

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

Khong Tran

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt
Interpreter: Khanh Nguyen

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An Oral History with Khong Tran, Volume 1043

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Biography

Mr. Khong Tran was born, one of nine children, on September 23, 1955, in Kien Giang Province, South Vietnam. He began fishing and shrimping with his father at the age of ten. His mother sold their catch at the local markets. In 1978 Mr. Tran escaped Vietnam by boat with friends to avoid being drafted to fight in Cambodia. He escaped with thirty to forty people toward Thailand and three months later made it to Hawaii, where he lived for one year before moving to New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1980. Mr. Tran first worked as a cook in a restaurant, then began fishing and saved enough money to buy his first grocery store. He owned grocery stores in New Orleans for seventeen years until Hurricane Katrina in 2005. After his last store was destroyed, he began shrimping. At the time of the interview, Mr. Tran had been shrimping for four years. He has a wife and daughter who live in Vietnam.

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

KHONG TRAN

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Khong Tran and is taking place on August 22, 2011. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. English/Vietnamese interpretation is provided by Khanh Nguyen.

Interviewer's Note: Interviewee, Mr. Tran, speaks Vietnamese with some English throughout the interview. Ms. Nguyen translates/interprets Mr. Tran's Vietnamese responses into English to Ms. VanZandt. Vietnamese transcriber's English translation of Vietnamese language passages are italicized and appear in parentheses below the passage. Ms. VanZandt's responses and follow-up questions were in response only to Ms. Nguyen's interpretation during the interview. There is additional information revealed here, post-interview, in the italicized transcribed passages.

VanZandt: OK. Today is August 22, 2011, and this is Linda VanZandt. And I'm with The University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Oral History. I'm here in the offices of Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation in New Orleans East. And I'm here today with Mr. Tran, who is a resident here, and a wonderful interpreter, Khai Nguyen's sister. If you could say *your* name.

Nguyen: Khanh Nguyen.

VanZandt: Khanh Nguyen. How do you spell your name?

Nguyen: K-H-A-N-H.

VanZandt: OK. Thank you. And Mr. Tran, if you could say and spell your name.

Tran: Uh, tôi tên Không Trần. Không Trần.

(My name is Khong Tran.)

Nguyen: Không Trần.

Tran: Um-hm.

Nguyen: His name is Không Trần. So K-H-O-N-G, T-R-A-N.

VanZandt: Thank you. And Mr. Tran, what is your occupation?

Nguyen: Chú làm nghề gì?

(What is your occupation?)

Tran: Chú làm nghề biển.

(Fishing.)

Nguyen: Uh, fishing.

VanZandt: Fishing? OK. What kind of fishing? What do you fish for?

Tran: Tôi đi làm cạo tôm.

(Shrimping.)

Nguyen: Shrimping.

VanZandt: Shrimping?

Tran: Yes, shrimping.

VanZandt: OK. How long have you been a shrimper?

Tran: Four years. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Four years.

VanZandt: *Four years?* What did you do before you were shrimping?

Tran: Làm tiệm; groceries.

(Grocery store.)

Nguyen: He worked in grocery stores.

VanZandt: Ah, OK. Interesting. Here in New Orleans? Grocery stores?

Tran: Yes.

VanZandt: OK. What did you do in the grocery stores?

Tran: Owner. (chuckle)

Nguyen: Khi mà chú làm groceries chú làm gì?

(What did you do in the grocery store?)

Tran: Làm chủ. (chuckle)

(Owner.)

Nguyen: Owner. (chuckle) Owner of a grocery store.

VanZandt: Oh! OK. You owned a grocery store.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: And how did you get into shrimping? What made you leave the grocery store?

Tran: Sau cơn bão Katrina, bỏ tiệm không làm nữa, đi làm tôm.

(After Katrina, [I] couldn't reopen [my] stores and decided to go into shrimping.)

Nguyen: After [Hurricane] Katrina, he couldn't reopen his stores, and he decided to go into shrimping.

VanZandt: OK. So maybe we'll start a little bit about your life in Vietnam, and when we get to Katrina, you can tell us a little bit about that. It sounds like that's important. How long did you own the grocery store?

Tran: Khoảng 17 năm.

(About 17 years.)

Nguyen: Seventeen years.

VanZandt: Seventeen years. What was the name of it?

Tran: Nhiều chỗ lắm. Có nhiều tiệm lắm. Có một tiệm là Abundant Food Store. Abundant—

(I owned several, but one of them called Abundant Food Store.)

Nguyen: Abundant. He said he owned several, but one of them is called—(speaking Vietnamese)—

Tran: Abundant Food Store.

Nguyen: Abandoned.

VanZandt: Abandoned?

Nguyen: Abundant, Abundant.

VanZandt: Abundant!

Tran: Yeah, Abundant.

VanZandt: Good name.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: So do you own any of the stores now?

Tran: No, no more.

Nguyen: No more.

VanZandt: OK, no more. OK, just shrimping. Well, if we can go back to the beginning of your life, Mr. Tran. And can you tell me where you were born, and the year?

Không: Sinh ở Việt Nam.

(Born in Vietnam.)

Nguyen: Ở chỗ nào?

(Where?)

Tran: Ở Kiên Giang. Kiên Giang.

(In Kien Giang.)

Nguyen: Kiên Giang.

VanZandt: He was showing me on the map. I brought a map.

Tran: Uh-huh.

Nguyen: He was born in the, what do you call, Kiên Giang.

Tran: On the map, Kiên Giang.

VanZandt: And that's K-I-E-N, G-I-A-N-G.

Nguyen: Năm nào?

(When?)

Tran: Tháng, 9, 23, 52.

(September 23, [19]55.)

Nguyen: He was born September 23, 1955.

VanZandt: Fifty-five.

Tran: Yes.

VanZandt: Ah, OK. So you have a birthday coming up. (chuckle)

Tran: Yeah, yeah. (chuckle)

VanZandt: OK. And where in Vietnam is Kiên Giang?

Nguyen: Miền Bắc phải không?

(Is it in the North?)

Tran: No, no. Nó ở miền Nam. It's South Vietnam.

(It is in the South of Vietnam.)

Nguyen: It's around the Delta area? Mekong—

VanZandt: Mekong Delta, yeah. OK. Along the river?

Tran: Yeah, yeah.

Nguyen: Dọc ven sông?

(Along the river?)

Tran: Gần biển.

(Near the ocean.)

Nguyen: Near the ocean.

VanZandt: Near the ocean.

Nguyen: Near the coast.

VanZandt: A fishing town?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, OK. Did your father shrimp or fish—

Tran: Fish.

VanZandt: —in that town? He did.

Tran: Làm tàu biển luôn.

(The shrimping also.)

Nguyen: He also, his career was also fishing.

VanZandt: OK, OK. So you were born in 1955 in that town? Did you live there all your life in Vietnam?

Tran: Yeah, yeah. (chuckle)

VanZandt: OK. And your parents, too?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. Can you tell me anything you'd like to share about growing up near the water with your father, your parents, there in the fishing village. What was that like?

Tran: Tại hồi nhỏ mình làm nghề biển, mình thích mình làm.

(I did fishing when I was young. I liked it.)

Nguyen: Chú có thể chia sẻ là mình đã lớn lên như thế nào? Cái làng đó như thế nào?

(Can you share how you grew up? What was that village like?)

Tran: Vui về hết, thích ở đó nhiều hơn. Nên không có đi đâu hết.

(Very happy. I like being there so I didn't go anywhere.)

Nguyen: Yeah. He said he liked living in that fishing village so much that he didn't want to go anywhere else.

VanZandt: Mm.

Nguyen: His childhood was really joyful and happy, and he was just content to stay in place. And he said that he really liked shrimping and fishing. That's why he went *back* to it. That's what he knew growing up.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: Right! And you loved that, so it's nice to be doing that again, I'm sure, carrying on your father's tradition.

Tran: Um-hm.

VanZandt: How old were you when you first started fishing with your father?

Tran: Ten.

VanZandt: Ten years old?

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Very young. OK. Is that what most boys did in your village, at your age?

Nguyen: Ở cái làng đó, lứa tuổi đó.. thì ai cũng đi làm vậy à.?

(In that village, at that age, everyone did the same thing?)

Tran: Ai cũng vậy cả.

(Everyone did.)

Nguyen: In that village, you start working when you're that young, yes.

VanZandt: OK. And did you have brothers and sisters?

Tran: Yes.

VanZandt: How many were in your family, children?

Tran: I have four brother and four sister.

VanZandt: Oh, my!

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Oh, my! Nine children.

Tran: Yeah, nine children.

VanZandt: OK. Almost even. And where were you, Mr. Tran, in the pecking order of nine?

Nguyen: Chú là con thứ mấy?

(What is your pecking order in your family?)

Tran: Thứ nhất.

(The first.)

Nguyen: He's the first born.

VanZandt: Oldest? Oldest son?

Tran: Yeah. (laughs)

VanZandt: Oh, OK. Very important. OK. Well, just tell me a little bit about—what was your house like, where you lived? And anything about daily life: What your mother did, what kind of games you played with your brothers and sisters? School memories, anything like that that you remember.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) (chuckle)

Nguyen: Hồi nhỏ chú đi học thể nào? Chơi thể nào với bạn, với các anh em?

(How was your childhood? How did you play with your brothers and sisters?)

Tran: Đi học, cuối tuần thì đi đá banh. Ở Việt Nam thì chỉ có môn đá banh.

(During the day, on weekdays, I went to school, came home and went fishing to work. But on the weekend I liked to play soccer.)

Nguyen: He said, um, during the day, during the weekday, he goes to school, comes home, and he goes fishing, to work. But then on the weekends he likes to play soccer.

VanZandt: Soccer fan? OK.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: And all the boys in your town, did you play together?

Tran: Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: OK, fun. What was school like? Did you like school?

Tran: I like school. (chuckles)

VanZandt: You did?

Tran: Nhưng mà không có thời giờ học. Học tới lớp 9 lớp 10 là nghỉ rồi.

(I didn't have time to study. I just studied nine and ten grade.)

Nguyen: He liked school, but he didn't have the opportunity and the time to continue so he only went up to ninth or tenth grade, and then he had to stop and go to work to help all his family.

VanZandt: Sure, OK. What was your favorite subject in school?

Nguyen: Khi học thì môn nào mà chú thích nhất?

(What were your favorite subject at school?)

Tran: Hồi đó thích toán nhiều hơn.

(I liked maths more.)

Nguyen: He likes math the most.

VanZandt: Oooh, OK.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Good for being a business owner.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: OK, and played soccer. When you started working with your father, shrimping and fishing, can you tell me about what the fishing life was like in Vietnam; very different from here—

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: —and now. What your boat was like, and the method, how he went about fishing and what all he caught. Just anything about that that might be interesting for people to know.

Nguyen: Làm biển ở Việt Nam thế nào, cái tàu như thế nào, sinh hoạt làm sao?

(Can you tell me about what the fishing life was like, in Vietnam?)

Tran: Khác là cái tàu bằng gỗ, cực khổ hơn bên đây, không có máy lạnh, ngủ ở trên mui, đánh cá bằng lưới.

(Wooden boats, no air-conditioning, old nets.)

Nguyen: Going to the boats, over in Vietnam, they have wooden boats, no air-conditioning.

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: They sleep out under the stars—

VanZandt: Ohh—

Nguyen: They cast, you know, they cast old nets.

VanZandt: Right, right.

Nguyen: Còn tàu bên này thì sao?

(What about the boat here?)

Tran: Bên này thì tàu của người ta, mình chỉ đi chạy tàu công thôi, nhưng thấy thoải mái hơn nhiều, tại nó có đầy đủ đồ, máy lạnh.

(Over here, I don't own my own boat. I work for someone else, and it's more comfortable because the boats are bigger, they are more convenient and comfortable.)

Nguyen: Over here, he doesn't own his own boat. He just works for someone else, and it's more comfortable because the boats, they're bigger, they're air-conditioned, they're more convenient—

Tran: Um-hm.

Nguyen: And they're more comfortable.

VanZandt: Comfortable, OK. Not very comfortable back when you were little.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: But it was fun anyway, I'll bet. I've heard stores of lanterns at night to attract the fish. Did you fish at night, or daytime? Tell me a little about how you went about catching the fish.

Tran: Đêm ngày gì mình cũng làm, không có nghi.

(No matter what time of the day.)

Nguyen: He said that they go fish anytime there's a fish that bites, they fished. It doesn't matter what time of day it is. (chuckles)

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: So, you would go out after school in the afternoon? How long would you stay out?

Tran: Night. Tại vì hồi xưa ở Việt Nam, đâu có học giống như bên đây là từ sáng đến 3-4 giờ chiều đâu, chỉ học từ 8-11 giờ là ra rồi.

(Because education system in Vietnam is different, I didn't go to school from eight to three or four, only from eight to eleven o'clock.)

Nguyen: Because the education system over in Vietnam is different, they don't go to school from, you know, eight [a.m.] to three or four p.m. They only go from eight to about eleven [a.m.]. So he gets out then he goes to work.

VanZandt: OK. So you were working longer than you were going to school?

Tran: (chuckles) Yeah, uh-huh. Đi học khoảng 2 hours, 3 hours rồi phải đi làm.

(I only studied for two to three hours.)

Nguyen: They only go to school about two or three hours.

VanZandt: OK. Some of the kids here would like that. (chuckles)

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: OK. So you would fish at night. And what kind of things would you catch in your net?

Nguyen: Chú bắt được những gì?

(What could you catch?)

Tran: Ở Việt Nam thì bắt được đủ thứ hết. Không có giống như bên đây chỉ bắt tôm, cái gì dính vào lưới cũng bắt hết. Um-hm. Everything. (laughs)

(They catch everything that fall into their nets, not just like here they specialized in shrimping.)

Nguyen: They'd catch anything that falls into the net; they'll take.

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: Not like over here [where] they specialized in shrimping, they only catch shrimp. They'd catch fish, crab, anything that falls into their net.

VanZandt: OK. Because there are some fish that aren't here around the United States, but are in Vietnam. Can you tell any specific kinds of fish? Did you have oysters in Vietnam?

Tran: (shakes head)

VanZandt: No oysters.

Nguyen: Chú có biết loại cá nào mà ở Việt Nam chú bắt được mà ở đây không có không?

(Is there any kind of fish that are not here in the U.S. but are in Vietnam?)

Tran: Nó khác nhau lắm, không có giống nhau. I don't know.

(They are very different.)

Nguyen: Yeah, he doesn't, he can't tell you the difference.

VanZandt: Sure, OK. Sure. But crabs and fish, shrimp.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: All different.

VanZandt: When you caught them, then what would you do with them, who would you sell them to? Or did you just feed your family?

Tran: Đem về chợ bán, bán cho bà con ở chợ.

(I catch them, bring them home, and then sell them to my neighbors at local markets.)

Nguyen: Catch them, bring them home for his family, and then sell it to his neighbors, to the local market.

VanZandt: OK. And did *you* do that, and your father, or did your mother do the selling?

Tran: Mother.

VanZandt: Mother did.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: OK. (chuckles) So you just got it to Mother, and your mother did that, OK.

Nguyen: The way those fishing villages is, it's the whole family, you know. Each family is a unit; the boys go do the hard labor.

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: And the girls, you know, the females then go to the market.

VanZandt: OK, OK. So was it always plentiful? Did you usually catch enough to be able to feed your family, and have enough? Did you feel like you had enough, as a child, for your family?

Nguyen: Làm vậy chú có bắt được đầy đủ cho gia đình không?

(Is it enough for your family?)

Tran: Dư luôn mới bán được. Không bao giờ thiếu.

(It's always plentiful. It never lacks.)

Nguyen: Yeah. It's always plentiful, like enough for him to sell and never lack.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: Wow. That's wonderful. And so tell me, after you were *older*, a little bit about your life after that. You were born in 1955, so you were living in that area during what people in America call the Vietnam War—

Tran: Yeah, Vietnam War.

VanZandt: —or in Vietnam, the American War. Do you have any memories of that at all? Did you see anything, any fighting or anything down where you lived, as far south as you were? Any memories of that period of time?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Nhiều lắm. Gần giải phóng thì thấy đánh hàng ngày. (laughs) Every day.

(A lot, I saw fights every day near the Independent Day.)

Nguyen: Yeah. He just said that—(speaking Vietnamese)—

Tran: Yeah.

Nguyen: Yeah. They were witness to the battles and, you know, the skirmishes. It's almost a daily event, especially near the end of the war, near the American withdrawal from the war.

Tran: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Um-hm. Because you were about twenty years old. Did you have to join the Army? The South Vietnamese Army?

Tran: No.

VanZandt: OK. Why not? How did you avoid fighting, at his age?

Nguyen: Tại sao mà chú không phải đi lính?

(How did you avoid fighting?)

Tran: Ngày xưa, anh của ông già làm lớn, toàn là sĩ quan, nên tôi không có bị đi lính. (laughs)

(Because there were some cousins in my family who had high ranking in the military, so I did not have to go.)

Nguyen: Because his family, he had some—

Tran: Cousins.

Nguyen: Cousins, who were pretty high ranking in the military, so he did not need to go.

VanZandt: You didn't have to because of your family connections. OK. So your cousins were high-ranking officers in the South Vietnamese Army?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: And your father did not have to fight, either?

Nguyen: Bố chú cũng không cần phải đi?

(Your father did not have to fight either?)

Tran: Không.

(No.)

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: OK. But you saw some [fighting] going on around you?

Tran: Nhà tôi có nhiều người làm lớn lắm nên không ai dám đụng vào. (laughs)

(Because of my high-ranking family, no one can touch my family.)

Nguyen: No one touched his family because his cousins were—I don't know the exact terminology, but I can look that up later.

VanZandt: Sure.

Nguyen: But—(speaking Vietnamese) is usually a colonel, or something like that.

VanZandt: Oh, very high.

Nguyen: (chuckles) No one wants to touch those people.

VanZandt: (laughs) You were very lucky.

Tran: Yes. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: One of his cousins is like a mayor, here.

VanZandt: Ah, of the town, OK.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: OK. So you felt safe, pretty safe. Well, is there anything else you would like to share about that time, Mr. Tran? Many people here, who might listen to this, only know what they saw on TV, or heard from the *American* side, but not from someone who *lived there*. So if there's anything that you think of, that you remember, that you'd like to share to help [others to] understand more about that time.

Nguyen: Chú có muốn chia sẻ thêm về thời đó không? Vì người Mỹ chỉ biết về chiến tranh Việt Nam theo khía cạnh của ng Mỹ mà thôi, hoặc là xem trên TV. Chú có thể chia sẻ gì thêm không?

(Many people here, listening to this, only know what they saw on TV, or heard from the American side, but not from someone who lived there. So is there anything you want to share that help to understand more about that time?)

Tran: Hồi đó mình thấy những người lính Mỹ đi lính chung với Việt Nam khổ quá. Ngoài đồng trống mà đi vào thì những kia núp trong rừng bần, nhìn tội.

(I sympathized with American.)

Nguyen: He says that during the war, when the Americans came, he sympathized with them because they're marching in a field, an open field, whereas the enemy is hiding, just like guerilla warfare—

Tran: (chuckles)

Nguyen: —so he felt sad and sorry for them because they're getting picked off as they're coming in; the Americans are coming to help them, and they're getting picked off.

VanZandt: Did you see that in the field?

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: The [North] Vietnamese were good at hiding, underground.

Tran: (chuckle) Không phải là người trong nam mà là (*Not the South but*) North of Vietnam.

Nguyen: The North Vietnamese came down.

VanZandt: Yes, yes.

Tran: Not South. (chuckles)

VanZandt: That's right.

Tran: North. (chuckles)

VanZandt: They were good at hiding, though. (chuckles) And did your father talk much? Did you hear much from your cousins who were involved, if they thought the Americans should do more, or stay longer? Or just, what kind of things did you hear, or how did *you* feel about the *end* of the war, particularly, and what happened? How things might have been different.

Nguyen: Chú có nghe gia đình của mình nói gì về lính Mỹ vào cuối trận chiến không? Họ có nghĩ gì về chuyện người Mỹ nên rút lui hoặc nên ở lâu hơn không?

(Did you hear anything that your family talked about the Americans?)

Tran: Trong thời gian 75 thì mấy ảnh đi hết rồi, không có nghe gì cả.

(Around 1975, right before the American withdrew, his cousins already left, so I didn't hear anything.)

Nguyen: He said around 1975, right before the Americans withdrew, his officer, you know, his cousins already, you know, left and so.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) (chuckles)

Nguyen: Um-hm. Yeah, they all left before the Americans withdrew. So there was no one left over there.

VanZandt: Sure, sure. Did they get out by helicopter like so many did? Or airplane?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: So tell me, then, about how *you* left, Mr. Tran, and your family, and how you decided to leave. Just about how you ended up here.

Nguyen: Gia đình của chú và chú đi bằng cách nào, quyết định nào giúp cho chú đi?
(*How did you leave Vietnam?*)

Tran: Tại vì sau năm 1975 nó vô bắt đi nghĩa vụ quân sự giống ngày xưa. Chú không đi được. Trận đầu tiên là qua Miên đánh với Miên nên chú bỏ nhà đi, gặp mấy người bạn có tàu đi nữa nên nhảy đi luôn. Năm 1978. (laughs)

(*When they come and took over, they forced everyone to enter military service, and they were going to invade Cambodia. I didn't want to join, so he snuck away. I met up with some friends of mine who had a boat, and in 1978 I left by boat.*)

Nguyen: Năm 1975 chú đi luôn? So after 1975, when the Communists came and took over, they wanted to enforce everyone to enter the military service, and they were going to invade, um—

Tran: Cambodia.

Nguyen: Yeah, Cambodia.

VanZandt: Cambodia, yes.

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: Around that time. The Khmer.

VanZandt: Yes, Khmer Rouge.

Nguyen: And he didn't want to join, so he snuck away. He met up with some friends of his who had a boat, and in 1978 he left by boat.

VanZandt: OK. That's right, the Khmer Rouge was doing a lot of—well, genocide was going on in Cambodia from [19]75 to [19]79.

Tran: Yeah, that's right.

VanZandt: So those were difficult years, and you would have been sent to fight. So you were able to avoid that with friends. So between 1975, when the Communists took over South Vietnam, and the time you left, how did you survive? How did life change under Communist rule? And just tell me about that time period. It must have been very tough.

Nguyen: Từ 1975 đến 1978 thì cuộc sống của chú thế nào?

(*How was your life from '75 to '78?*)

Tran: Bữa qua nhà bạn này ở, bữa qua nhà bạn kia, không về nhà được vì về nhà thì bị bắt.

(I had to move from friend to friend. I can't return home because if I did, they would pick me up and force me to join the military.)

Nguyen: So basically he'd drift from friend to friend.

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: And he can't return home, because if he returned home, then they would pick him up and force him to join the military.

VanZandt: So they were coming to look for men like you.

Tran: (big laugh)

VanZandt: (laughs) Your age. And *you* had to be good at hiding now. So was this going from friend to friend in your same village, or did you leave your town?

Nguyen: Khi chú đi từ nhà này qua nhà kia, chú ở vùng đó hay chú đi đâu?

(So you were going from friend to friend in your same village, or you leave your town?)

Tran: Bỏ xứ.

(Out of village.)

Nguyen: Chú bỏ xứ đi đâu?

(To where?)

Tran: Hà Tiên.

Nguyen: Yeah. He left the area, and he went to a place called Hà Tiên.

VanZandt: How do you spell that?

Nguyen: H-A T-I-E-N.

VanZandt: How far away was that from your home?

Tran: Khoảng 15-16 cây số. Trong bản đồ nó ở đây.

(About fifteen, sixteen kilometers. It is here on the map.)

Nguyen: About fifteen, sixteen kilometers.

VanZandt: OK. OK. It may not be on there. We're looking at this map, but it may not be detailed enough. Was it away from the water?

Tran: Somewhere down here (pointing to the map).

VanZandt: Ah. Oh, way down, OK. So toward, in the Gulf of Thailand area.

Tran: (laughs) Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. Tell me about that.

Tran: Bạn bè rủ lên đường đó để đi bộ qua Thái Lan.

(I had many friends, and they encouraged me to walk towards Thailand.)

Nguyen: He had many, many friends, and they were asking him, encouraging him to walk towards Thailand.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: And how did you—so did you walk at night and hide during the day? Did your family know where you had gone?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: His family did not know where he was going.

Tran: Chú nói là 3 tháng sau chú mới qua tới Mỹ.

(Three months later he came to America.)

Nguyen: Once he left, it was three months later, he made it to America.

VanZandt: OK. So you walked toward the Gulf of Thailand. And how do you get to America?

Tran: Đi bằng tàu chứ.

(By boat.)

Nguyen: He said (speaking Vietnamese). He walked with his friends towards Thailand, and he met up with friends with boats, and they sailed to Thailand. And then from there, it was about three months later they made it to America.

VanZandt: OK. So you spent some time in Thailand.

Tran: Lúc đầu bọn chú định đi bộ nhưng mà sau đó tìm thấy tàu nên đi bằng tàu luôn
(Originally we were going to walk all the way down to Thailand, but then we found the boat. Then we went by boat.)

Nguyen: *Originally*, they were going to walk *all* the way to Thailand—

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: —but then they found a boat.

VanZandt: You found a boat? Did you know whose boat it was?

Tran: Của bạn.

(My friend's.)

Nguyen: One of their friends.

VanZandt: OK, OK, yeah. And who left with you?

Tran: Nhiều lắm. 30-40 người.

(Many, thirty, forty people.)

Nguyen: It's like about thirty-something, forty people were on that boat with him.

VanZandt: Wooden boat? Fishing boat?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: About how big was that boat, how long?

Tran: Khoảng 60 ft. Bề ngang khoảng 12 ft.

(Sixty by twelve feet.)

Nguyen: About sixty by twelve feet; twelve by sixty feet.

VanZandt: OK, OK. So the rest of your family stayed in Vietnam, then. Were you the only member of your family to leave? Your brothers and sisters stayed?

Tran: Còn ở Việt Nam hết.

(Still in Vietnam.)

Nguyen: Yeah. He's the only one that left. They're all *still* over in Vietnam.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: (gasp) So none of your brothers? Did they think about leaving?

Tran: No, only one. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Why do you think that was, that you were the only one?

Nguyen: Những người em của chú có nghĩ đến chuyện đi không?

(Did they think about leaving?)

Tran: Họ muốn đi nhưng mà sợ bị bắt nên thôi. Năm 1978 bị bắt 2 lần. (chuckles)
(*They wanted to go, but they were tired about getting caught, two times already.*)

Nguyen: His brothers actually attempted to go, but then they were caught several times, so eventually they just, you know, grew tired of getting caught, and they gave up. So they just decided to stay.

VanZandt: Did anyone, or any of your family go to what was called reeducation camp?

Nguyen: Gia đình chú có ai đi cải tạo không?

(*Did anyone in your family go to reeducation camp?*)

Tran: Có cha tôi và một người em gái.

(*My father and my sister.*)

Nguyen: His father and one of his sisters had to go to reeducation.

VanZandt: OK. How long were they there? Do you know?

Tran: Ba tháng.

(*Three months.*)

Nguyen: Three months.

VanZandt: Three months, OK. Not too, too long

Tran: Not too long, no.

VanZandt: Some were three years and longer.

Tran: Làm việc nhẹ cho ấp, cho xã thôi.

(*The work was very light. They worked for local offices.*)

Nguyen: So their reeducation was very light. He worked for the local office, the government office.

VanZandt: And then he was able to return home? He and your sister came back home?

Tran: (nods head.)

VanZandt: OK. So you left in 1978. Tell me about your journey, once you left from Thailand. Did you come straight to the United States, or go anywhere else?

Tran: Tháng 10 năm 1978 ở Thái lan, tháng 1 năm 1979 qua tới Hawaii.

(October 1978 I reached Thailand and stayed there until January 1979. I reached Hawaii then.)

Nguyen: Hm, OK. October 1978, he reached Thailand and stayed there all the way until January 1979, and he reached Hawaii then.

VanZandt: OK, by boat, as well?

Tran: No, flying. (chuckles)

Nguyen: Reached by plane to Hawaii.

VanZandt: (laughing)

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Quicker trip. (laughter) When you were in Thailand, were you at a camp? Were you at a refugee camp that arranged his flight to Hawaii?

Nguyen: Khi ở Thái Lan chú ở trại tị nạn à?

(When you stayed in Thailand, you stayed at the camps?)

Tran: Yeah.

Nguyen: Họ cho chú vé máy bay qua Mỹ? Yes.

(They gave you tickets to the U.S.?)

VanZandt: Does he remember the name of the camp?

Nguyen: Chú có nhớ tên của trại tị nạn không?

(Did you remember the name of the camp?)

Tran: Songkhla.

Nguyen: Chú có thể ghi qua đây?

(Can you write the name?)

Tran: Lâu quá rồi, quên rồi.

(No, I forgot. It was a long time ago.)

VanZandt: Thank you, that helps. S-O-N-G-K-H-L-A. Songkhla.

Tran: Yes.

VanZandt: In Thailand. When you found out that you were coming to the United States, what was your reaction?

Nguyen: Phản ứng của chú khi chú biết chú được qua Mỹ?

(What were your reactions?)

Tran: (laughs) Happy.

VanZandt: Happy? OK. What did you know about the United States? What were his expectations? Did he know very much about what to expect?

Nguyen: Lúc đó chú biết gì về nước Mỹ, chú có hi vọng gì?

(What did you expect?)

Tran: Mấy ông anh ở Dallas nói là đừng đi đâu ngoài đi Mỹ, cuộc sống sẽ thoải mái hơn.

(I already got family in Dallas. They sent me some money, and they said don't go anywhere else but the U.S.)

Nguyen: Yeah. So at that time, he had some family in Dallas. And they sent him some money, and they said that—

Tran: Go United States, don't [care] where. (laughs)

Nguyen: (chuckles) Yeah, just get here.

VanZandt: Go to the U.S.!

Nguyen: Don't go anywhere else.

VanZandt: (chuckles) Just come here, and they would try to connect with you. So where did you—you went to Hawaii, and then from Hawaii where did you go?

Tran: 1 năm ở Hawaii.

(One year in Hawaii.)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He stayed in Hawaii—

Tran: One year.

Nguyen: —for one year.

VanZandt: For one year.

Nguyen: And he came directly to New Orleans from Hawaii.

VanZandt: OK. What did you do for one year in Hawaii?

Tran: Học cách đi chợ. (chuckles)

(Go to the market.)

Nguyen: They taught him how to, you know, to assimilate to American society. How to go to the market and how to deal with daily life here.

VanZandt: OK. How was that different from your life in Vietnam?

Nguyen: Cuộc sống ở Hawaii khác cuộc sống ở Việt Nam thế nào?

(How was that different from your life in Vietnam?)

Tran: Đời sống quá dễ dàng mình cũng thấy vui.

(Life is easier. I basically felt happy.)

Nguyen: It's very different, very, um—there's more cars here, and he's more happy. And basically, that's it.

VanZandt: Yeah. Lots of cars. You'd never seen so many cars. (laughter)

Tran: Yeah. (laughs)

VanZandt: What were the challenges? What were the biggest challenges that you had to overcome, making that change from life in Vietnam to the United States, and New Orleans?

Nguyen: Trở ngại lớn nhất của chú là gì khi thay đổi cuộc sống?

(What were the biggest challenges you have to overcome?)

Tran: Nhà nước cho tiền học, ăn, ở. Ở Việt Nam mình phải tự lo hết.

(U.S. government gave me everything. I had to deal with everything on my own in Vietnam.)

Nguyen: Ý tôi muốn hỏi về khó khăn ở Mỹ?

(About difficulties in the U.S.)

Tran: Không có khó khăn gì cả ngoại trừ ngôn ngữ. Nhưng sau một thời gian cũng sẽ khắc phục được.

(The only difficulty is the language, but over time it would be okay.)

Nguyen: He said that he found it more(?) challenging in America, because here the American government provides welfare money, and provides money for him to go to

school, and just more comfortable over here, compared to Vietnam. The only difficult thing he had was the language barrier. But then he said that over time, you know, he picked it up on the streets, and he got more comfortable with it.

VanZandt: Sure. That would be difficult. I can imagine. When were you first able to get word to your family, to your mother and father, that you were safe and you were in the United States? Was that a long period of time, or were you able to communicate with them along the way?

Nguyen: Khi nào chú liên lạc lại với gia đình lần đầu tiên?

(When did you tell your family that you are safe in the U.S.?)

Tran: Lâu lắm. 10 năm mới gọi điện thoại về. Về lại Việt nam lần đầu tiên năm 1994.

(It took me ten years to make a phone call to my family, and I returned home in 1994.)

Nguyen: He had to wait about ten years to make a phone call to his family.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Ten years, Mr. Tran?!

Nguyen: In 1994, he was able to go back over there to visit.

VanZandt: For the first time, in 1994, OK. So for ten years your family didn't know where you were?

Tran: Họ nghĩ tôi chết hoặc mất tích rồi. (laughs)

(They thought I died.)

Nguyen: His family thought he had passed away or died somewhere.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: What was that first phone call like, when they heard from you?

Tran: Họ khóc lóc. (chuckle)

(They cried.)

Nguyen: They were overjoyed over there. They were crying.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: I can imagine. Wow. I bet your mother was very happy to hear from you.

Tran: *Yeah.*

VanZandt: And how had life been for them? How had it changed, and how was life for them? Was your father still able to fish like he used to, or did life change very much after [the war]?

Tran: Nó lấy hết tàu vì nó sợ mình đi vượt biên.

(They took my father's boat because they were afraid people would escape from Vietnam.)

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

Nguyen: Yeah. They confiscated his father's boat because they were afraid that he would use it to, you know, escape from Vietnam. And so his family quit fishing. As for him over in America, he worked odd jobs, at grocery stores, just odd jobs.

VanZandt: Um-hm. And you learned the trade. You learned the business—

Tran: (shy laugh)

VanZandt: —so you could own your own. So your father wasn't able to fish anymore. Life must have been harder, much harder for them. What about your brothers and sisters? Were they able to go to school? Or, what kind of jobs were they able to have? Because I know that life changed a lot after the Communists took over. It was very difficult for the South Vietnamese to find work, sometimes.

Tran: Họ lớn hết rồi, lập gia đình, đi xây dựng, làm mộc.

(So at that time they were grown up, they were married, and they learned to build houses.)

Nguyen: Hồi mới giải phóng?

(Near the Independent Day.)

Tran: Uh-huh.

Nguyen: Around that time, they were already somewhat grown, and getting married, and so his family was somewhat stable. They went to work building houses, and stuff like that.

VanZandt: OK. And so 1994, you went back to visit. Tell me about that. What was that like seeing them again, after all those years?

Tran: Lần đầu về sợ lắm. (laughs)

(I was scared.)

Nguyen: The first time he went back, he was so scared. He was scared he was going to get caught by the Communists.

Tran: Yeah. (laughs)

VanZandt: I can imagine. So did you take certain—were there certain things you had to do to make sure you were safe there? Had you heard stories about people being kept there and not allowed to come back? Was that the fear?

Tran: Vì cũng có nhiều người bạn về nước trước rồi nên tôi cũng cố gắng đi.

(My friends came home before, so I tried, too.)

Nguyen: Chú có nghe chuyện có ai về bị bắt hay không?

(Did you hear about someone getting caught?)

Tran: Họ nói là sẽ không bị bắt đâu.

(They said they hadn't been caught.)

Nguyen: He said that even though he was scared, he went with a group of his friends, and he also had many friends who already went back before him, and they reassured him that it's OK; you won't get caught, you know, pulled away or get caught, so it's OK. So he's a little bit more reassured because (inaudible), he was a little scared.

VanZandt: Sure. I'd still be nervous, I'm sure.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: Well, Mr. Tran, did your family still live in the same home where you grew up?

Tran: Chỉ có cha và em trai út.

(Only my father and my youngest brother.)

Nguyen: Only his father and his youngest brother were staying in the house. Everyone else had gone off, married.

VanZandt: Married—

Tran: Uh-huh, married.

VanZandt: OK, OK. Well then, tell me about your life here in New Orleans. So you came to New Orleans in 19—do you remember what year you came to New Orleans?

Tran: [19]80, '80.

VanZandt: Nineteen eighty, you came to New Orleans. And why New Orleans?

Tran: Ma'am?

VanZandt: Why did you come here?

Tran: Bạn tôi làm việc ở đây và nói là sống ở đây thoải mái lắm.

(My friend working here said that living here was comfortable.)

Nguyen: Because he has a friend who's been set up here, and his friend called him over [and] said it's nice, comfortable living here. And he worked with his friend, you know. He went fishing with his friend here.

VanZandt: OK. So did you live with your friend at first, when you moved here?

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: And started out fishing some with him?

Tran : Đầu tiên là đi nấu ăn 1-2 tháng sau đó mới đi tàu. (laughs)

(I started with cooking in a restaurant for one or two months before I went fishing again.)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: The first thing he did here was, he was a cook in a restaurant for about, a couple of months—

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: —before he went fishing.

VanZandt: (laughs) OK. Cooking seafood?

Tran: Chinese. Chinese food.

VanZandt: Chinese food, OK. Did you know how to cook Chinese food, or was that something new for you?

Tran: Hồi đó có đi học ở Hawaii.

(I learned in Hawaii.)

Nguyen: He learned that in Hawaii.

Tran: Uh-huh. Three months(?). (chuckles)

VanZandt: Oh! You learned a lot in Hawaii. Did you learn any English at all, on the way? Some English, too?

Tran: Vừa đi học, vừa đi làm.

(I learned English and cooking, too.)

Nguyen: While he was in Hawaii during that year, he learned English, and learned how to cook, too.

VanZandt: That gave you some skills.

Tran: (chuckle)

VanZandt: So you cooked here for a restaurant, and then what did you do? I'm curious about how you started your business.

Nguyen: Sao chú mua được cái groceries?

(How did you buy the grocery stores?)

Tran: Đi nấu 3-4 tháng, đi làm 7-8 tháng. Có tiền 15000\$-20000\$ là làm được rồi.

(I finished cooking after three or four months and went fishing for seven or eight months, and I saved about \$20,000, and that was enough for me to open a grocery store.)

Nguyen: Once he finished a couple months as a cook, he went fishing for about seven, eight months. And he said that back then you earned a lot of money fishing, so he saved up about \$20000, and that was enough for him to get his own store.

VanZandt: And so you loved fishing in Vietnam. What made you save your money and *leave* fishing to start your own business, to start the grocery store? Did you think that would be an easier life, or you wanted to just own your own business? Why leave fishing?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Bởi vì ở bang Louisiana lúc đó mở groceris stores kiếm tiền dễ hơn dưới biển.

(In New Orleans at that time, owning a grocery store could earn money easier than fishing.)

Nguyen: At that time, here in New Orleans, it's easier to make money when you own your own store. He said that he could easily make a hundred grand (\$100,000) owning a grocery store, compared to going fishing, [which] is a lot less profit.

VanZandt: And you never know what—

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: —you're going to catch and be able to sell it for. OK. So where was your business, your first business located? Was it around this Versailles area?

Tran: Yeah. On the (inaudible) and Gentilly, Louisa(?)

Nguyen: His first place is Louisa(?) and Gentilly.

VanZandt: OK. So what kind of things did you sell in your grocery store?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Đủ hết, cửa hàng lớn mà. Mua với giá \$120,000.

(Everything. I bought it for \$120,000.)

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

Nguyen: He said he sold all sorts of convenient-store stuff, and some meat, some fish. He said he did have a lot of people working for him because it was a big store that he bought. And for that time, he bought it for about a hundred twenty-something thousand dollars, which is, you know, that's pretty big(?) for a grocery store.

VanZandt: So you sold local seafood, too?

Tran: Chỉ cần bỏ \$20000 vào ngân hàng là họ cho vay \$100000.

(I put \$20,000 in the bank, and they gave me \$100,000 loan.)

Nguyen: (chuckle) He was able to get such a big place because it was so easy to get a loan from the bank, with a small down payment.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: But you worked hard saving. A lot of people aren't good at saving money. You're good at saving money. Well, tell me about then, you said you lost the store in Katrina. So can you tell me a little bit about what happened to your store and to you personally in Katrina? Did you stay here during the storm to take care of the store? Just a little bit about your Katrina experience.

Tran: Hồi bão không có ra tiệm, 7 ngày ở trên nóc nhà. (laughs)

(I stayed seven days on the roof.)

Nguyen: During the Katrina period, he did not leave New Orleans because he had to watch the store. He ended up staying on the very top of his house for seven days.

VanZandt: For seven *days*, on top of your house?! The roof?

Tran: (chuckles) Yeah. Tôi phải đợi helicopter đến đón.

(I waited until the helicopter picked him up.)

Nguyen: He waited until the airlift—

Tran: Helicopter. (laughs)

Nguyen: —the airlift from Houston came and picked him up. (chuckle)

VanZandt: Mr. Tran—

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: —you were airlifted from your roof? Was the water too high?

Tran: Nước gần đến nóc nhà.

(It was up to the ceiling.)

Nguyen: The water came all the way up to the ceiling.

VanZandt: So you went as high as you could get to escape the water.

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Where was your home? Was it in this—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)—Bullard.

Nguyen: His house is on Bullard.

VanZandt: OK, Bullard Street. So what was that seven days like? Tell me about that.

Nguyen: 7 ngày đó ra sao?

(What was that seven days like?)

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: Did you have any food or water?

Tran: Yeah, yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: You owned a grocery store—

Tran and Nguyen: (laughs)

VanZandt: —I'm thinking, surely you were prepared with something.

Tran: Đầy đủ hết. Có 5-6 người ở cùng để coi tiệm mà.

(There were five or six people with him to watch the store.)

Nguyen: So he said there were like five, six people staying with him to watch the store, around that period. They survived on chips and water. (chuckles)

VanZandt: That works.

Tran: Yeah, that work.

VanZandt: Chips and water. OK, and were you able to check on your store at all, after Katrina? Did you know what had happened to your store, stores? He had more than one.

Nguyen: Lúc đó chú có mấy tiệm rồi?

(How many stores did you still have?)

Tran: còn có 1 tiệm lớn nhất thôi.

(Only the biggest one.)

Nguyen: At that point, he only had the one, big one—khi chú trở lại thì tiệm sao rồi?

(How was it when you were back?)

Tran: Mỹ đen vô lấy hết, rồi bão nữa, khi mình quay lại còn cái khung không.

(They took everything, and after the storm, the stores were just skeletons.)

Nguyen: Um, so his store got looted, and it did get damaged—

Tran: (chuckles)

Nguyen: —from the flood. And once he came back, there was nothing left of a skeleton.

VanZandt: Did you have insurance?

Tran: (nods head).

VanZandt: Good. So you had to pick up and start over again. Was your house, were you able to repair your house?

Tran: Phải làm lại hết. Hư hết.

(All damage.)

Nguyen: Like, he had to basically start over; everything was damaged.

VanZandt: Were you able to do some of that work yourself?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Cái nhà đó chú tự sửa hả?

(You fixed your house on your own?)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He fixed up his house himself.

VanZandt: Good, OK. So Mr. Tran, that must have been really difficult losing a business you'd worked so hard to grow. And it was very successful, it sounds like. So then you decided to go back to fishing and shrimping? Did you do that as a deckhand, or how did you get back into fishing?

Nguyen: Thế rồi chú quyết định đi biển lại?

(Did you decide to go back to fishing and shrimping?)

Tran: Lúc đó kinh tế cũng xuống rồi, có thằng bạn rủ đi biển nữa. Nó có tàu thế là đi luôn. Nó chưa có quốc tịch.

(I did that business for so long, and the economy was going down. My friend had a boat, too, so I went back to fishing. He didn't have the citizenship yet.)

Nguyen: So his store was completely gone, and he said he's been working from, you know, he's owned his store for so long, and then the economy was going down. So he had a friend who has a boat, called him to join him in fishing. And his friend didn't have citizenship yet, but he has, so he came and worked for him.

VanZandt: OK. So you were able to help him, too, together. And was it his shrimp boat?

Tran: (nods head)

VanZandt: OK. So what year was that, 2006, that you started fishing again?

Nguyen: Năm 2006 là chú đi biển lại?

(Was it 2006 that you started fishing?)

Tran: Um-hm.

Nguyen: Two thousand six.

VanZandt: OK. I have never been on a shrimp boat.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: I've *walked* out on a shrimp boat.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: But I've never been shrimping on a shrimp boat. So can you sort of paint a picture for me? If I were to go out on your boat shrimping with you, what would that day be like, or night? Can you just tell me, in your own words, about what it's like to go out? How long you're gone? And what that life is like out on the sea, and looking for the catch. How do you know where to go? And just all those kind of things. (chuckles)

Nguyen: Bà ấy nói là chưa bao giờ đi biển bắt tôm. Chú có thể nói cho bà ấy biết 1 ngày đi biển của chú là như thế nào không?

(Can you tell me what did you do in one day on the boat?)

Tran: Một chuyến đi là 2 tuần lễ, trước khi đi phải lấy dầu, đá đồ ăn. Ra ngoài đó mình có 1 cái máy, mình sẽ thăm dò xem chỗ nào có nhiều cá rồi mình bắt.

(One trip is in two weeks. Before I go out he has to prepare for food, oil and supplies. I had a radar machine out there, and it will tell where there is lots of fish or shrimps.)

Nguyen: Yeah. So each trip takes about two weeks. And before he embarks on the trip, they prepare by going, you know, buying two weeks worth of food and oil and supplies. And once they go out onto the water, they have a machine, the radar machine, to tell them if the area has a lot of fish or shrimp, any catch. So he casts the net to get a feel for what is there, and if it's good, then that's where they will stay for a while.

Tran: (chuckle)

VanZandt: OK. So the radar helps.

Tran: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Shrimp over here; go this way! (chuckles)

Tran: Ở Mỹ nó có máy móc nên cái gì cũng dễ.

(Fishing in America is easier.)

Nguyen: Yeah. Fishing in America is so easy because you have radar to rely upon.

VanZandt: (laughs) That's right. In Vietnam, you didn't know where to go. It was just luck, right.

Tran: No.

VanZandt: How many people does it take, on your boat, to be able to run the boat the way you need to on a two-week trip?

Tran: 3 người.

(Three people.)

Nguyen: Three people.

VanZandt: Just *three* people? OK. Captain, two deckhands?

Tran: Two deckhands. Nhưng mà big boat thì cần 4 người.

(If it's a big boat then you need four people.)

Nguyen: If it's a big boat they need four people.

VanZandt: OK. What size boat do you usually go out on, on a two-week trip?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Twenty-five feet by seventy-five feet.

VanZandt: OK. That's a good size boat. Steel hull? Not wooden! (chuckles)

Tran: No, not wood. (smiles) Steel.

VanZandt: Steel, OK. And was it difficult—because in Vietnam, I know there aren't all the fishing regulations and rules that you have to go by, but here there are. Was that difficult to adjust to, to learn? Was that an adjustment?

Nguyen: Ở Việt Nam khi đi biển không có nhiều luật lệ, còn bên Mỹ thì có. Vậy chú có gặp khó khăn gì khi đi biển không?

(There are not many regulations in fishing in Vietnam, but there are in America. So there are many regulations to learn and to adjust.)

Tran: Không có khó khăn gì cả. Mỗi đầu mùa họ đưa cho cuốn sách hướng dẫn cá nào bắt và cá nào thả, mình cứ làm theo thôi. Đôi khi chỉ bắt tôm.

(Each season they give you guidelines what's to catch and what's not. If I don't know he could ask my children. Or I just catch shrimps.)

Nguyen: Yeah. Over in Vietnam, there's no rules. But over here, there's rules. And each open season, when the season first opens, they give you guidelines, like what fish, what species you can have. But whatever he doesn't understand from the guidelines, he asks his children. But for him it's easy because all he does is catch shrimp.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: (laughs) That's true. So you don't have to worry about it, OK. So and today is the beginning of season. Is that right? You said today?

Tran: Yeah, today. No no. Đầu mùa là tháng 4-5.

(The beginning of season is in April or May.)

Nguyen: He said the season started back in April—

Tran: May.

Nguyen: —or May. And right now it's just opened.

VanZandt: OK. So do you plan on going out anytime soon?

Tran: 1 tháng nữa mới ra được. (laughs)

(After one month.)

Nguyen: (laughs) Yeah. He's taking off for about a month, because there's hardly anything out there right now.

VanZandt: OK. So you already know there's not much out there. So there's no reason to spend the money.

Tran: Bởi vì hôm trước đi một lần rồi mà lỗ rồi, 6-7000 gì đó.

(Before I went out for one week, and I had a loss about six or seven thousand dollars.)

Nguyen: Last time, he went out for about a week, they had a loss of about six or seven thousand dollars.

VanZandt: OK. Well, people who might hear that might wonder, "Is that because of the oil spill?" You said there's not much [shrimp] out there. So can we just maybe jump forward to a little over a year ago now, when the BP [Deepwater Horizon] oil spill happened, in April of last year. Can you tell me how your occupation, your life, was impacted by the oil spill? And just tell me a little bit about that over the last year.

Nguyen: Có phải vì dầu tràn?

(Was it because of the oil spill?)

Tran: Ảnh hưởng nhiều lắm, dầu tràn vào hết các sông hồ.

(Yes, much affected.)

Nguyen: So the first, the impact is that, once there's a spill, the oil leaked into the ponds and the marshes and the area along the Grand Isle coast that he's used to. So all the shrimp died, and there's not much left. And what was the second part?

VanZandt: So that's the area that you were shrimping then, Grand Isle?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)—Grand Isle?

Tran: Yeah, and Houma, Morgan [City], Delacroix.

Nguyen: Like Houma, yeah.

VanZandt: OK. And so the shrimp were affected by the oil spill, then? And there was a period of time when you didn't know what was open—

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: —and you couldn't go out, and you're waiting to hear, and didn't know what to do. Just tell me about what that was like. Were there times that you went out and invested in the oil and your supplies and didn't catch anything? Or saw oil? Just tell me about that, over the last year. How often did you go out over this last year? Have you been out—

Nguyen: Từ lúc dầu tràn chú ra biển bao nhiêu lần?

(How many times did you go out after the oil spill?)

Tran: Năm ngoái ra biển có 1 lần 1 tuần mà không bắt được gì nên năm nay mới ra lại. (chuckles)

(I went out one time last year for one week, and I didn't catch anything, so I came back until this year.)

Nguyen: In this past year, he went out one time. He went out originally one time for a week, and there's nothing there. And so his boat's been, his friend's boat's been docked until this year. And came out and found there's just open water(?), there's nothing there.

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Hm. So what has happened to the shrimp? I mean, what do you think?

Tran: Dead. (laughs)

Nguyen: He thinks they're all dead. (chuckles)

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Really?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: Is that what people think?

Tran: Từ (inaudible) là không có cá, tôm chỉ có water. (chuckles)

(Nothing is alive.)

Nguyen: From the area from Delchamps—

Tran: Venice.

Nguyen: Venice.

Tran: Delkum(?).

Nguyen: Delkum? And Venice.

VanZandt: Delkum and Venice.

Nguyen: That area, there's just, nothing that's alive down there.

Tran: Not alive there.

Nguyen: No fish, no shrimp.

Tran: Empire(?), Grand Isle, Morgan, Houma, Delkum, no (inaudible).

VanZandt: No shrimp.

Tran: No.

VanZandt: What about other fish? Do you hear about tuna?

Tran: Chỉ có mấy tàu to ra ngoài khơi thì bắt được cá to thôi, còn đâu thì không có gì hết. (chuckles)

(People who have bigger boats, they can go far to the coast, and they can catch tuna or bigger fish.)

Nguyen: For those who are able, who have like bigger boats that they can go farther out to sea, they're able to catch tuna or bigger fish. But closer to the coast, there's hardly anything.

VanZandt: OK. So hard for the shrimpers.

Tran: Yeah, hard.

VanZandt: Yeah. Well, what do you think the future holds for shrimpers, then? If you're not catching anything, and nobody wants to put all that money out up front—

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: —when they don't know, can't be assured that it's going to be safe to eat if they do catch anything. What do you think's going to happen? Do you plan on staying in the shrimping industry?

Nguyen: Chú nghĩ gì về tương lai của đi làm tôm sẽ ra sao? Chú có ý định bỏ nghề không?

(What do you think about the future of shrimping? Did you think about quitting?)

Tran: Chắc vẫn làm chứ. Làm không được nữa thì lên khiếu nại với VCCF, kêu nó trả tiền. (laughs)

(I still go fishing.)

Nguyen: Chú nghĩ gì về tương lai của ngành này?

(What do you think about the future of shrimping?)

Tran: Sau này chắc bị thất bại, vì bây giờ không có gì, chắc vài năm sau mới có lại. *(Shrimping now are greatly declined, and you have to wait for the long term. There's nothing right now.)*

Nguyen: He said that shrimping, in general, right now has greatly declined. And you have to wait for the long term for it to recover. There's nothing right now. And for him, what he's saying, he had to do is file claims for the shrimping damages. There's nothing else he *can* do.

VanZandt: Yeah. And I've heard that from people in the oyster business. That they feel like it may even get better, and a lot stronger harvests may be a few years from now, so it's just going to be maybe this few years that may be tough. So you do have hope that it will come back, just takes some time?

Nguyen: Chú có hi vọng vài năm sau sẽ trở lại làm không?

(Maybe a few years from now, so you still want to come back?)

Tran: Vài năm.

(Couple of years)

Nguyen: Yes, he'll just wait a few years.

VanZandt: Yeah. I've been hearing that, too. It's hard to hold out, find something else to do. Well, I heard earlier today, and I'm looking at the book that you have by you. And this was a USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] program to help retrain some fishermen, and maybe offer some cash to help you learn business management, and come up with a business proposal, maybe. So you're working on that.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: (chuckles) And you've got a little bit, about four thousand dollars from that. So how do you feel about that?

Tran: It be OK, good. (laughs)

VanZandt: Something to do now?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. Well, have you thought about going back into the grocery business? No?

Tran: Sợ, chú sợ làm business. Tiền thì nhiều mà áp lực lắm. Chú còn bị bắn 3 lần nữa.

(No. I found business stressful for the money. And I got shot three times in the past. I don't want to return to the business.)

Nguyen: He said that he is not going back to the grocery business because it's a stressful job for the money. And he has been shot three times before, in the past.

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: So he does not want to return to the business.

VanZandt: Umph, Mr. Tran.

Tran: Chú sợ bị bắn lại.

(I'm too scared that it would happen again.)

Nguyen: Yeah, he's permanently quitting from—

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: —grocery stores because he's too scared that will happen again.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness. That's a little detail you didn't mention earlier. Was that being robbed?

Tran: Yes.

VanZandt: My goodness. Well, it sounds like maybe fishing might be a little bit—

Tran: Little bit better. (laughs)

VanZandt: —a little bit safer?

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Do you have any crazy fishing stories of out at sea? Storms, sharks, any interesting fishing stories? None?

Tran: (shakes head) (laughs)

VanZandt: *Really?* None?

Nguyen: Có câu chuyện nào về cá mập.. không chú?

(Do you have any crazy fishing stories like storms, sharks? Anything interesting?)

Tran: Không có, không có sợ bằng làm trên bờ, làm trên bờ ghê lắm.

(It's calm; there's really nothing. It's quite relaxing.)

Nguyen: It's very calm out there. He didn't really encounter anything. And he said it's relaxing because there's nothing to do but just sit around and just shoot the breeze. (chuckles)

VanZandt: I wondered what—I was going to ask, “What do you do in your down time when you're waiting for the shrimp?”

Tran: Go to sleep. (laughs)

VanZandt: Sleep? Yeah.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, that does sound like a very relaxing way to spend your time. Not being shot at, in the grocery store. There's also been a challenge for shrimpers with competition from foreign imports: Vietnam and Brazil, and other places. And high, rising fuel prices. So one of the initiatives that this Mary Queen of Vietnam CDC is working on is farm-raised fish, and agroponics. So not catching fish out in the wild, but raising it here on the land. What do you think about that?

Nguyen: Nghề đi biển giờ bị đe dọa bởi những nước nhập khẩu, và bởi vậy một trong những chương trình của CDC là dạy cho người đi biển biết nuôi cá trong hồ. Chú nghĩ gì về vấn đề này?

(There's also been a challenge for shrimpers with competition from imports: Vietnam, Brazil, and other places. One of the CDC program is training for them to raise fish. What do you think about that?)

Tran: Cạnh tranh với Mỹ thì cũng không lại Mỹ. Tôm nhiều, dư dả. Nếu như không có bị dầu thì đem lại rất nhiều tôm tép.

(I'm not constrained with competition because there were plenty of shrimps here. It's just because of the oil spill.)

Nguyen: Nhưng bây giờ?

(How about now?)

Tran: Bây giờ chịu thua.

(Now, no.)

Nguyen: Nếu nước Mỹ ra hồ như vậy chú làm sao?

(If the U.S. processes the home-raise shrimping, what would you do?)

Tran: Thì nuôi thôi. (chuckles)

(OK, I'll go with it.)

Nguyen: Without the oil spill, he's not concerned with competition from other countries because he said that the waters around here, it's very plentiful. Because of the oil spill now, there's hardly anything there, so I asked him if going into farm-raised shrimp—so he said if he has to, he has to. (chuckles)

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: Kicking and screaming. Only if you have to.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: (chuckles) Wouldn't be as much fun as being out on the water. Uh-huh. What do you like about fishing out on the water? What do you like best?

Nguyen: Điều gì chú thích nhất khi đi biển?

(What do you like about fishing out in the water?)

Tran: Thấy thích thú và không suy nghĩ gì cả.

(Happy, calm and comfortable.)

Nguyen: It's, you know, just out in the open water, he's working on the shrimp, and you know, it's calming, and it's comfortable. And he doesn't have to think too much.

Tran: (laughs)

Nguyen: It's not stressful. It's carefree.

VanZandt: Got you, yeah. When you come back with your shrimp, who do you sell to? You bring it to the dock, and then what happens to your catch? Who gets paid, and where does it go, and do you keep some for yourself, friends?

Nguyen: Khi chú trở lại bờ, chú bán xong chú có giữ lại không?

(What happens to your catch? Did you keep anything?)

Tran: Có giữ lại 1 ít cho gia đình, còn lại bán cho vựa.

(I keep a small portion for my family, then I sell it to the company.)

Nguyen: So when he comes back, he keeps a small portion for his family, and then the rest, he sells it to the—

Tran: Company.

Nguyen: —the company that's there, yeah.

VanZandt: OK. Is it normally one particular company, or does that vary?

Tran: Anywhere, anywhere.

VanZandt: Anyone? Anyone who'll buy. (laughs)

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: So if you were to bring some in today, how much is a pound of shrimp going for now? How much can you get for it?

Nguyen: Bán 1 pound bao nhiêu?

Tran: Còn tùy, có lúc 4-5 đồng, có lúc 2 đồng.

(It depends. Maybe four or five dollars, maybe two dollars. Can't tell.)

Nguyen: It ranges. It depends on the chefs, or whoever the buyer is. Sometimes they offer four dollars, and sometimes they offer two-something [dollars]. So he can't tell.

VanZandt: And what was the highest—I know there were some good years back in the [19]80s. What were the good days? What were the best days with the highest prices that you could get, the good ole days?

Nguyen: Giá cao nhất mà chú bán được là bao nhiêu?

(What was the best day with the highest price you can get?)

Tran: 6 đồng.

(Six dollars.)

Nguyen: He said about six dollars.

VanZandt: When was that?

Nguyen: Hỏi nào?

(When?)

Tran: Năm nào cũng vậy.

(Every year.)

Nguyen: So, every year there's a period where we catch really big, really good shrimp. And they can get up to about six dollars.

VanZandt: OK. So you haven't seen it steadily decline since—

Tran: (chuckle)

Nguyen: Giá tôm mấy năm trước đây chú có thấy lên hay xuống không?

(How about the price these years?)

Tran: Lúc trước nó xuống, gần đây lại lên. Ngày xưa có lúc lại lên, không giống nhau được.

(Before it dramatically rise, for a couple of years it go up and down again.)

Nguyen: So he says that, a while ago. He just said “before,”—

VanZandt: Sure.

Nguyen: —there was a period that it just dramatically increased, and that, you know, for a couple of years it went down a little bit—

Tran: (chuckles)

Nguyen: —and then it goes up, and then it goes down, so. Year to year, it just—

VanZandt: Sure, sure. As long as we don't have any more oil spills, no more Katrinas, it might be better. Well, you mentioned you have children. How many children do you have?

Tran: Only one.

VanZandt: Just one. Boy or girl?

Tran: Girl.

VanZandt: Girl. How old is she?

Tran: Twenty-five.

VanZandt: Twenty-five? OK. Does she live here, in New Orleans?

Tran: Unh-uh. Vietnam. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Vietnam? With your wife, you mentioned your wife, too.

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: But you get to go back every year, you said. What does your wife do in Vietnam?

Nguyen: Ở Việt Nam vợ chú làm cái gì?

(What does your wife do in Vietnam?)

Tran: Tôi mua cho bà ấy một nàh máy chà gạo.

(I bought her a rice plant.)

Nguyen: He bought her a rice plant.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Mr. Tran, that's a nice gift. So she can grow her own, and—

Nguyen: No. The rice plant is basically, that's where they bring in the rice.

VanZandt: Oh, a plant, the factory.

Nguyen: Yes, the factory, the rice factory.

VanZandt: Wow.

Nguyen: Where they bring in, you know, they take off the shell—

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Yes. Right. And where is that in Vietnam? Is it in your same home town where you lived?

Tran: Yeah, same home town.

VanZandt: My goodness.

Tran: (chuckle)

VanZandt: Are there other rice plants there? Or is that the only one?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. There's a couple down there also, but not enough competition because he bought his for her about fifteen years ago.

VanZandt: How is it doing? Doing well?

Tran: Yeah, good.

VanZandt: Does your daughter work there, too?

Tran: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Oh, that's fantastic. Well, I guess—and I want to ask you at the end if there's anything else I haven't asked.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Anything that you would like to share. But just to finish a little bit more about the oil spill—how do you feel that the government, that BP, that the Gulf Coast Claims Facility [GCCF] has handled this oil spill over the past year? And what do you think could have been done better, differently?

Nguyen: Chủ nghĩ gì về những việc làm của chính phủ hiệu quả ra sao?

(How do you feel the government has handled this oil spill over the past year?)

(some Vietnamese spoken here not transcribed in above passage.)

Nguyen: Claims facility?

VanZandt: Gulf Coast Claims Facility.

Tran: Gulf Coast.

Nguyen: GCF.

VanZandt: Ken Feinberg.

Nguyen: GCF. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Không được, không xong.

(No, it's not good.)

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

Nguyen: Yeah. So all the deckhands and all the fishermen, it doesn't matter. They can't really file a claim based on their income or what they were going to own(?). They have a final compensation of \$25,000. And that's final. They can't appeal that. And he said that's just not right.

VanZandt: And there's been pressure, I understand, to file a final [claim] and be done—

Nguyen: Right.

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: —instead of taking the interim payments or waiting. And so it sounds like it's been really, particularly hard for the deckhands. Why is it that you can't file a claim, or don't want to? Does it have to do with documentation that you may not have, or—

Nguyen: Tại sao nó khó để mà claims? Có phải là vì giấy tờ?

(Does it have to do with documentations?)

Tran: Không phải, tại vì thằng harbor nó muốn ép dân mình để nó hưởng. Nó không làm khó giấy tờ.

(Not because of the documentations. They have it all. I just want to have the final claims.)

Nguyen: He thinks it's, whoever is in charge of the claims, he just wants it to get it done. It's not because of documentation. They have it all. He just wants to have it final claimed, and then the guy who watches(?) his claims, hands in and keeps, you know, whatever is left for himself and—

VanZandt: Have you filed a claim, any kind of claim over the past year?

Tran: Có làm hết rồi, làm xong rồi. 3 tuần trước nó gửi về nó kêu ra ký lãnh 25 ngàn. Sắp tu van phòng tra cho hàng lại rồi. (laughs)

Nguyen: Yeah, he's done all the paperwork, and about three weeks ago he received a letter that says go out and sign for that \$25,000, that final claim.

VanZandt: So will you do that, or will you wait?

Tran: I wait, wait. (laughs)

VanZandt: Good for you. Well, I know that it's difficult, because I understand to receive the final payment, once you do, that you don't have any recourse later to sue at all. And that it's based on a prediction. Is that right? Of what your income might be later on? Which is impossible to predict. So it sounds like you think there needs to be some changes. How do you think it would be better? What could they do?

Tran: Nếu cả làng này không chịu kí, mình kéo dài thời gian 2013.

(That this whole area, the fishermen are refusing to sign that, so that they can have a deadline of 2013. So they can wear them down.)

Nguyen: So he says that this whole area, all the deckhands and fishermen are refusing to sign for that so that they can drag it out. Because didn't they have a deadline of like 2013 for it? So they're just dragging it out to whittle them down.

Tran: (laughs)

VanZandt: Wear them down. OK. Well, it sounds like you-all have come together—

Tran: Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: —and are helping each other, supporting each other, and committed. That’s good. What kind of help have you received from Mary Queen of Vietnam CDC here? How have they helped you?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Tốt, cần gì thì tôi lại hỏi.

(Very good. I could ask everything.)

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

Nguyen: Yeah. He says that this office has done good work for him. Anytime he has a question, he comes out here, and he talks to one of the counselors, and it helps him to have confidence.

VanZandt: Well, Mr. Tran, I’ve taken a lot of your time. (chuckles)

Tran: (chuckles) Yeah.

VanZandt: But you have a lot to tell about your life. You’ve had a very interesting life. And I thank you for sharing. Is there anything that you think about that you’d like for your daughter to know, for maybe her children, your grandchildren—

Tran: (chuckles)

VanZandt: A hundred years from now, when you’re gone—and you think about your life—any advice for them, or anything else that you’d like to share.

Tran: (chuckles) Nó có sống chung với mình đâu mà nói.

(They don’t live with me, so.)

Nguyen: Còn gì chú muốn nói ra nữa không.

(Is there anything else?)

Tran: Thôi, đủ rồi. (laughs)

(No, it’s enough.)

Nguyen: He’s like, “I don’t know.”

VanZandt: (laughs) OK. Well, thank you very much, then, Mr. Tran. I wish you all the best.

Tran: You’re welcome.

(end of interview)