

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

Thieu Tran

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt
Interpreter: Khai Nguyen

Volume 1043
2011

This project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration through Mississippi State University-Northern Gulf Institute, Grant Number NA06OAR4320264. Louis M. Kyriakouides, 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 Thieu Tran, Volume 1043

Interviewer: Linda VanZandt

Interpreter: Khai Nguyen

Transcriber: Carol L. Short

Editor: Linda VanZandt

Biography

Mr. Thieu Tran was born, one of eleven children, in 1960 in Vung Tau, South Vietnam. His parents sent him to live in a seminary during the Vietnam War, returning home in 1974. Mr. Tran's father was a fisherman and also joined the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnamese Army) providing security for their town. Mr. Tran's mother helped sell the fish catch when it came in. Mr. Tran learned fishing from his father after 1975 when living conditions became harsh.

In 1979 he escaped Vietnam by boat, with his three younger siblings, to Malaysia but they were rejected. They made it to Indonesia where they stayed until they could contact their grandparents, who had already arrived in the United States. Mr. Tran lived in Alabama from 1980 to 1988 attending high school then working for a bicycle and chair manufacturer. After the company went bankrupt, he moved to New Orleans and learned shrimping from a cousin. He owned his own boat for four years then worked as a captain on other boats. At the time of the interview, Mr. Tran was working as a long-line fisherman catching tuna and had been catching fish for oil spill research for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Table of Contents

Personal history.....	1
Vietnam War.....	2, 8
Father, fisherman, served in Army of the Republic of Vietnam.....	5
Mother marketed catch	6
Learning to fish as a child in Vietnam.....	6
Fleeing from Vietnam after fall to Communists.....	7, 12
Refugee camp.....	7, 18
Family captured by North Vietnamese Army.....	9
Living under Communist rule in Vietnam.....	10
Reeducation camp.....	11
Fishing for survival under the Communists.....	11
Voyage out of Vietnam, hardships at sea.....	15
Pirates.....	18
Coming to the United States	19
Helpful Catholic priest.....	20
Arriving in Alabama, 1980	22
Education in the United States.....	24
Risky nature of fishing for a living.....	26
Differences in fishing in Vietnam and in the United States.....	26
Regulations	27, 35
Overfishing in Vietnam.....	27
Fishing equipment.....	28
Repairing nets	30
Getting his own boat in the United States.....	30
Longline fishing for tuna in the Gulf of Mexico.....	31
Steady decline in tuna catch since 1997	34
NOAA, hooks changed to protect sea turtles.....	35
BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.....	36
Lost-income claims process against BP.....	36
Costs of fishing	37
Splitting the catch	38
Crew aboard fishing boat.....	38
Losing money fishing	38
Marketing catch in the United States.....	38
Working in the cleanup of oil	39
Working for NOAA	41
Species caught after BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.....	42
Visual assessment of the Gulf of Mexico, circa 2011	43

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

THIEU TRAN

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Thieu Tran and is taking place on April 26, 2011. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. English/Vietnamese interpretation is provided by Khai Nguyen.

VanZandt: Today is April 26, 2011. This is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. I'm in New Orleans East in the Versailles Community today in the offices of Mary Queen of Vietnam Community Development Corporation. And I'm here today with Khai Nguyen, who is offering interpretation today, with a gentleman who lives in this community, is a fisherman, and has some experiences to share with us. So thank you for being here today.

Tran: You're welcome.

VanZandt: And could you tell me your name and where you are from?

Tran: My name is Thieu Tran. I'm from Vietnam.

VanZandt: Where in Vietnam are you from?

Tran: Phuoc Tinh, Vung Tau.

VanZandt: Vung Tau?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: Fishing village.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Fishing, yeah.

VanZandt: Beautiful. (chuckles)

Tran: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: On the coast in South Vietnam.

Tran: South Vietnam, yeah.

VanZandt: South Vietnam, right. Could you spell your name for me, Thieu?

Tran: Khai, you know.

Nguyen: T-H-I-E-U.

VanZandt: (writing) OK.

Nguyen: And last name is T-R-A-N.

VanZandt: OK, great, thank you. And can you tell me what year you were born?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Phuoc Tinh, Vung Tau. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Nineteen sixty.

VanZandt: Nineteen sixty! We're almost the same age; (pointing to self) 1961.

Tran: Yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: OK, 1960, in Vung Tau.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: You're going to have to fill me in on that. (chuckles)

Nguyen: He's saying he was born in 1960, but his papers say he was born in 1963, so.

VanZandt: Ah. Tell me a little bit about your life growing up; your father, what he did, and just what life was like in Vung Tau.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. He's saying growing up he was very young during the [Vietnam] war, and so his parents sent him to a seminary to live. So (speaking Vietnamese).

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he was just living there; he wasn't going to, like, learning to be—

VanZandt: Right. Just for safety or?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Why did they send him there?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Good.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Well, actually, you know, I don't think it was for safety. He said, you know, it was kind of like boarding school, I guess, going to school. And he said, you know, to see if he wanted to be in the seminary, but by the time the war was over, he—when the war was almost over, he went home, so.

VanZandt: OK, OK.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: And so what was that like in the seminary?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, right.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, it was just school in the morning and afternoon, two meals a day, just basic stuff like that. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He was saying the school during the war wasn't really affected by the war. And yeah, that was during the war, so.

VanZandt: OK. So you didn't see much of the war going on?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's saying, I mean, while he was in school he didn't see any of the war, but he went home and—he returned home in 1974 and so for that last year he—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK. (speaking Vietnamese) Like a mine? (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) No, bomb. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: *Oh*, OK, OK. I guess what he was saying is when the war was close to the city, like, his parents would go on the boat and, like, they would go into the water to avoid the fighting. I mean, but they would return—

VanZandt: Hm. Sure.

Nguyen: —when the fighting was over.

VanZandt: It was safer to get away from it.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said once the war was over in 1975, all his extended family left, but he and his family stayed.

VanZandt: OK. Well, let's get back to your family a little bit. What did your father do? What was his occupation? Was he in the [South Vietnamese] Army or fought in the war?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He was a fisherman but he did go; he did join the Army.

VanZandt: He did, OK. So your father was ARVN [Army of the Republic of Vietnam], South Vietnamese Army?

Nguyen: Uh—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah.

VanZandt: What did he do in the Army?

Tran: He, uh, (speaking Vietnamese).

Nguyen: Oh, he was just, he was saying it was more like town security.

VanZandt: *Oh*, OK.

Nguyen: Yeah, security for the, for his town.

VanZandt: For the town.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Not like, I guess, on the line, on the frontline.

VanZandt: Not a combat soldier.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Right. OK, great. And what about your mother? What did your mother do?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said she was more a housewife, but like, she would help sell the fish when the catch came in.

VanZandt: Ah, OK. So your father was a fisherman.

Tran: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Is that where *you* learned to fish, from your father?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He said following 1975, conditions were really harsh, and it was hard to find any—hard to make a living in any other way, so he started to follow his father and try and learn the fishing profession.

VanZandt: OK, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He was saying that at first it was very hard because he was very inexperienced, but he actually learned the trade. And then, but the whole time it was really hard to make a living anyway, but then in 1979 it was just, it just all came together, and like, it seemed like they couldn't take it any more in that kind of environment, and so his parents began preparing for him to leave Vietnam, so.

VanZandt: OK, OK.

Tran: Um-hm. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Thailand, Malaysia. (speaking Vietnamese) Indonesia. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said when he left, he was on a boat and went to Malaysia, but I don't think they—they didn't accept him. So they went and then actually got into Indonesia and stayed there for a few months and tried to get in contact with his grandparents, who were in America.

VanZandt: Ah, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK, yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Singapore. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said at first in the refugee camps, you know, it was kind of hard, too, because they didn't have contact with people in America yet, and he wasn't sure of anything. But then like once they got in contact, it was a lot easier, and they wouldn't worry as much.

VanZandt: Right. You knew that you might get to the United States. You knew where you might be going. And I wanted to ask more about the journey. Can I back up a little bit and ask about the war? When you came home, you were fourteen years old. Out of the seminary, you came home, and the war was very bad. The American soldiers had left, pretty much; [American] troops were gone.

Tran: Yeah, the American they—

VanZandt: Tell me what—

Tran: The Americans, they left in 1972.

VanZandt: Right.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: So things were very bad, and the South Vietnamese were having a very hard time fighting the North.

Tran: Yes.

VanZandt: What was that like in 1975? Do you remember? Anything you can share about April 30, 1975, when South Vietnam fell to the North. What was that like, and what were you thinking? What was your family thinking? And just what was that period like? People are very interested to know from the Vietnamese perspective.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He remembered, one thing he remembered is like, his village, his town didn't get bombed, or there wasn't any war damage, but what he remembers is, by the

time the North Vietnamese Army came, most of the town had left. It was very—it was like after Katrina, he said.

VanZandt: Wow.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Bau Katrina. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said—

VanZandt: So his family was one of the few left—

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: —it sounds like, because they didn't leave.

Nguyen: Well, he was saying that there was maybe one or two buildings that got a little bit of damage, but for the most part—(speaking Vietnamese).

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Right. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said, yeah, for his village, he said like 90 percent of the people left.

Tran: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Um-hm. Why did his family *not* leave? His grandparents had already left, it sounds like, much of the town. Was that because of his father's position as a policeman, or why did they stay?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He, uh—(speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said they were planning on going, but by the time they get to the dock his dad saw that everyone was trying to cram on these boats, and like people were falling overboard alive. As he was saying, he didn't want to take that risk, so they—

VanZandt: Dangerous.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And he said he thought that his dad thought that his [Mr. Tran's] grandparents would stay back, too, but then by the time—and others would stay back, too, but by the time they got back to the house, they weren't there, so he assumed. And then like they got captured by the North [Vietnamese] Army; I mean, *his* family.

VanZandt: His family did?

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: Yeah.

Nguyen: So his grandparents were gone.

VanZandt: Gone.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Tell me about that, when they got captured. Did they come to your house?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: It wasn't like captured, it was more like, they made him stay.

VanZandt: Right, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: They were saying, "Why would you leave? This is our country now."

VanZandt: Right.

Tran: Ah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said living to about [19]78 and '79, they realized how hard it was to live under that [Communist] rule.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said his parents had planned on leaving, but somehow the government found out, and so they seized everything they had.

VanZandt: (heavy sigh) Hm.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Well, many people, particularly who were in the South Vietnamese Army, were then sent to reeducation camp. Did his father have any experience with that?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said since his dad was a guard, just like a city guard, they didn't treat that as harshly. They didn't keep him in a camp. He would have to go in the morning, but they would let him go home.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Nguyen: And he did that for three months.

VanZandt: Three months, OK, good.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, so while, while his dad was doing his camps, he couldn't work, so Thieu and his brother would go fishing.

VanZandt: Ah, to make money and food, bring food for the family.

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And they were just—they weren't making profit or anything; it would just be enough to survive.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. By the time he was ordered out to enlist in the Army, there was fighting with the Cambodians.

Tran: You heard that?

VanZandt: *Oh*, yes. *Oh*, yes.

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Uh-huh.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK, and this is—but he avoided joining the Army by—he avoided it, and this was around the time that he was going to leave Vietnam. And he actually left with Ziem(?), who is the executive director here—she's on vacation—but her grandfather. He left with her grandfather.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Wow. So she was from the same village you were from?

Nguyen: Well, she's—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, same, the same village.

VanZandt: Ah. Are there many other people who live here from his village?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese) Vung Tau.

Nguyen: He said, yeah, there are quite a few.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Tran: Um-hm.

Nguyen: In this community.

VanZandt: Yes, and in Biloxi, too.

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese) Avondale.

Nguyen: Oh, he said in Avondale, which is on the West Bank here. There are a lot of people from his community, too. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Vung Tau. (speaking Vietnamese) Vung Tau.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Parish.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) New Orleans, West Bank, Avondale.

VanZandt: So a lot from Vung Tau's villages ended up here—

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: —afterwards.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. And he said so many people from Vung Tau left in 1975, and even the people that remained, after a couple of years they were wanting to leave, too.

VanZandt: Um-hm. Well, Mr. Tran, tell me then about when you decided to leave. You said your parents stayed in Vietnam.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: But helped you prepare to leave. So tell me about that.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: How you left.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's saying that, he had a big family, so they didn't feel like—they felt like if everyone went, it would be a lot easier to be caught because they were a bigger [group]. So they decided since he was coming up to the age to be drafted, it would be better for him to leave and then not join the Army, and so they decided for him and two—(speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: So him and three younger siblings to go with him. I mean, he had other siblings as well, but they decided that their smaller—

VanZandt: How many siblings in your family?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: (laughs) A lot, I can tell.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Eleven kids in the [family].

VanZandt: Oh, my.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, one passed away.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. So eleven children, and five of them are still in Vietnam.

VanZandt: Ah, OK. Were you the oldest?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He was the second oldest.

VanZandt: Second oldest.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. So you left with three—you were the oldest to leave, in charge of three younger siblings.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: How did he feel about that? It was a great responsibility not knowing where he was going.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said he was thinking they needed to come with him because the life in Vietnam was really hard, and if there was any chance to have a better life, then he should take them with him, and let them have that life because in Vietnam his parents, once they find out that his son and the children left, his dad would probably be jailed anyway. And it was worth the risk to take.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He—(speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: All right. He's saying, he's saying that even on the boat when they left, it was very, it was very tough, as well. Several times he felt that the boat could've sank, but it didn't; he didn't at any time, so he felt like it was a miracle. And there were about ninety people on his boat.

VanZandt: And how did you secure this boat? It wasn't his family's boat, it sounds like, if there were ninety people. Did they have to pay the captain? And just a little bit about that, and then about the journey when they took off.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. And he was saying that the boat owner, which is Ziem's grandfather, just came to his family and said, "Today, I mean, I'm going to leave this day. I'm planning on leaving. Do you want to come with me?" And his parents were like, they weren't going to leave because they were afraid of some getting caught. But he said they sent him, so that's how they got a spot.

VanZandt: So this was a friend's boat, so they didn't have to pay.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Unh-uh.

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: What did he take with him? What did he and his siblings take?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Just one, one—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He didn't bring anything, just his one change of clothes and—

VanZandt: *One* change.

Tran: Yeah, one each. (laughs)

Nguyen: And his mom had to give him a gold ring, and that was it.

VanZandt: Do you still have that gold ring?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. No because when he got to the refugee camp, he was so hungry that he actually sold the ring for money to buy food.

VanZandt: Um-hm, sure. Well, if he can just tell me about what that boat trip was like.

Nguyen: OK.

VanZandt: And how long it took to get there.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said after a day they had gotten past the border, Vietnamese ocean border, and into Thailand, but they didn't stay in Thailand.

VanZandt: Right.

Nguyen: They moved on to Malaysia—

VanZandt: Right.

Nguyen: —where they stayed for a couple of days, but they, the Malaysians, told them they had to leave. And so after that they got to Indonesia, and from the time they got to Indonesia it was about ten days.

VanZandt: OK, OK, so a ten-day boat trip. There are stories and incidents about Thai pirates and boats being attacked.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Did they have fear of any of that? Or any experiences like that on the way in that ten days?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: No, he said there wasn't.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. He actually, um—there were some pirates, but the boat, his boat was too fast for it.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. So, so yeah. His boat was too fast for the pirates, and when they got to Malaysia he felt like the Malaysians were kind of not—it wasn't—he didn't feel that safe with them.

VanZandt: Ah.

Nguyen: So all the Vietnamese people in his group, they would sleep in a circle and have the women and children in the inside and stuff like that just to make sure nothing would happen, yeah.

VanZandt: Um-hm, so you were glad to leave Malaysia, sounds like, to get to Indonesia.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: Mr. Tran, what did you eat in that ten days? Was there food and water for the ninety people on the boat?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said they *had* some food on the boat, mostly rice; they just had rice the whole time. They would use the rice to make soups and everything like that, just—

VanZandt: So they had just enough.

Tran: Um-hm. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And so by the time they got to Indonesia, they were fed by the refugee camps.

VanZandt: OK. So did you have a good experience in Indonesia in the camp? If he could just briefly tell about that.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And he said the refugee camps were OK. They had everything that he needed. They had a hospital; they had doctors, and they had food.

VanZandt: You said that you weren't sure where you were going to end up, but then was able to make contact with family who was already here in the U.S. So tell me when you found out that you were coming to the U.S. Did you know you were coming, and did you come to New Orleans first?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. He said actually he had received a letter from his grandparents before he left, and so he knew that there was an address, so he kept that address, and by the time he got to the camp, he was able to write them and also write his parents back home to say that he was safe and in Indonesia.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: Wonderful. Your parents were happy to hear that.

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, and he was prepared by the time he got to, at least, contact the people he needed to contact.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Huh?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He was just saying he remembered a priest, an Italian priest in the camp who was very, who was very helpful.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And he actually spoke Vietnamese very well.

VanZandt: Ah, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Were you Catholic? Was his family Catholic?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: You remember him.

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he said I think—he thinks the priest passed away, but he was very helpful for all the Vietnamese refugees.

VanZandt: How nice.

Tran: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Mr. Tran, the ninety people who were on your boat who landed in Indonesia, was it hard to leave? Obviously they were leaving, I guess, at different times and ending up, didn't all leave together to come here. Was it difficult to say goodbye to them? I would just imagine that would be such a bonding time—

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: —to go through an experience like that with those people.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: And then, did he have a reunion here later, since so many of them ended up here?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He's saying the last time they got to the refugee camps, people were, I think they were, they had their priorities. They had to interview and try to get to different cities *and* countries and everything like that. So I mean, he didn't really say it was hard. But it was like, it's hard to, since like everyone went to different places, it's hard now to contact them because they didn't even—some people went to Italy. Some people went to Canada, and stuff like that. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He's saying there are several people from the boat that lives in Biloxi.

VanZandt: Um-hm.

Tran: Um-hm, got some here.

VanZandt: Any good love stories?! He was nineteen years old. (laughter) Not married. (laughter) Anyone he remembers other than the Italian priest?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said he did leave Vietnam with someone, and she brought like two siblings as well. Actually, she also came to America, but at that point he was saying that there were just too many things to worry about like taking care of the family in Vietnam and stuff like that, where they didn't think of settling down or anything then.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. She has her own family now, too, but sometimes when they go to Vietnam, they visit each other's families.

VanZandt: Aw. So you've been back to Vietnam.

Tran: Yeah. (laughs)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: To Vietnam.

VanZandt: And kept in touch with her, that's wonderful. So you made it to New Orleans. The trip here, did he first arrive at any of the camps? There were several refugee camps.

Nguyen: Oh, actually, he was saying he was actually in—when he first came, he was in Alabama. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's actually, he's—when he arrived in the States, it was 1980. He was in Alabama until 1987 or '88.

VanZandt: Ah, OK. And what did you do in Alabama for that seven years?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He was saying he was going to school, as well as working in a bike-making and chair-construction company.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (chuckles) He said his wage was only like three-something [dollars] an hour.

VanZandt: Oh.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said he did work a lot of hours and got some overtime, and he was making about three hundred dollars a week.

VanZandt: Hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm. So he was working hard because he wanted to provide for his family in Vietnam, still.

VanZandt: Right.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And that company had gone bankrupt, so he moved to New Orleans after that.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. So you first came to Alabama, which is not where your family was, right, because they were in New Orleans, or?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Uh-huh.

Nguyen: Yeah, they were in Alabama.

VanZandt: Ah, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: OK.

Nguyen: Wait, wait. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he said his grandparents, who were in Alabama, but he had I guess his grand uncle—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. His brother, his grandfather's brother was in, his family was in New Orleans.

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He had other family here, too.

VanZandt: And where in Alabama did he live?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Dothan.

VanZandt: Dothan.

Tran: Yeah, Dothan, you know that?

VanZandt: Uh-huh, south.

Tran: Yeah, not too far from Panama City, [Florida].

VanZandt: Right, that's right.

Tran: Yeah, I went Panama City every weekend.

VanZandt: Ah, did you. (laughs)

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: The summer and for, after working, I off on Sunday. That when I go to Panama City, and I take picnic made for the (inaudible); I think too much. That's why I (laughs)—

VanZandt: Yes. Stop thinking, relax. (laughs)

Tran: Yeah, after working, yeah.

VanZandt: OK. And you said you were going to school, too. What kind of schooling was that?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said he was enrolled in high school since his—the papers say he was born in [19]63, so he was, like he was up to tenth grade, but he was saying that he was going to school just to go. It was like his mind wasn't on learning. He was just trying to make money to support the family back in Vietnam.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's saying he would go to school at ten o'clock in the morning, and then at three o'clock he would, after school he would walk to the factory, which was only about a fifteen- to twenty-minute walk away, and then he would work until about eleven o'clock.

VanZandt: Hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he worked for them for about five years.

VanZandt: Oh, long time.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He was saying that if that factory didn't go bankrupt, he might not have moved to New Orleans.

VanZandt: Ah, you liked it there?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: Good work?

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He was saying, if it hadn't gone bankrupt, then he feels like if he was working the same job, he would make about eight hundred dollars, nine hundred dollars, a thousand dollars a week now.

Tran: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Wow.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: Well, I'm—oh, go ahead.

Nguyen: Oh, he was just saying that he would get a bonus every year, so it was a, it was a good company to work for.

VanZandt: Oh, nice. Sounds like it. He was very lucky to find that job. Well, you were fishing in Vietnam, but when you came here, did you think about fishing right when you arrived? You were in Alabama, not too far from the coast. There were some who were in Bayou La Batre, in that area fishing. I'm curious how he decided to get that job, or was it even something he thought about, trying to fish for a living at that time?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's saying that it's true that he was really close to the water, but once he tried to apply for the job on land and like, once he got the job, he saw that it was a nice job, so he didn't—

Tran: Um-hm.

Nguyen: —because it was definitely a lot more secure, because he felt like, fisherman, they have to take a lot of risks because there are a lot of expenses and everything with that, so. And he liked the job that he was doing. But by the time that the factory closed, he had a cousin who was doing shrimping, and he was able to go along with him to see how the shrimp, the profession was in America.

VanZandt: That's great, because I was wondering what kind of fish, what did you fish for in Vietnam and just how that was different from learning to shrimp and fish here. Can you talk a little bit about the differences in the boats and the methods of fishing and what they fished for there?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said one big difference is that in Vietnam whatever you catch you can sell. You can catch anything you want. And here, over in America you have your specific—if you're a shrimper, you can catch and sell shrimp, and—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, and crab. You have to catch that and sell only that specific species.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) In Vietnam, don't matter. (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: No rules and regulations.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. He said since there's very little regulation in Vietnam, anyone can catch anything there. The quantity was a lot lower, over time. People would catch everything. And over here he says there are regulations, [but] I guess there is more to catch over here.

VanZandt: Right, right.

Nguyen: They make sure there is enough to catch every season.

VanZandt: Kind of balances. It wasn't overfished, right.

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Um-hm.

Nguyen: Yeah. He's just repeating that it's just, because of the regulations, it's a lot better because there's going to be fish every season. Um-hm.

VanZandt: So you learned how to shrimp here. That was new for you? Or did he shrimp in Vietnam, too?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. It's different because there's different kinds of nets and everything like that, so he learned over here.

VanZandt: Right. Well, tell me a little bit—that's kind of I guess what I'm curious to know about. How are the nets different? How are the methods of fishing different? What did they use in Vietnam, and what do they use here? If he can talk a little bit about that, and what supplies they needed, just generally.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, like a net?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's saying that the boats in Vietnam, they weren't as strong; they weren't as, I guess, advanced, and so they'd use a, just use a big net that caught everything, and they would take about two boats to drag the net, whereas over here, the boat would be powerful enough to drag a net by itself, and when they caught something, they would have to throw other things back that they're not supposed to sell, and so.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He said that a crew over there would be bigger because they would have to have like two boats. But over here—it would be like eight people over there, and over here it would be like just four people.

VanZandt: Um-hm. Harder labor there, so more manpower. And here more engine power, it sounds like.

Nguyen: Um-hm. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: And then, I'm trying to visualize. The nets in Vietnam, were they pushed ahead of the boat, or were they dragged behind, and how was that different from how they trawl?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said in the front.

VanZandt: OK, right. In Vietnam.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK, well, actually he said they put the net in the front, but like, it would still be dragging.

VanZandt: Right.

Nguyen: They were still dragging the net.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: You had a trawl?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Butterfly, you know, butterfly?

VanZandt: Yes, yes, yes.

Tran: Yeah. In my country, look like different.

VanZandt: Right.

Tran: Yeah. In America, butterfly they have for beside the boat.

VanZandt: On each side of the boat.

Tran: Yeah, on each side of the boat. In Vietnam, they have more in front.

VanZandt: Out in front, yes.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: Yes, OK, thank you. I see, OK.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: And did you repair your own nets in Vietnam and here, too? Do you have to repair your nets?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Oh. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: OK.

Nguyen: Yeah, he repairs.

VanZandt: (chuckles) He can do that well. Well, Mr. Tran, when you moved here from Alabama and starting shrimping, tell me, what was your occupation on the boat? Did you have your own boat? Were you a deckhand? Just tell me about that.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. He said actually he was able to get his own boat before from—just save money and borrowing money from family.

VanZandt: So you had your own boat?

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: What year did you get your own boat? Do you remember?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) [Nineteen]-ninety or [19]91.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm. He said, and then like in 1994, he actually sold the boat and was thinking about getting a bigger one, but he was saying that at that point there was fears of overfishing, so he didn't go ahead with buying the bigger boat. He just became a captain for other boats.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Longline?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Longline fishing. Tuna, (inaudible) tuna.

Nguyen: And so then he transitioned to being a longline fisherman, catching tuna.

VanZandt: OK, that's interesting. And how was that different from shrimping? Did he like that better? What was that like?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said he liked fishing a lot better because for shrimp there are certain seasons, and during the seasons you would push yourself really hard and you wouldn't be able to save too much because you had to constantly be on the water like twenty-four/seven, pretty much. Whereas—

VanZandt: Hm, to make up for the times you couldn't go.

Nguyen: Um-hm. Whereas for tuna, for fishing, you can go year-round, and so it's more comfortable for him.

VanZandt: Um-hm. And you said longline fishing—for people who don't know what longline fishing is—is that what he said, longline, catching the tuna?

Nguyen: The longline fishing?

VanZandt: If he could tell what that means.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Uh-huh.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, it's kind of like, um—(speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

Tran: Yeah.

Nguyen: And I think, I don't know if what I'm getting is right, but they would release about a thousand, one thousand lines—(speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Oh, about nine hundred to a thousand hook.

Nguyen: Hooks.

VanZandt: Hooks.

Tran: The hook, yeah.

VanZandt: *Oh.*

Tran: Yeah, the line, they go about thirty-five mile, the lines.

VanZandt: *Oh,* so that many hooks are set out.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: So that many hooks are set out for that many miles.

Tran: Yeah. Uh-huh, about, run about a thirty-five mile, over thirty-five mile.

VanZandt: Thirty-five miles.

Tran: Yeah, for the one day, for one trip. But when we put the gear, when we put the gear down, you go about three hour and four, and in half hour we finish.

VanZandt: OK, three-and-a-half, four hours.

Tran: Yeah.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Um-hm. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Yeah!

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) You heard about what they say for, they say a longline, but for the different, there's so many longline. The longline, what we do for the longline, they change for the (inaudible) longline.

VanZandt: OK, so there are different kinds of longlines.

Tran: Yeah, there different kind longline, yeah.

VanZandt: Right.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: I'm just trying to picture that many hooks out in the water. So about how many tuna would you say you would catch at a time, and how do you bring that in with that kind of catch?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Um-hm.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Right. It depends on the, just the day, I guess—

VanZandt: Sure.

Nguyen: —but sometimes they would get twenty or thirty, and sometimes they would get none.

VanZandt: Sure.

Nguyen: It just depends.

VanZandt: On average, sure, OK, so maybe twenty to thirty.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: And what size tuna? Of course that varies, but what's a good-size tuna? What are you hoping to catch?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: It's usually from sixty to seventy pounds to a hundred pounds.

VanZandt: OK. And are there, obviously, years that have been better than others? And what were some really good years? And how has it been, let's say, leading up to before the [BP Deepwater Horizon oil] spill? Because he talked about overfishing around in the [19]90s; if he can kind of talk about from that period on.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK. He said it's just steadily declining since [19]97 or '98.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK. Yeah, he said it's steadily declining since [19]97, '98.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said in [19]97, '98, he did pretty well, but ever since then, it's definitely gotten lower and lower every year. And last year, before the oil spill, it was especially bad.

VanZandt: Um-hm. And why does he think that is? And when he says "bad," does that mean catching less, [or] they're smaller?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's catching less. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he's thinking maybe like change in the climate or something, like changes in the water.

VanZandt: Um-hm, changes in the water, and so there are just fewer and fewer to catch.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he said—(speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said, well, another factor is the N-O-A-A [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration]. NOAA came out with some more regulations saying they had to change their hooks, and so that led to lower, to fewer amounts.

VanZandt: That were being caught.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: How were the hooks changed, and why did they change them?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, the hook used to be like a “J”, like a regular hook you would see, you would imagine.

VanZandt: Right.

Nguyen: But then they would, then made them change to a hook that was more circular, more round, and that was to prevent, to help protect turtles, yeah, in the area, so. But that led to smaller catch.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: OK, so that’s another factor, not just decreasing the quantity that’s available, but also that they can’t catch as many with that kind of hook.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, OK. Well, let’s get to the oil spill. And so we’re about, a little over one year ago the oil spill happened out in the Gulf. Tell me about from that point on, April 20, 2010, what happened. How did the spill impact you, and his livelihood?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Uh-huh. He was saying the oil spill interrupted his way of life, his livelihood pretty much. And he was saying that the claims process so far hasn’t been very helpful, (coughs) and a lot of people are kind of hesitant to go out because they’re not sure they can catch them, and also they’re afraid that it would negatively affect their claim.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He was just saying the same thing. A lot of people, captains are afraid that they’re taking the risk to go out there, but then it would mess up their calculations with the claims process.

VanZandt: OK. Tell me about, just walk us through—for people who don’t know—a day of going out and spending that time. What kind of supplies he needs and what kind of finances he has to—how much does it cost to take a—

Nguyen: I think he meant three or four hours from the time he dropped the line.

VanZandt: Dragging it.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He was just—the trips, they take like about two weeks, at least.

VanZandt: Well, that's what I thought.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, OK, thank you.

Nguyen: But, um, he's—

VanZandt: So when he's out for that two to three weeks, that's a long time. There are a lot of supplies to take, fuel. If he can talk about what all he needs.

Nguyen: OK.

VanZandt: What kind of supplies, and then how much it costs.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He says with gas, food, bait and other supplies, each trip costs, pretty sure it would be over ten thousand [dollars].

Tran: Yeah, ten thousand.

VanZandt: For each trip, two to three weeks long.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK, he said—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, three hours is how long it takes just for them to lay their lines down.

VanZandt: Yes, I got that.

Nguyen: And so like after that they would wait about six hours, and they would pick it up.

VanZandt: OK, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, and he's thinking it might be even more now because fuel prices are so high, so it might even cost him about fifteen thousand [dollars].

VanZandt: Yes, they're going up every day. (chuckles)

Tran: Yeah. (laughs)

VanZandt: And I'm curious. As a captain, obviously he's not the owner of the boat. He's the captain, and there's crew, so how does he share that expense? Does the owner pay some of that? Does the captain? How does that work?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) He said the boat owner actually is the one that pays for the supplies.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, so the boat owner is the one who takes care of the costs, and when he comes in and sells the fish, the boat owner decides what percentage he will get.

VanZandt: OK, right. So depending on the catch that comes in, how well they've done, then he works out, the owner works out how much—

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: —the proportion that will go to who.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And how many generally are on your crew?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Five, including himself.

VanZandt: OK, five total, deckhands and—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. And he said ever since the oil spill, any time he's gone out, it's either he's losing money, or he's just barely breaking even.

VanZandt: Right, because he may go out and spend two to three weeks, and if he doesn't catch much, come back and then obviously not make much. Has it occurred—and I'm curious how many times over this past year *since* the spill he's been able to go out. When he brings catch back, who does he sell to? Who buys that, and is there a risk of not being able to sell it once you get to the dock?

Nguyen: OK. (speaking Vietnamese) It's like after the spill?

VanZandt: Yeah. Like normally, who would he sell to, what's the normal [procedure]? And then after the spill, how has that changed?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said he usually sells to a dock in Houma, [Louisiana], and he says even after the spill, the dock would buy anything. They're not going to turn the fish away.

VanZandt: OK, so they *will* buy.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: They have been buying, OK. That's good. (chuckles)

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. Well actually, he said after the spill he didn't go on trips to sell to the docks. He did it for research for certain agencies.

VanZandt: Right, OK. And so tell me about that, Mr. Tran. I wondered if he was a part of the Vessels of Opportunity [VOO] program. And so since the spill, how did that come about? How was he chosen to do that work for NOAA?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah. He says, yeah, he was doing oil cleanup for about two months.

VanZandt: Immediately afterwards?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Ah, cleanup?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he said right after it.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Was he laying boom, or what was he doing specifically?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah. He was doing that, laying boom.

VanZandt: OK. Did they pay you well? Was that a good job to have then?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And was there any danger of the fumes or dispersants or toxins? Did he worry about that at all?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's saying that his crew was closer to the coast than a lot of other crews that were near the oil spill itself, and so he was just laying boom by the Coast. And if there was oil that was close to them, they were providing a lot of safety equipment and just—

VanZandt: Masks?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And so he didn't feel any really, fearful or any effects or anything like that. And then like after that was done, his owner got in touch with NOAA, N-O-A-A, and so he's been doing work with them ever since.

VanZandt: Right. Tell me what you're doing for NOAA.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK, (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's going out to catch fish for N-O-A-A to do research. I mean, every single fish he catches is going to them.

VanZandt: Ah, OK. And you're doing that now, still?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said he isn't going, like, currently because he's waiting on word for them to go out again. But he's—(speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, he's just waiting for them to tell him when to go out again.

VanZandt: OK. So how does that work? Do they just call you and say, "This area is where we want you to go"? And what is he catching? So obviously it's not just shrimp, or it's not tuna. What kind of fish is he catching?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, and then he says they'll just give him a call and tell him, "Go here, go here, go here," and catch something specific.

VanZandt: OK. So they tell you what to catch each time.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: And what different things are you catching?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Well, actually he said they don't tell him to catch a specific one. They just say like, what he catches, give it to us.

VanZandt: OK. So what are you catching, mostly?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Tuna, oilfish, wahoo, mahi, blackfin.

VanZandt: *Oh.*

Tran: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He's just saying all kinds of fish. Anything that can be eaten and sold in the market; he's catching them and giving it to them.

VanZandt: For people who don't know what kind of fish, though, can be caught on the Gulf Coast, so I think I understood him to say mahi, blackfin tuna—can you tell some of the—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: Mahi, the blackfin, the tuna, the oilfish.

Nguyen: Oilfish (speaking Vietnamese)?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (Inaudible) oilfish?

Tran: (Inaudible) oilfish.

VanZandt: Oilfish?

Nguyen: Yeah. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Ah! (chuckles)

Tran: Um-hm.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said there's a different name for it, but he doesn't know it.

VanZandt: Right.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: But not, not anything to do with the oil.

Tran: Um-hm.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: Wahoo.

Nguyen: Wahoo.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) Gulf of Mexico. (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese) Everything.

Nguyen: You know, everything.

VanZandt: (laughs) Everything, OK. And everything you catch is going to them. You're not keeping any?

Tran: That's right.

VanZandt: OK, OK. What do you see out there, Mr. Tran? Have you seen any effects of the oil on the fish that you catch? Smells?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: No, he said he doesn't really see any—

VanZandt: OK.

Nguyen: —any effects of it.

VanZandt: OK, that's good. And do you, I guess, do you hear anything back from NOAA about what you've caught? They don't give him any data, I guess.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: No.

VanZandt: Yeah, so that's just it. Sell it and—

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Do you mind—I have a map here. Can you show me where you fish, where you're going now? I don't know if this—(chuckles)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Can you show me where? I don't know if this would be better. This is the zone, this map shows the zone one, two, three. And this has more—

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Oh, OK.

VanZandt: OK.

Nguyen: He's saying places off the map, maybe.

VanZandt: Off this map, right, so out—how many miles out?

Tran: A hundred miles over.

VanZandt: A hundred miles.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, that's why—(laughs)

Tran: Yeah, about seventy miles or two hundred miles, say, over a hundred miles.

VanZandt: OK, but then you come back to Houma, is where you bring your catch?

Tran: No. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said when he fished to sell, it would be in Houma, but for NOAA it's—

VanZandt: OK.

Nguyen: —another dock.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: It's in Pascagoula.

Nguyen: Patcha—

VanZandt: Ponchatoula?

Tran: No, Pascagoula.

Nguyen: Patchahola, I don't know where that is.

Tran: Mississippi, in Mississippi and close to Mobile.

VanZandt: Oh, Pascagoula!

Tran: Yeah, yeah, Pascagoula.

VanZandt: Oh, you go to Pascagoula, yes. I know they have operations up there. Oh, that's a long way, OK.

Tran: Yeah, that long way.

VanZandt: OK. And how many are helping you do this? How many people on your crew?

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: The same, same—

VanZandt: Same—

Nguyen: —number—

VanZandt: —five.

Nguyen: —of five people.

VanZandt: OK, I see, OK. Well, do you know how long that work will last, any idea?

Tran: I don't know. (laughs)

Nguyen: He doesn't know.

VanZandt: (laughs) You just keep hoping the phone keeps ringing.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. So you've been very lucky to have that work.

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: It sounds like.

Tran: I am, for that.

VanZandt: Yes.

Tran: Then for, a lot of people say I've been very lucky I have this job for the work for them.

VanZandt: Very lucky.

Tran: And they ask me how do I do this, and I say I don't know, my owner, my owner, he—

VanZandt: Recommended you? Maybe they—

Tran: Yeah.

VanZandt: I wondered how they chose you.

Tran: Um-hm. (chuckles)

VanZandt: Very lucky, good. What would you estimate his losses were from the past year not being able to fish?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: He said it's hard to say because the fishing industry, the fishing profession is so up and down from year to year, but he said he makes at least thirty-five [thousand dollars] to forty [thousand dollars] a year.

VanZandt: OK.

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: And he said because he has been working cleanup and for NOAA. He's making enough money for now.

VanZandt: Um-hm. Well, let me ask you Mr. Tran, so many people don't know what the future holds. We don't know what the long-term effects will be to the Gulf. So do you plan to continue after this job is finished with NOAA? Will you go back out and fish for tuna? Will he continue what he did before?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Tran: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: Yeah, and he's saying that—

(Mr. Tran's cell phone rings, and he has to leave; end of interview)