

**THE CENTER FOR ORAL HISTORY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE  
of  
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI**

**Recording Log**

**Interviewee:** Khong Tran, New Orleans East resident, shrimper

**Interviewer:** Linda VanZandt; Khanh Nguyen, interpreter

**Date of recording:** August 22, 2011

**Recording format/notes:** Recorded digitally on an Olympus WS-321M voice recorder using an external microphone on table base stand. Recorded in small storage space in office of Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation [MQVN CDC]. Primarily Vietnamese spoken with English interpretation.

**Recording length:** 01:20:47

**Location:** New Orleans East, Versailles Vietnamese community, MQVN CDC office.

**Subjects/Topics:** Growing up in Kien Giang, Vietnam; learning to fish from father; family business of fishing; Vietnam War and difficult life under Communist rule; reeducation camp; decision to escape; journey to Thailand, then Hawaii to New Orleans; first jobs in America; shrimping to save money to own grocery store in New Orleans; losing store in Hurricane Katrina and returning to shrimping; spending 7 days on house roof then airlifted by helicopter after Katrina; typical shrimping trip; losses and impact since BP oil spill; no shrimp for boats operating near coast; assessment of industry future since oil spill; retraining program; challenges to industry (fuel cost, foreign imports), opinion of farm-raising fish; marketing catch; daughter and wife living in Vietnam (bought daughter a rice factory); opinion of BP oil spill response and claims process; support from MQVN CDC.

\*Times noted below are English interpretation of interviewee's response to the question.

<b>Time/ Counter</b>	<b>Topic</b>
00:00:26	Introduction of interviewee and interpreter.
00:00:58	Has been shrimping for just 4 years; prior to shrimping, owned grocery stores.
00:01:54	Moved from store owner to shrimping after Katrina when couldn't reopen store.
00:02:18	Owned Abundant Food Store grocery store 17 years.
00:03:10	Born in Kien Giang, Vietnam, September 23,1955; Kien Giang around Mekong Delta area near ocean; fishing town.
00:04:19	His father was a fisherman; lived in Kien Giang (fishing village) throughout his life in Vietnam.

00:04:42	Like growing up in fishing village; joyful childhood; liked shrimping and fishing so easy to go back to after Katrina.
00:05:45	Began fishing with father at age 10; start working at young age in his village.
00:06:14	Had four brothers and four sisters; he was first born.
00:07:22	Attended school during week, then worked fishing after; played soccer on weekends. Liked school but didn't have opportunity and time to continue so stopped at 9 <sup>th</sup> grade to help family.
00:08:18	Favorite subject was math.
<b>00:09:24</b>	<b>Fishing in Vietnam</b> – wooden boats, no air conditioning, cast their own nets; here in US, he works for someone else (doesn't own boat) and boats are more comfortable and have more conveniences.
00:10:38	Fished any time of day or night, whenever they were biting! Education system was different there (school day shorter – 8-11 a.m.) so worked more hours there.
00:11:57	Caught everything! Not like over here where fishing is specialized; no oysters there. Saved some for his family, then he sold to neighbors and local market. His mother did the selling. Each family as a unit contributes to fishing work (females do marketing while males do the catching).
00:13:59	Catch was always plentiful; they never lacked.
<b>00:14:59</b>	<b>Vietnam War</b> – they were witness to the battles; almost a daily event, especially near the end and American withdrawal.
00:15:57	High-ranking cousins in Army helped him avoid serving in military. No one touched his family due to this status (laughs). One cousin was the equivalent of a mayor here in US.
00:18:29	During the war, he sympathized with American soldiers because they were marching in open fields whereas enemy was hiding (guerilla warfare); getting picked off.
00:19:20	Distinguishes the North Vietnamese soldiers were good at hiding (not South).
00:20:33	Around 1975, before Americans withdrew, his cousins (officers) were able to leave by helicopter.
00:21:53	When Communists took over, they planned to invade Cambodia; he didn't want to join military so in 1978 he met with friends who had a boat and escaped.

00:23:19	Surviving after Communist takeover – went from friend to friend; couldn't return home or would have been taken to join military. He left area and went to Ha Tien (looks at map to identify area toward Thailand).
00:24:56	Many friends encouraged him to leave; walking toward Thailand without family knowing. 3 months later he made it to America. After walking, met up with friends who had boats and left with them.
00:26:31	Left with approx. 30-40 people on wooden fishing boat 60x12 feet; only one in family who left, rest is still in Vietnam; brothers attempted to escape but caught several times and gave up.
00:28:08	His father and one sister sent to reeducation camp for 3 months; reeducation was very light (he worked for local govt. office) then returned home.
00:29:08	October 1978 he reached Thailand; 1979 reached Hawaii (by plane). In Song Khala refugee camp in Thailand.
00:30:33	Happy when found out coming to US.
00:31:05	Family already in Dallas, TX sent him money and encouraged him to come to US; in Hawaii for 1 year then to New Orleans. While in Hawaii, he learned about American society (markets, daily life).
00:32:33	Life in Vietnam very different; more cars in US, he's happier here.
00:33:47	American life less challenging because govt. provides welfare money and education; only difficulty was language barrier but he picked it up on the streets and became comfortable with that.
00:34:55	Waited 10 years before he could contact his family in Vietnam; 1994 went back to visit; family thought he had died and was overjoyed to hear from him.
00:36:21	Repercussions for family after Communist takeover - confiscated his father's boat so family had to quit fishing (while Mr. Tran worked odd jobs at grocery stores in America).
00:37:32	His siblings were somewhat stable and worked building houses, etc. after war.
00:38:03	Scared of being caught by the Communists the first time he returned to Vietnam.
00:39:00	Went with group of friends; others had reassured him it was safe to return.
00:39:36	Father and youngest brother remained in same family house.
00:40:01	Came to New Orleans in 1980 at behest of friend who fished here.

00:40:57	Job as cook in Chinese restaurant first (learned skill in Hawaii), then started fishing; also learned some English in Hawaii.
00:42:27	Fished for 7-8 months (could earn good money then) and saved \$20,000, enough to get his own grocery store.
00:43:25	In New Orleans then, easier to make money owning own store (\$100,000) compared to fishing (less profitable); first store was in Gentilly and he sold meats, fish, convenience store goods; bought it for \$120,000 (easy to get bank loan with little down payment).
<b>00:45:49</b>	<b>Hurricane Katrina</b> – stayed to watch store and ended up on roof of his house for 7 days after storm; airlifted by a helicopter from Houston. Went to roof to escape high water (house on Bullard Ave.).
00:47:15	5 or 6 friends stayed with him to watch store and survived on chips and water for 7 days. Just owned 1 big store then; it was looted and damaged from flood. When he returned, there was only a skeleton of a store left; had insurance.
00:48:32	Entire house damaged as well, so basically started over; he did own repairs.
00:49:43	Lost his store, economy going down, then had friend who wanted him to join him shrimping but he lacked citizenship, so Mr. Tran joined him (was a US citizen) in 2006.
00:51:55	Each trip takes 2 weeks; prepare by buying supplies, oil, food; use radar to find shrimp, then casts net to see what's there; if good, that's where they stay for a while.
00:52:47	Fishing in America is so easy with radar; 3 crew members (2 deckhands) for small boat; 4 for large boat. Shrimps on 25x75 ft. steel hull boat.
00:54:32	In Vietnam, no rules or regulations; here when season first opens, guidelines go out for species; he asks children if doesn't understand guidelines. Easy for him because he just catches shrimp!
00:55:17	Season started in May; taking off for a month because not much out there right now. Last time he went out for 1 week and they had a loss of \$6,000-\$7,000 (post BP oil spill).
00:58:39	Last trip found nothing there so friend's boat is now docked; he thinks shrimp are all dead; area from Delacroix(?) to Venice is dead (no fish or shrimp); Empire, Houma, Morgan City, Delacroix(?) no shrimp.
01:00:06	Bigger boats that can go farther out to sea catching tuna or bigger fish, better catch; hardly anything to catch for those closer to coast, so hard for shrimpers.

01:01:38	Shrimping in general now has greatly declined; <i>have</i> to wait for long term recovery since nothing right now. Can only file claims for damages, nothing else he <i>can</i> do.
01:02:35	May take a few years for shrimp to recover; meanwhile, learning how to write a business proposal through recovery program (received \$4000 from that program).
01:03:40	Not going back to grocery business; too stressful for the money - has been shot 3 times in the past during robberies.
01:05:10	Very calm at sea; hasn't encountered any real dangers. It's relaxing to sit around, sleep, and eat shrimp during downtime.
01:07:23	Opinion of farm-raising fish in future as alternative – besides the BP oil spill, not concerned with foreign import competition; waters here have been very plentiful but hardly any there now since BP oil spill. If he has to change to farm-raised fish he will (“if he has to, he has to”).
01:08:23	What he likes about shrimping - enjoys being on the open water, working on the shrimp; it's calming and carefree (doesn't have to think too much).
01:09:17	Marketing catch – keeps small portion for family and sells rest to a company (anyone who will buy, not one specific company); cost for one pound of shrimp today ranges according to what buyer/chef will offer. In the past, one pound could fetch \$6.
01:11:33	Shrimp prices fluctuate from year to year.
01:12:00	Has one child (daughter) age 25 who lives in Vietnam with his wife. He returns every year to visit; bought her a rice processing factory in Vietnam in his hometown 15 years ago.
01:15:15	Opinion of BP oil spill response – can't file GCCF claim based on their income but only have offer of a final claim payment of \$25,000; not right that they can't appeal that decision.
01:16:35	Thinks whoever is in charge just wants to get it done, even though they have documentation proof; final claim allows them to wash their hands of the problem.
01:17:26	Has done all paperwork but received letter 3 weeks ago instructing him to sign for final claim; won't sign final claim but will wait; all the deckhands and fishermen are refusing to sign final payment (deadline is 2013). Feels GCCF is just trying to wear them out and make them give up.

01:19:31	Support from MQCN CDC – counselors have helped answer his questions, which gives him comfort.
<b>END</b>	