Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: NICOLE NGUYEN
Interview: Malessa Tem
Date: February 26, 2012
Location: Yorba Linda, California
Sub-Collection: Vietnamese American Experience Winter 2012

Field Notes

The interview was conducted in Nicole Nguyen’s home of residence in Yorba Linda, California. Present during the interview were the narrator, Nicole Nguyen, and the interviewer Malessa Tem. We had already completed the standard paperwork at the Union of Vietnamese Student Associations office located in Garden Grove, California, two weeks prior to the interview.

We found a place to conduct the interview in an upstairs guest room in the spacious house that she shares with her brother and his family. I sat at the small computer desk against the wall, while Nicole sat on the bed amongst a stack of old albums. She had on a long sleeve blouse and jeans during our interview. She had gone out for a run in the morning although she had been under the weather during our interview. Her illness did not stop her from explaining her story.

Nicole was unable to tell much about her experiences in Vietnam due to her age. She stumbled around the memories of being in the camp with responding to what her mother had told her, you simply don’t talk about those things. It impacted her early understanding about her family’s journey.

Nicole was very detailed in her story and added a lot of voice to her recollections especially with her life in Oklahoma. She felt an attachment with Oklahoma because it was the place where she had her formative years. She dwelled on her experiences with being bullied by other minorities but she dismissed their taunts with her love for basketball. Athletics played a large role on her teen years because it was how she made friends both in Oklahoma and California.

Nicole’s recollection about her experiences in college seemed to be the liveliest out of the whole interview. She describes the first introduction to the Project Ngoc organization at the UC Irvine campus. It leads to a passionate talk about her role as a member leading to becoming a president of the Project Ngoc. She doesn’t mention her actual position in the organization in the recording, but from what she had described with me, she played a major role within the community.

As we were ending our interview, Nicole had mentioned a handful of examples of her personal involvement in the community following the disbanding of Project Ngoc in 1997. She talked being a mentor to at-risk teens. She seemed to have this deep connection to the youth because of her positioning as a 1.5-generation.

The interview touched upon Nicole’s experiences with growing up in several different communities and how she adapted to her changes. It also highlights Nicole’s passion in community awareness and activism in the mid-1990s.