Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: LY BANH
Interviewer: Viola Van
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Location: Garden Grove, California
Sub-Collection: The Grove Senior Apartments
Length of Interview: 01:16:05

Transcription

VV: My name is Viola Van and today is August 8, 2012. I am going to interview Ly Banh and we are at The Grove in Garden Grove, California. This interview is for the Vietnamese American Oral History Project at UC Irvine. Let’s begin. Okay. What is your name?

LB: My name is Ly Banh.

VV: Where were you born and when is your birthday?

LB: I was born in Vietnam on August 7, 1951

VV: What was your hometown like in Vietnam?

LB: I lived in Tai-on – Ho Chi Minh City

VV: Was it like the city or like how we are living or countryside?

LB: It was the city. Tai –on is considered the city

VV: Then when you were in Vietnam where have you lived or have you lived there your whole life in the same city?

LB: I have only live there and no where else

VV: In Vietnam do you remember what you used to like to do?

LB: I didn’t do anything, I just went to school

VV: So you only went to school?

LB: Yes.

VV: Where did you go to school? Do you remember?
LB: I went to “Mei – Ying”

VV: Mei-Ying?

LB: Yes, it is near the “new market.”

VV: Did you go there from elementary school onwards?

LB: I went to “Yok Sow” in elementary school, later I went to Mei Ying. Mei Ying is high school

VV: When you were little did you have any sister or brothers that you could play with?

LB: Yes. I did

VV: Did you do a lot of afterschool activities or sports?

LB: We did dance

VV: Was that in school?

LB: Yes at school. We only did it once. We sang also. Now I can’t sing!

VV: Where you lived, were there factories for like making electronics, like big factories?

LB: No. there isn’t and I have only worked in Hong Kong at Philips electronic factory that makes electronics in Hong Kong in Kowloon. I haven’t done anything in Vietnam

VV: What was it like where you lived? Is it more urbanized or is it factories?

LB: Our area didn’t have any factories.

VV: You lived in the city?

LB: Yes yes in the city. Factories were in another area.

VV: Did you play with your neighbors?

LB: Yeah we could all leave our doors open. We all knew each other. In Vietnam, we never close our doors, we leave them open!

VV: Oh!
LB: It's not like here where we always have to close our doors, we always left them open.

VV: Then in Vietnam did you play with your neighbors?

LB: Everyone left so I don't know where they went. I could no longer see them.

VV: How about when you were young?

LB: When I was younger, of course I don't remember that now! We would play and that was it! I don't remember now.

VV: When you were little would you play with your neighbors?

LB: Yes of course. We would play at night. During the day we couldn't play.

VV: When you were little did you celebrate Tet or Chinese New Year?

LB: Oh! Chinese New Year we all wore pretty clothing. We went to our relatives to celebrate the New Year! We would walk around and watch the dragon dance!

VV: In Vietnam?

LB: Yes! The new years was really great, we all wore new clothes. Your relatives would give you lucky money and so would your mom.

VV: So it was really fun?

LB: Yes it was and we would go out and eat a lot of special food for new years at home! We would eat more over new years!

VV: Over new years would you guys do anything special?

LB: Yes yes we would make a lot of special food that was really good. We bought seeds and new year candies, make a lot of food, buy flowers, oranges and put them at home. Make our house very pretty.

VV: And you guys would pray?

LB: Yes.

VV: And what about birthdays?

LB: Yes birthdays too but it was more simpler. Mom would make an egg and we would have noodles. She would give that to us for happy birthday. We didn't invite guests when we were little.
VV: No party?

LB: No no party, not like here. We would get an egg to celebrate.

VV: Then when you were small did you do anything else that was special not like birthdays? Anything else?

LB: We don’t do anything else

VV: So only new years and birthdays?

LB: Yes new years and every house. There are lots of holidays in Vietnam. In May, there’s a holiday where we have to buy stuff to put on our door like grass. For lucky. We would take the leaves and put them on our head for luck. Just like that. In August there is a holiday where we pray to the moon. In November there is a holiday where we eat a special soup. We cook them sweet or salty. In February we celebrate our ancestors. There were basically holidays every month! I don’t really remember anymore.

VV: Do you guys ever eat vegetarian?

LB: No we could eat whatever we wanted! Meat, vegetarian, anything! Usually, parents make vegetarian over the New Year.

VV: So anyone eats whatever they want?

LB: Yes if you want it then you can if you don’t you don’t. If my mom made vegetarian, then that’s what we ate, if she didn’t, then we ate whatever she made. I don’t eat fish.

VV: You don’t eat fish?

LB: No I don’t eat fish!

VV: In Vietnam you never worked?

LB: No I didn’t

VV: Only go to school and come home after school?

LB: Yes! Only when I got older after I was done with school I opened my own Chinese medicine store

VV: Wow! Then that means you did work!
LB: No I didn’t, I only did it at home!

VV: Your own store means that you did!

LB: Only when people come did I do anything, I just gave it to them. Whatever they bought, I just handed it to them! If they were sick, I just gave them medicine.

VV: You only did this or did you do something else?

LB: No only our house.

VV: So only sell Chinese medicine?

LB: Yes only sell medicine when I got older.

VV: Then when you were in Vietnam…

LB: I was twenty something when I came out.

VV: Did you go to college?

LB: I only went up to high school, no college. I only went up to high school and that was it

VV: So only up to high school?

LB: When the army came in, we had to leave. I tried to escape several times but couldn’t

VV: Oh.

LB: I tried four times and no success. Failed.

VV: Did you like your school in Vietnam?

LB: It was pretty good, we went to school then went home.

VV: 10:00 Were the teachers good? And what about your friends?

LB: Yes, yes they were good. But I don’t know where they are now. I don’t see them.

VV: You don’t see them?

LB: I went to a lot of schools and didn’t really see much people. I only see one. I only have one friend that lives in America. She always comes to see me.
VV: She comes to visit you?

LB: Only one, I don’t know where the rest went. She used to sit next to me and now she came to America. And she came to find me.

VV: Is that your best friend?

LB: She sat next to me when we were in school. We sat together. Sit down together. She came to America first and I tried to leave a couple times but couldn’t. I went to England and she came to America. She went back to visit Vietnam and she went looking for me and my mom said that I went to England. Then I came here to visit and she didn’t know and I didn’t know so I went back to England and saw a letter.

VV: How did she find you?

LB: She went to Vietnam and found my mom and my mom said I left for England. So my mom gave her my England address. So she sent me a letter to England to find me. So I told her that I just went to America and I told her next time I go to America I will go to her place to stay and she said okay. So I went to America to see her.

VV: So you went to America first?

LB: She went to America first. She was successful the first time and it took me four tries. It took me four tries and she tried once and she was able to leave for America. She didn’t go to England. I went to England.

VV: When you were small do you remember your parents and grandparents?

LB: They all died!

VV: I mean when you were younger, what did you think of them?

LB: Nothing really

VV: What were they like?

LB: They were really strict. When we were young kids like to play so we would go outside to play and when dad came home he would ask “Where did you guys go?!” If you went to play you would be in trouble. When dad came home we were scared because we were scared he would punish us. Mom didn’t but dad did. He was worried because we were young.

VV: Then when you guys were in school would they tell you to work hard?
LB: Of course they did! Asians are like that. My mom didn’t have any education she came from “Tong San” she came from China, she didn’t have a proper education.

VV: How about your father?

LB: Dad did. He died early though. My aunt took care of us.

VV: How about your grandfather?

LB: Grandfather I don’t know he already passed.

VV: So both sides passed early?

LB: Yes, I don’t have anyone here.

VV: When you were young they were not here anymore?

LB: Yeah, they were not there.

VV: Do you know what your last name means?

LB: My last name is Ly. It’s a Vietnamese last name. “L-y not L-e-e”.

VV: Vietnam is L-y, what is your Chinese last name?

LB: Ly.

VV: What about your name?

LB: Banh.

VV: How did your parents come up with that?

LB: I don’t know how they came up with that on my birth certificate. They wrote “Banh” and I don’t know how they got that. Its supposed to be “Ly Peng” but the birth certificate came out “Banh” I don’t know the meaning. It’s a Vietnamese word I don’t know what it means.

VV: Was it the doctors that wrote it for you guys?

LB: No no on your birth certificate they wrote it. But now that you escaped you have to use it.

VV: Are you the oldest or youngest?
LB: I am the oldest. My aunt took care of me.

VV: Oh me too!

LB: My aunt took care of me and my siblings.

VV: How many children are in your family? You are the oldest.

LB: The others were not my real siblings. It was my mom’s. I am the only one.

VV: Do you guys speak Cantonese at home?

LB: No we speak Teochew.

VV: Oh so you spoke Teochew, how do you know how to speak Cantonese?

LB: We went to live in Hong Kong. We lived there a few years so now we know how to speak it.

VV: Oh.

LB: I lived in Hong Kong for a few years and in Vietnam I knew a little, not a lot.

VV: You only spoke Teochew, were there a lot of Teochew people?

LB: Yes yes there was, we spoke Teochew

VV: Do you only know Teochew?

LB: I know Teochew, Cantonese, and Vietnamese, but Vietnamese I am not that great but I could speak.

VV: You know English!

LB: I am not that great at English! That is why I don't pick up phone calls!

VV: So at home you guys speak Teochew?

LB: I tested in English!

VV: Wow that's really great!

LB: I only got one wrong! We had many problems like ten to twenty and I only got one wrong. The problem was that I was nervous.
VV: Then when you were younger did you only speak Teochew, then what happened at school?

LB: At school we spoke Cantonese and mandarin.

VV: How come!

LB: That school was a Chinese school. It was run by a Cantonese person. It was Cantonese and mandarin.

VV: When you were younger you didn’t really speak Vietnamese?

LB: When we went out it was all Vietnamese people so we had to speak! My whole family is not so great at speaking Vietnamese. To me it is almost like the level of my English, which is not a lot.

VV: So you could understand all the Vietnamese?

LB: Sometimes I still don’t know so I have to ask and they explain then you understand. Its like English, I don’t know how you say and they explain to you this and this…

VV: When you were younger do you remember any stories that your mom and dad asked?

LB: No not really but my mom was really great. If you wanted to eat something she would go out and get it for you my mom. She would give you money to go get something to eat. We would go out and buy food. A lot of people sell stuff on the street in Vietnam.

VV: Yeah..

LB: Whatever you wanted to get you could go out and get.

VV: So your mom did not work?

LB: No she only stayed home and cooked

VV: What did your dad do?

LB: My dad died when I was really young so I lived with my aunt. My dad had a business.

VV: So you said your mom didn’t have a proper education and your dad went up to?
LB: My dad I don’t know we never asked.

VV: So do you know how your parents met?

LB: I don’t know. They came from China. My grandma took my mom, my aunt to Vietnam when they were younger.

VV: So they came from China?

LB: They came really early.

VV: They met in China, your parents?

LB: No they met in Vietnam. They came from China to Vietnam.

VV: So they met in Vietnam and married there.

LB: Yes yes.

VV: Do you still see…

LB: My friends? I don’t see them I don’t know where they all went.

VV: Do you see your grandchildren?

LB: My grandchildren are here.

VV: Do you still go visit?

LB: Vietnam? My Vietnam relatives?

VV: Yes

LB: Time to time I still go back.

VV: Do you still have relatives in Hong Kong?

LB: I have a sister in Hong Kong, its my aunt’s daughter. She died already but she still has babies there – three children.

VV: So you go visit them?

LB: She also came from Vietnam and went to Hong Kong. Later she got married and had three kids and she died.

VV: So her kids live in Hong Kong?
LB: She is a Hong Kong citizen.

VV: Do you go once in a while?

LB: Yes every couple years I would go. Her daughter came with her husband to come visit us and we took them to go places

VV: What about England? Do you go visit your grandchildren?

LB: Yes and she’s already here. She goes to school in Fullerton. She just came, before she would come to visit.

VV: What about your husband?

LB: My husband is upstairs.

VV: Oh!

LB: He doesn’t like to talk, don’t ask him.

VV: What is he like?

LB: He came from Vietnam and he’s Fukien.

VV: How did you guys meet?

LB: He’s here!

VV: No I mean did you guys meet in Vietnam?

LB: Yes I knew him in Vietnam

VV: Were you guys young?

LB: Yes. He went his way and I went my way. I went to England and he went to America.

VV: Did you guys already marry?

LB: Yes we already married.

VV: Where did you guys meet?

LB: We got married in America
VV: Not in Vietnam?

LB: No America.

VV: Was he your classmate?

LB: What is classmate?

VV: Someone you went to school with

LB: Oh no no we came out already. I was in England and he was in America.

VV: He was already your friend?

LB: No I went to visit him in America

VV: You guys dated?

LB: No his mom was still here so I came to America to see him. I came from England.

VV: Then was he your neighbor?

LB: No he wasn't we were so far! He was in America and I was in England!

VV: Then how did you know him in Vietnam?

LB: We knew each other in Vietnam. He lived a couple streets down from me.

VV: Did you guys play together?

LB: No we didn’t play together, we sometimes went to his house to hang out and see his mom

VV: So it wasn’t until you guys came here did you marry

LB: Yes yes

VV: So you guys only have one child?

LB: Yes one son

VV: Did you ever tell your son about when you were young?

LB: No very little.
VV: About you escaping?

LB: Oh about coming here? No I sent my son first. I tried three times and didn’t make it so I was afraid I wouldn’t have any more money. So I had someone take my son to leave first. So when I knew my son arrived, I tried again.

VV: So you had to use gold?

LB: Yes gold for each person

VV: When you gave up your baby, what about you and your husband?

LB: I had someone take him first

VV: So you and your husband were still in Vietnam?

LB: No my husband left already, he went his way and I went mine. We weren’t married yet. He went to America first

VV: How come you didn’t go with him?

LB: During that time we weren’t married, we knew each other but we weren’t married yet. My son was able to successfully escape so I left after four days. He arrived in Thailand and I waited for a boat. He was really young. He arrived so I kept looking for a boat for myself. He sent me a letter back to Vietnam to let me know he arrived.

VV: When you sent him out…

LB: I looked for a boat, I looked at four everyday. And then I took one. I went to a refugee camp in Hong Kong.

VV: What about him?

LB: He was in Thailand, and after he went to Hong Kong to see me. He took an airplane to see me. He was young.

VV: Did you both live in Hong Kong?

LB: No no I was in a refugee camp in Hong Kong

VV: How come you couldn’t come out with him?

LB: No the papers haven’t allowed me. I was doing paperwork to try and go to America.
VV: Was his paperwork all done?

LB: No he could. He was in Thailand and he went to Hong Kong to see me and after he saw me he went to America because America accepted him. I was supposed to be able to be with him when I applied but I waited four years in Hong Kong and America still didn’t accept me so England and Hong Kong had correlations so they let families go with $1500. So I thought since America is taking so long then I might as well. My son was already in America. So I went to England. I said I had a son in America already. I asked around and people said England was good. So I went and applied and they allowed me to go.

VV: So they let you go to England. And America didn’t accept you?

LB: America didn’t accept me so I went to England. I wrote a letter this week and the next week they accepted me. It was really quick. They wanted people. A lot of people went to Hong Kong. A lot of people liked going to America and Australia. They didn’t want to go to England. I even waited for so long in Hong Kong. I went to England in September. It was so cold. The wind blew in the airport and it was so cold.

VV: So it was just you?

LB: Me? It was me and my two daughters. They asked us that when we got to England the airport ladies told us that we have to go to school because we didn’t know English. I only knew a little bit of English from high school. I just said yeah yeah yeah. It was really funny. When we got to England, they were really good to us. They had church volunteers take us to the government place to get money. Because we were refugees. It was to help us for food and stuff.

VV: Who did you live with?

LB: I lived with my two kids. They gave us housing and I didn’t know. The house was so beautiful. The person that took us to get money was English so the person asked if I had money and I thought I knew what I was saying so I said yeah yeah. The person told me no no no and I was saying yeah yeah yeah. The white lady kept saying no no no because we were going to go get money. I didn’t know English. She asked me if I had money and I didn’t understand. They said that tomorrow they will send a book to get money. To get benefits, it was like a checkbook.

VV: So when you were in Vietnam you took the 2 daughters to come with you and your son had already came to America?

LB: Yeah my two daughters and my son already came. He came a long time ago. When I was in Hong Kong, they were in America already.
VV: Is your son around the same age as your daughters?

LB: They are all around the same age, my son is older by a little. I had one daughter that could walk and the other I still had to carry. In Vietnam I didn't have to watch her but when we left I had to carry her and take them with me.

VV: So your son already left?

LB: Yes he left. He went to Thailand. He got to Thailand really quick – about half a day. It took us about 40 days to get to Hong Kong.

VV: So your husband already left?

LB: My husband already left, he went to America.

VV: Do you do any prayers?

LB: Yes I pray to Buddha. We have a display at home.

VV: Do you celebrate new years with your son and husband?

LB: Yes of course we do! We go and eat! If we don't cook at home then we go out to eat.

VV: Do you cook?

LB: Sometimes yes and sometimes no. We need to pray to the sky, we pray time to time.

VV: Do you cook anything special or listen to any type of music in particular?

LB: Everyday we cook two types of soup and two types of dishes – one meat and one vegetable or a fish, but I don't eat fish. Sometimes we have shrimp or meat, chicken, and a vegetable, soup.

VV: Do you have any special songs that you like to listen to?

LB: Whatever is good, mandarin, English is okay, mandarin you could still kind of understand what they are saying, but English is different.

VV: Do you think America and Vietnam are different from when you were younger like the traditions?

LB: Of course here for the new year, you must keep everything very clean. You can't throw your trash.
VV: Are the festivities as big as they were in Vietnam?

LB: No not so big. In Vietnam your whole family is there so everyone can come over and celebrate together. Here is the same, all the families get together to celebrate and welcome the new year together.

VV: What do you think of America?

LB: Here everyone lives separately. In Vietnam, families live together. Everything is separate here. People buy their own houses and live on their own. There are some things that are different. In Vietnam everyone would live together whether you have food on the table or not. Everyone would be in the same house and eat together.

VV: Do you think its very different from when you were in Vietnam?

LB: It is different. Here there really isn’t much family relations. In Vietnam, families were very close with each other. Here you see cousins and they sometimes don’t even really help each other. Families only help within families and sometimes here people don’t do that. In Vietnam it is different because when you live in the same house, everyone goes to work together and your business is together. Its kind of different.

VV: Do you still pray to Buddha?

LB: Yes.

VV: Have you been doing it since you were young?

LB: It was not super strict, if you pray you pray if not, then you don’t. Some people prefer to do it on bigger holidays and time to time we go to the temple.

VV: Do you pray and still go to temple in America?

LB: Yes yes, sometimes we go to the Taiwanese temple and sometimes our friends tell us to go with them so we go.

VV: Do you have any special recipes handed down to you from your mom?

LB: When I was in Vietnam I didn’t know how to cook. There were people who could cook for us. They would prepare our food and we would pay them. I didn’t know how to cook.

VV: Was it when you went to England or America did you learn how to cook?
LB: We thought we could go out to eat like we did in Vietnam but in England but what did we know when we got to England they only sold fries and fried fish. I don’t eat fish so I hurried and wrote a letter to Hong Kong to send me a rice cooker. I didn’t know how to cook rice but I had to learn.

VV: So it was in England…

LB: Yes in England I wrote a letter to Hong Kong and at first I didn’t even want to buy one but when we went out there was nothing to eat but fries and fried fish and we couldn’t eat that everyday. I can’t eat fish. There was only fries, fried fish, and sausages. It was only that there was much variety. So I had to buy a rice cooker. There were restaurants but you had to go out to London. At that time I lived in Barford. The view was beautiful and there were Chinese food but there wasn’t a lot.

VV: Was there a lot of Asians that lived there?

LB: Yes near Chinatown. It was called Chinese…

VV: Chinatown!

LB: Yeah Chinatown so I bought a rice cooker and cooked whatever.

VV: You had to learn on your own?

LB: So I tried my best to cook whatever I could. The place we lived had upstairs and downstairs and a garden in the front. It was beautiful so kids could play outside. I didn’t know that I had to clean the rice when you cooked it so there was a nail inside and I didn’t know. Good thing I found it when I ate. It was inside the rice.

VV: Were you scared?

LB: Good thing I didn’t eat it, if I did it would ruin my teeth. I said to myself why is there a nail so I took it out.

VV: Do you clean your rice very thoroughly now?

LB: I do, but not too clean because you rub all the nutrients out of it. There’s no vitamin ABC

VV: But there are dirty things inside of it…

LB: If you just wash it a couple times its okay.

VV: The nutrients will all be washed away…
LB: Vitamin A B C…

VV: Have you learned anything special that you like to cook?

LB: My husband knows how to cook he used to run a restaurant. He knows how to cook. He cooks better.

VV: Did he teach you?

LB: No, when he used to have a restaurant I would watch and learn

VV: Do you have any special pictures that you love?

LB: Photos I don’t have that many after I left. The government took your stuff after you leave.

VV: You didn’t bring much?

LB: I only brought a small suitcase with noodles and stuff to eat for the boat. It got lost on the big boat. Someone stole it. We had three little suitcases. I got seasick on the boat.

VV: So the three of you had a small suitcase?

LB: Yeah just a small one. My two daughters were too young so I had to hold everything. People stole it on the boat, I had nothing.

VV: Did you have any money in there?

LB: Some but good thing I had some on me

VV: Do people steal or take it from you?

LB: They take all your money. So you have to hide it. They take your shoes even because they know you’ll hide it in there. If you could hide it well then its yours if not, its theirs. It gets taken away.

VV: So you don’t have any photos?

LB: No I don’t have any photos. I have photos from when I left but none from before.

VV: The ones from Vietnam you don’t have anymore?

LB: Those of course not!
VV: Those photos you don’t have anymore?

LB: No everything was taken back by the government because you left.

VV: When Vietnam was in war what happened to you and your family?

LB: We didn’t live in the country side so that’s where they usually had battles. We lived in the city. We lived in Ho Chi Minh City and they only came in a couple times. I think it was 1966 or 1967 they fought really badly and for an entire day.

VV: You heard everything?

LB: Of course. We had to lay on the ground because there were soldiers going everywhere. It was the south and north.

VV: Were you still living with your mom?

LB: Everyone was living separately.

VV: Did you all live together?

LB: No we didn’t live together. At the time we had a business so we lived separately.

VV: Did you have your children?

LB: I didn’t have them yet. It was really bad. A lot of people died on the street. We went outside and saw a lot dead. We got scared. They would search our house. They would tell us to go out to search our house. If they told us to go out then we had to go out and we would show them our paperwork. If everything was cleared then we can go back into our home, if not, then we get pulled to jail.

VV: Would your neighbors and family be scared?

LB: When they were fighting?

VV: Would you know when they were coming? Would you be scared?

LB: Of course you would be scared, you never know until you hear the loud noises and the gunshots. When we heard it we would close the door and lay on the floor.

VV: So you were scared?
LB: Yes we would be scared and we would lay on the ground. A lot of stores would be burned down.

VV: Who’s would burn down?

LB: My husband’s store got burned down. It was on a popular street and it was burned down. A lot of stores burned down. There was so much trash, a week couldn’t have cleaned it up.

VV: What did he sell?

LB: He sold bikes. There was a lot of trash. Everything was burned.

VV: When the war started did you have a job? Did you have your Chinese medicine store?

LB: No during the war I didn’t have the medicine store. They mostly attacked the countryside. It was very far from us. A lot of people died.

VV: Did you have anyone in the war in your family?

LB: Yes my aunt’s sons went and some died along the way in the war. Eighteen years old they have to go.

VV: What do you remember most about the war? Was there enough food?

LB: Where we lived in Ho Chi Minh City there was a lot of food so we didn’t have to worry. They didn’t come into the city that much to have war, there were lots of stores that burned down.

VV: They would burn houses?

LB: Of course when you fight there were bullets everywhere.

VV: Have they ever gone to your house?

LB: We would just close the door.

VV: Do they come to your door?

LB: At my husbands they did. They come in with guns and tell you to go outside. They mess up your house.

VV: They come into your house?

LB: No they went to my husband’s
VV: Would you be scared?

LB: Yes we would hide.

VV: Did you and your husband go to camps?

LB: My husband went to refugee camp in Malaysia. My husband said the conditions were not good in Malaysia. I went to Hong Kong.

VV: Did you or your family get hurt during the war?

LB: No we didn’t. A lot of stuff burned down.

VV: Do you remember what happened when the war was almost over?

LB: 1975 is when they came in. Americans were in Vietnam and they all went back.

VV: How old were you then?

LB: During that time I was about 20 something.

VV: Did you already have your babies by then?

LB: When they came in, yes.

VV: Would you be scared?

LB: A lot of people told us to go when they came in but I didn’t. A lot of people would take airplanes. So if we knew people that worked in airport, they would tell us to go and just leave everything. We decided not to. We figured we would just do what they said.

VV: Did you think it would be alright?

LB: Yeah, we didn’t know anything and never experienced this so we figured we could just work and just stay. A lot of people came to Saigon. A lot of people got scared and left. We just kept watching. We cooked a lot of porridge.

VV: When they came in there wasn’t much to eat then?

LB: No we listen to the radio and listen to what is happening. We heard them take over the presidents place. We just thought if they want to be king then so be it. We were hungry because we ate so much porridge. We got hungry a lot. We saw a lot of people run.
VV: Did you guys have a lot to eat?

LB: There were a lot of vendors outside. People still buy stuff. They only gave us a little bit of money. We all have so much family and they only gave about 200$ a family no matter how big the family is. After several occasions was when we decided to leave.

VV: Was that day April 30, 1975?

LB: Yes I think it was April or May 1975

VV: It was April 30, 1975

LB: Yes that night. On the 30th we still could have left but we didn't. A lot of people still took boats.

VV: Did you want to leave?

LB: I was crazy and didn’t leave.

VV: What about your kids?

LB: What did the kids know? If the adults said to leave then they leave. We didn't know so we thought if we could work and have food on our tables then we should be okay.

VV: What about your husband?

LB: They took his store, and you would have to move to the countryside. We weren’t married yet. They slowly left. He went to America earlier than I did.

VV: When the war was over, how did you re-establish your life?

LB: That day when they came it was not so bad. They only took over and it wasn’t so bad. We only worried about working and having food on our table. They took all the soldiers. My husband left for the countryside and lived there for a while. They did tell me to go do volunteer work. I did some work at the parks. We walked a lot of miles and dug. We worked two weeks.

VV: Why did you decide to let your son go first?

LB: I was afraid I wouldn’t have enough money and I tried three times before already. I was able to get a spot on a boat.

VV: Who did you come with?
LB: I came with my two daughters. We wanted to depart with my whole family but we couldn’t because they would arrest you.

VV: Did your family all go together?

LB: We tried to go altogether but got caught so that’s why we decided to go separately.

VV: How old was he?

LB: He was about 7 or 8 years old. He was lucky because he got to Thailand quick.

VV: Were you scared?

LB: A lot of people died on the boat. There was not much to eat. Whatever you brought. I lost everything that I brought because someone stole it.

VV: How long were you on the boat?

LB: We were on the boat for 40 days. The restroom broke on the first day so we had to get on land because the water went up really high.

VV: What kind of people were on there?

LB: There were different kinds. We had to wait a long time. We waited one week. A volunteer ship rescued us and even cooked us food on their ship. The ship was really big but I got sea sick.

VV: When you arrived in Hong Kong how long did you stay in the camp?

LB: I was 9 months in the boat. I had to wait in the boat, then when the engine broke was when we were allowed to go onto shore in the Chimawan Refugee Camp. Women lived with women, men lived with men. We filed our papers there.

VV: It was the first camp?

LB: We had an ID. We could go out once a week to Hong Kong. We could also have a job.

VV: So you went to work in Philips?

LB: Yes at the electronics factory Philips.

VV: When you worked, what happened to your children?
LB: I let the lady in the bed next to me watch them. I worked and didn’t collect my work pay. The lady next to me didn’t say anything.

VV: Did they trick you?

LB: They didn’t tell me! Government gave us money for food. I didn’t know and my kids were so small they didn’t understand. So next door didn’t tell me.

(Interruption)

VV: Did you ever get the money?

LB: I didn’t get the money. I earned $34 a day! I worked everyday and $1 can get you a big plate of rice and condiments and soup. We ate 3 times. I didn’t know we would get paid.

VV: How did you eat?

LB: I just took my kids out to eat.

VV: Then how did you get money to eat?

LB: I worked at Philips! They gave me $34 a day.

VV: After the first camp why did you go to the second one?

LB: I worked and they have money. They didn’t tell me the lady next door. She wasn’t that great of a person. A good person would have let me know.

VV: After you left for Hong Kong did you want to go back to Vietnam?

LB: No I didn’t. I was happy. To visit would be okay.

VV: When you escaped to the camps, you didn’t want to go back to Vietnam?

LB: Of course not! I couldn’t go anywhere anyway. I didn’t have a passport or anything yet.

VV: At the second camp, when were you able to get your re-location to England?

LB: I waited for four years! I worked at Philips.

VV: What would your kids do?
LB: I left them with the lady next to me and gave her 10$ per kid. She didn’t work. Her husband did.

VV: When were you able to get England? Were you happy?

LB: It was easy to get there, the next week they allowed us. We waited about a week.

VV: Did your friends go?

LB: Some did, some didn’t want to. Some went to Australia, Canada. That day I got to England, there were only a couple families that went to England. Some went to different parts. They would tell us which cities.

VV: How would you know which one you wanted to go to?

LB: They would tell us and you would go to whichever one. I didn’t know anything so I got re-located to Barford. I was so happy. We first went to the camp.

VV: What was the camp called?

LB: I don’t remember, maybe Surrey? I don’t know. I had to wait a couple months. They prepared a house for us and around Christmas time we were able to move in. It was beautiful. There was everything inside. It was so clean and carpeted. We had received a lot of stuff.

VV: Did they all speak English?

LB: Yes they spoke English not Vietnamese. But they had some people to translate. The person that took me to get money was English.

VV: How long were you in England?

LB: I was there for 10 years. After 10 years was when my son was able to sponsor me.

VV: Who did your son live with?

LB: He lived with my friend that helped bring him out for me. He later got a job and was able to sponsor me. I went to holidays to visit him. I went back everywhere. I went back to Hong Kong, and Vietnam too.

VV: When you came to America, how was it?

LB: It was through family union.
VV: When did you get here?
LB: I got to America in 1990.
VV: Did you want to come live with your son in America?
LB: I thought it would be nice. I visit 2 times a year anyway.
VV: How about your daughters?
LB: They all came with their families.
VV: So where are your daughters?
LB: They came to America and didn’t like it so they went back to England. They all came to visit.
VV: Did you like America when you first came?
LB: I was so bored at home!
VV: Did you know how to speak English?
LB: I don’t remember much but I did take classes.
VV: Where did you first live?
LB: I lived with my son.
VV: After you lived with your son you came here (The Grove)?
LB: Yes
VV: How about your husband?
LB: I lived with my son and now I live with my husband here.
VV: Do you like America?
LB: My son says if you don’t like it then why do you choose to come
VV: Do you find a big difference from America and England?
LB: Its cold there and hot here in America. English people are more nice. Americans could be more fierce. One time I went to Disneyland and I didn’t know because the lines were so long so I walked first and someone yelled at me.
VV: You didn’t work here?

LB: No didn’t work.

VV: Do you see yourself as Chinese, Vietnamese or?

LB: I see myself as an American. I am a citizen now. I can’t say what I am but American because I am a citizen now.

VV: Do you still have relatives in Vietnam do you talk to them?

LB: I go time to time.

VV: Do you miss Vietnam?

LB: No, not really. Our families are here now.

VV: Have you been to Little Saigon here?

LB: Yes many times to buy groceries!!!

VV: Do you think its like a little Vietnam?

LB: Usually its pretty quiet only on the weekend. Everyone works.

(interruptions)

VV: Do you think children nowadays should remember the struggles your generation has experienced?

LB: My son knows and he’s lucky. A lot of people are able to have family unions.

VV: I know a lot of boat people struggle to get here.

LB: Yes it was very hard. When the waves come onto the boat, urine gets everywhere. We had no place to use the restroom. On the big boat we were able to have restrooms.

VV: Should children nowadays remember their parents’ stories?

LB: Kids nowadays don’t really want to hear and we don’t really want to tell.

VV: Do you have anything else you want to add?

LB: No! That’s all!