that you wanted, living here in Biloxi? The weather? Other Vietnamese, more of a community?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said she like it here. It's just like Vietnam. My kids tell me to go to Texas, but I said, "No. I like it here."

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She has such good neighbors that she doesn't want to go anywhere. They said, "When I die, then you move, but don't move." (laughter)

VanZandt: Good neighbors is—

Phan: Because she developed a good friendship with them.

VanZandt: Friends, that's what makes life worthwhile, good friends and neighbors. And so tell me about your life on the Gulf Coast. Your husband is gone right now, out shrimping. He's been gone for a month. So she's been the wife of a fisherman, or has she had any other occupation?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: I stayed home. I was a housewife.

VanZandt: Good. So you worked *inside* the home, raising your children.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said she doesn't go to the casinos or anything. She just stays home and teaches her kids and take care of the home because, she said if she went out, who's going to teach her kids? And so she stayed home. Good housewife.

VanZandt: Yeah. And taking care of your husband when he comes home, I'm sure. What is that like, being the wife of a fisherman who's gone for long periods of time, running the household? How does she feel about that?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Any particular challenges?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: OK. So when he's out working, "I'm working in the home, too. I'm cleaning the house, folding the laundry. I have my garden to take care of."

VanZandt: You have a garden?

Pham: Yeah.

Phan: "And so I'm keeping busy, too. This is my work in the home and the garden."

VanZandt: So it's not too difficult with him being away.

Phan and Pham: No.

VanZandt: And she has good friends who call, like they did earlier, and check on you.

Phan: Right.

VanZandt: Well, tell me about how you-all did through [Hurricane] Katrina. Your husband has his own boat. And if she could just talk about their Katrina experience, and if they lived in this house. Just anything she would like to share.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Is this new? Yeah, I wondered if they added that.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: She said they were in this house?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: No. She said the fireplace got [destroyed] by the wind.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Oh. So they were in this house. Oh, the fireplace here, I can see (touring the other room).

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. It came over.

Pham: Yeah. (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Were you in this house during the storm? Were they here, or did they evacuate?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: She went on the boat with her husband to Back Bay.

VanZandt: During the storm to Back Bay. What is the name of your husband's boat?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) *Thanh Hai*.

Pham: *Thanh Hai*.

Pham: *Thanh Hai*.

VanZandt: How do you spell that?

Pham: T-H-A-N-H, H-A-I.

Pham: *Thanh Hai*.

VanZandt: OK. And does he keep it docked at Back Bay?

Pham: Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: Usually Back Bay?

Pham: OK. I'd like to look for it, OK. So during Katrina, you left with your husband, stayed on the boat. Was anyone else with them on the boat?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Three.

VanZandt: Were you tied up together with the other boats? If she could, just kind of describe going through the storm.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: They were tied to other boats, but—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —her husband had to still steer it—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: —and watch over it because the water kept on rising, lower, and rising, lower. And she just remembered that during Katrina.

VanZandt: What was that like? Hurricane Katrina was the largest natural disaster in America, and she rode through that on a boat with her husband.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Can she describe anything about what that was like and what she was feeling at the time?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She was *very* scared because one of the boats, the rope had popped.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: The other boat, it *sunk*, immediately, and she thinks that the people on the boat *died*. Of course at that time she was very afraid because—

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: So she said the other boat, when the rope had popped it slammed into her boat, and then it float with the current, and then it sank. And she watched that.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: And the people that were in the boat—

VanZandt: Went under?

Phan: —went under, also, with the boat.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: And it could have happened to them.

VanZandt: Did she know who they were? Did you know them?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: No.

VanZandt: Another fisherman and his family?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Wow!

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: OK. She said she remember seeing the whole incident happen, and there was boats everywhere, but the ones that actually popped and went with the current, that one particular boat, it had—what are those things called?

VanZandt: The mast?

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: The long pole.

Phan: Yeah, the long—

VanZandt: The mast, sure.

Phan: The long pole, it hit the bridge, the Cowan-Lorraine Bridge, and so it went under, and they couldn't go any further.

VanZandt: Right. I interviewed another fisherman who witnessed, I think it was, that same drowning. He recalled that, and he described them hitting the bridge, so I think it might have been the same boat.

Phan: Been the same boat.

VanZandt: Unless there was another one, too.

Phan: How many people in that boat?

VanZandt: He didn't say.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: She may know him. Tung Nguyen is his name.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese) Tung Nguyen.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) Tung Nguyen?

VanZandt: His wife is Vivian.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: And it's her parents' boats. They had three or four boats.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah, it was *very* scary. Oh! (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Wow! So all of her kids were on the boat, also.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: After school, they were here, and after Hurricane Katrina, they all moved.

Pham: Yeah.

Phan: Yeah, they were scared. They were *very* afraid, and they didn't want to be here anymore.

VanZandt: That's when they all moved.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: It must have been a very helpless feeling, watching that and not being able to do anything about it. And so how was your boat through the storm? Was it OK, or were you able to repair it?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. I spent a hundred and forty thousand [dollars] to fix it.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness! So, *major* damage.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: And then how long did it take to be able to go back out, again? It must have taken a while to get back out, before he started shrimping again.

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: Yeah. And so when the hurricane happened on August 29, 2005, I was able to pick back up and go again in 2006.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Oh, OK. Did your husband do his own repairs? That's a lot of repair.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: They had insurance, so the companies, you know, gave them.

VanZandt: Good. So you had insurance coverage; that helped.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: Good.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: And your house, were you able to stay in your house after the storm?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: For three days, no electricity, no water. But three days after, we had(?) water.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: But the only thing I fixed was my living room and the fireplace, and the insurance helped.

VanZandt: With that, so they were able to stay here. That's good. Good grief. And then last year, April, 2010, the BP [Deepwater Horizon] oil spill happened, just as many of the fishermen were recovering from Katrina and doing well again. Can she talk about how the BP oil spill has impacted her husband's livelihood and their family?

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: Well, no shrimp out there.

Pham: No shrimp, yeah.

Pham: No shrimp because of the oil. Most of the boats are parked, but my husband's going out there. He has to go *all* the way out there, and—

VanZandt: How far is he going? He has a big freezer boat, so he can go further out. Where is he going?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: All the way out there, near the oil rigs, all the way out there.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

VanZandt: In Louisiana?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: It's all the way out (inaudible; speaking simultaneously).

VanZandt: Yeah. OK. That's OK. So how's the catch? How's he doing? You said there's no shrimp. And yet he's out there now and been gone for a month. That's a big risk and investment to make.

Phan: For three days.

VanZandt: Oh. I thought she said he'd been gone a month.

Phan: He would go for a month, but he's been gone three days. So she said twenty-seven more days.

VanZandt: Oh, I see. OK. But he will be gone for a month.

Phan: Right.

VanZandt: So what does he expect? Because they're saying there's no shrimp, so I'm wondering—

Phan: Well, she stated earlier that there's no shrimp, but I mean, it's supposed to be a good season right now.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: And he wants to work, and so he's just going out there, uncertain if he's going to bring back anything, but he's just going out there. He wants to work. She said that earlier.

VanZandt: OK. Good. I didn't know that. So even though there's uncertainty, and it's a huge investment of money, and a risk, it's worth trying rather than just sitting around waiting. OK. And how does she feel like—how has that oil spill impacted

other people? She has so many friends here who are also in the seafood industry, some probably of the smaller boats. And how has she seen just the community, in general, be affected, really, versus Katrina, too? Some people talk about how Katrina was easier to get over because they could repair and get back more quickly, and now, it's the unknown. Does she have any thoughts about that?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She said with Alaska Exxon *Valdez*, she [is] hearing that it was just the boat that leaked the oil, and the oil remained there for twenty years. But I'm thinking over here, I mean, we have an oil spill, all the way from the rig, and it didn't stop for a hundred days. I can only imagine how much oil is still there.

VanZandt: Yeah. You mentioned earlier, Mrs. Pham, that education was so important to you for your children. Did your son consider following in his father's footsteps to go into the fishing industry?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: I let my sons go during the summers, so they can go play.

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: But that's not—

VanZandt: They went to help in the summer.

Phan: They went to help in the summer, every summer, but that's not the career choice that I would want them to take. So they went to school.

VanZandt: Is there anything else that she can think of, Angel, that we haven't touched on, or that you're interested in?

Phan: I think that's it. Maybe just leave a word for her grandkids.

VanZandt: Yeah. OK. We've covered a lot of your life history, Mrs. Pham, and you've been a very devoted mother and wife and family person. And I just wondered if there's anything else that you would like to add about the future? What would you like your children to know when you're gone? They may hear this; your grandchildren, great-grandchildren, may hear this recording fifty years from now, or more. Anything that you would like to add or share? Advice? Anything at all?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Phan: She just said that this is her story. She raised her kids, and she's a fisherman's wife, and that's how he raised his kids. And just remember her story.

VanZandt: I'm so glad that you offered to share your story. They'll enjoy hearing it for many years, and many other people will learn from your story, too, about Vietnam and the fishing life on the Gulf Coast. And we thank you so much for giving us your time.

Pham: Yeah. OK.

VanZandt: Thank you.

Phan: Basically from what I got, it's an incredible story of sacrifices and a lot of hardship, and now, I think what's good is that her children can remember that, what she mentioned earlier was their father was a fisherman, and that's how they got the money to fund their education and become who they are today, because of him.

VanZandt: It's so important for them to remember. That's true.

Pham: Yeah.

VanZandt: And any advice about overcoming hardships? She's been through many, many hardships and had to be very strong throughout her life. Any parting words about that?

Phan: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Pham: (speaking in Vietnamese) (laughter)

Phan: That's it.

VanZandt: That's it. Thank you so much.

Pham: Yeah, OK, thank you.

VanZandt: Great.

(end of interview)