

Tacoma Community History Project
Thanh Huynh Transcript

Thanh Huynh's
Transcript
Interviewed by
Jennifer Nguyen

Thanh Huynh
May 12, 2015
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JN: Okay Di Thanh, could you tell me your full name? Yeah... what's your name?

TH: My name is Thanh Huynh.

JN: and um... When and where were you born?

TH: I born in Vietnam, April 11, 1971

JN: In Nha Trang, Right?

TH: Yeah, Nha Trang

JN: How did your family come to live there?

TH: To Nha Trang?

JN: Yeah

TH: Uh, we, I don't know (giggles) so when I was born, my family was there.

JN. Okay. What do you remember about the Vietnam War?

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TH: I only four years old so I don't remember anything.

JN: You don't remember anything? Um...

TH: Because I was born in 71 and the War ended in 75 so I was only four years old.

JN: What was your religion growing up?

TH: Um... Buddha, Buddhist.

JN: What was school like for you as a child?

TH: I Didn't like it,

JN: In Vietnam

TH: We got hit a lot so...

JN: Tell me about that.

TH: Like, if you don't do homework... Or you do the wrong... Doesn't get the answer right you would get hit.

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JN: Do you know any stories about Ong Ngoi (grandpa) or anything like that?

TH: What do you mean?

JN: Tell stories about what Ong Ngoi told you when you were little

TH: Oh, he um... is a hard worker, his story is that he... after the war in 1975 he go arrested so he go to jail for three years. He had a rough time in there.

JN: Does Di Thanh (aunt Thanh) know about it?

TH: No...

JN: Nothing about it?

TH: I, I, I, Remember one time we went to visit him and we bring food for him and they said, "Oh, no, no, no, you don't have to" because they don't want us to give the... you know food for them because they wanted to let them be hungry.

JN: What did Ong Ngoi (grandpa) look like?

TH: Skinny... um very Sick

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JN: Were you scared?

TH: Yeah

JN: What were you thinking?

TH: Sad

JN: Tell me about when you came to America... during the boats?

TH: We have a rough time... We came... we left at midnight... In the dark of the night

JN: Describe it... tell me... before like when... tell me about when you... like how did you guys know to come to... like... how to leave... right from the beginning... tell me from the beginning.

TH: OH... My mom set up so we, we don't know and my mom say, "we got to go tonight to the beach and then we.... I think your mom know but not me. Your mom knows what we plan to go... and she told me to go to that place, what time and just be there and then we just went there and sat on the sand, and look at the beach. And then around 4:30(PM) a guy came and say, "just go" cause they arranged ahead. I don't know, I didn't know but I think your mom know and my mom. And then we just followed him and go to the small house and it was dark and we just

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stayed in there until midnight another group of people came and they said, “Okay we got to run, we got to escape from the police.” And then we went to a small boat and then they took us to the big boat. And then on the two days on the boat, the boat was broken. No water... Oh we have water, but very little, no food and we stayed on the boat two days, its just on the boat, just water just...

JN: Rocking?

TH: Yeah, it was just rocking and then we thought that we were going to die. Everybody just lay down and cried... and then suddenly we see... we saw another boat and then we escaped.

JN: onto the Holland boat?

TH: To the Holland boat, and that's it... they took us... to the... Oh, we stayed on the Holland boat for two days. They give us food, everything, clothes, money, to send the letter to Vietnam. We stayed on the boat for two days and then they took us to the Singapore and they paid three dollars a day for the Singapore money to take care all of us for two months in Singapore... until we have to wait and to go to America.

JN: What about the Philippines?

TH: Yeah! To go to the Philippines for six months to learn English and learn how to um... how is America's life like. You have to be in real life...

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JN: You have to learn about...?

TH: Learn about... English, and learn to be independent, learn how to take a bus, learn how to... go to work on time, go to school on time... to the American life.

JN: Tell me about what Di Thanh (Aunt Thanh) was thinking when you were on the boats with mom.

TH: I'm Scared.

JN: Tell me... Describe it... Tell me how you were feeling?

TH: I'm just scared... but I, I, I knew that we were going to be freedom... to see my dad to get a better life. But I was so scared; I don't know where are we going and where we would end up. They don't know either they just get onto the boat and just the... looking for a better life.

JN: What about... tell me about the Philippines? When you went there... like how did you get on the... how did you get... what did you do there besides just learning.

TH: Um, I went to school, I went to work like...

JN: What were you working?

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TH: I work at the office assistance, not for pay but they training you to um... to go to America. So they make you work. I work for four hours in the morning and I went to school four hours. And they pay for you everything they pay for food they pay for house. They paid for everything.

JN: That's good, Di Thanh, tell me about when... how you... the process between the Philippines and arriving to America. So did you go on an airplane or?

TH: Yeah. Yeah, we stayed there six months and after six months you have to went for an interview again to get ready to accept to America, because my dad was here... so he have to send all the paperwork to sponsor us to get here. And from Philippines, yeah we went to a plane and went to America but it takes like six-month process.

JN: Other people it would take longer.

TH: Yeah longer... it depends on the situation, like if you had your family here [in America] you would get here quicker.

JN: Tell me about when you first... Did Di Thanh and mom arrive to America together?

TH: Yes.

JN: And it was just Di Thanh and my mom right?

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TH: Yeah

JN: ...and not Ba Ngoi (Grandma)?

TH: No.

JN: Tell me about... when you came to America? Who picked you up?

TH: Um... Oh! That sad, my dad he just... he just got laid off and started working so he can't take a day off to go to... to went to the airport. So, his neighbor, the one that he rent the house, so his friend's son came and pick us up. And we didn't know who was what... and then he said and he came and I say... cause my dad name is... and he knew my dads name and he came and he said, "Are you the daughter of this person" he said the name and we knew. So, yeah it was a little bit awkward but... yeah... cause my dad he can't make it.

JN: And then you came to America and then you got off the plane what was the first thing you did? After they picked you up?

TH: After they picked me up...? Just came to their house and we were a little bit disappointed you know... we thought that you know... when you go to America you don't have to work you

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have money, you have a house. But my dad was staying in the basement and we were staying in the garage. They have in the garage a room they made us a room.

JN: So, after you came to America and you were disappointed about the house, how did you go to school and get a job and everything? What was the process?

TH: I went to school with my bicycle, I have a little bicycle and I walk... I walk a couple days. And the people in the house they help us, they give me a ride when they have a chance. And it was terrifying it was hard. You know? I don't know any English so everywhere I go I would bring a dictionary... a little dictionary. And I went to school people make fun and I went to the English second language and then I started learning. They have all the groups' only Vietnam and Spanish the people they don't know English. But when they enrolled me to eighth grade I have to go to with different other kids so that's when they made fun.

JN: What did they say to you?

TH: They said, "Where you come from? You don't know English how do you go to school?" Yeah, I heard but I don't say it back because I don't know how to say it back. But you know I understand what they were saying.

JN: Was your feeling hurt?

TH: Yeah... It was sad, I get mad but you know you got to do what you got to do.

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JN: So you came here when you were... you got to go to eighth grade when you were here? That was the school? Did people help you enroll you to school or were you automatically enrolled?

TH: No. They helped, I have to take the test and the entire test, on all the tests I did good but I don't know English. So, I have to go into English Second Language but on the math I did very good.

JN: That's good. Of course Asian people [are good at math] (giggles)

TH: Yeah, but for English and writing I had no idea.

JN: Yeah, I bet. And then what happened... how did you get to... so, what school did you go to after in high school or middle school?

TH: I went to South Plainfield I forgot the name... it was... North Plainfield, High school, North Plainfield High School.

JN: For college, What college did you go to?

TH: Fairleigh Dickenson University

JN: Oh, That's in New Jersey right?

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TH: Yeah, New Jersey, after graduate I went to that school.

JN: What did you major in?

TH: I have a couple majors.

JN: Oh, tell me.

TH: First I do in Biology and I didn't do it good, so I took a test to go to pharmacy school and I made it... It was a lot of work of course you know you're in school you know what's going on. But yeah I had to work too and commute, but I stay in the dorm and then during the weekend I have to come home and cook for my dad. I have to cook for the whole week and put it in the refrigerator. Then I go back on Sunday night.

JN: To your school?

TH: To school, and after four years there I went to school for pharmacy tech. so now I got a job, I get married, I got three kids right?

JN: Yeah, how did Di Thanh (Aunt Thanh) end up in Washington?

TH: Oh I went to visit your mom and when I came you did not do good in school.

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JN: REALLY?

TH: Yeah.

JN: That's weird.

TH: and then we went... so I decide, your mom only wanted to stay here, so I decided to stay here and help you guys out. Because your mom doesn't know English so your homework and your paperwork; you guys have to turn in the paperwork to your teacher She doesn't know you know. She doesn't do a lot of work to turn in all the paperwork you need so I decided to come stay with her.

JN: ...so we did badly in school.

TH: No, no, no, not bad you guys did very good but because your mom doesnt know English so you guys didn't go the right direction. Like today, if your homework is supposed to be done but... and other paperwork's too. But after that you guys did very good.

JN: So it was just the matter of turning in homework right?

TH: Yes.

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JN: Okay just making sure, that's it actually, wait actually one more. What accomplishments were you the most proud of?

TH: To do good in school, to get a job and to get over the people making fun and stuff, and say, "I will make it and I will ignore them and I will try to be successful"

JN: I think we're okay for now.

TH: Okay, my voice is so weird.