HMD: My name is Howard Diep and today February 17th 2012. I am going to interview Hue Minh Truong, my mom. We are at our home in San Diego, California and this interview is for the Vietnamese American Oral History Project.

HMD: I’d like to ask you to please state your name
HMT: My name is Truong Minh Hue

HMD: And how old are you?
HMT: I am 53 years old

HMD: And where do you currently live right now?
HMT: I live in San Diego, California

HMD: What are your parent’s names?
HMT: My fathers name is Tan Truong and my mothers name is Ly Choi

HMD: Can you please describe them?
HMT: My father right now is old, but he’s healthy. My mom died in 1955, no 1995.

HMD: What were your parents like?
HMT: My parents? They’re both Chinese. My father was born in China and he moved to Vietnam and then I was born in Vietnam

HMD: What about your mother?
HMT: My mom’s parents are from China and then she was born in Vietnam

HMD: Where did you grow up in Vietnam?
HMT: I grew up in Se Dac South Vietnam

HMD: Describe your hometown where you grew up, what was that like
HMT: I lived in the middle of the city, close to the big highway and the big river. Very close to the big market
HMD: Where else have you lived in Vietnam?
HMT: That was the only place
HMD: Tell me some of your childhood memories?
HMT: My childhood memories, I was a full time student and surrounding my neighborhood was a lot of Chinese families and the whole block like couple of the Vietnamese families on my right was the Vietnamese pharmacist. My family was Chinese herbs and on my left was Chinese candy store. That was the only place that I remember when I was young.
HMD: What were the main industries in your hometown? Was it farming, welding?
HMT: Business
HMD: Businesses? What type of businesses?
HMT: So many types of different businesses, they’re grocery stores, pharmacists, Chinese herb store, candy store, supermarket, they’re many carpenters and welding and automobile repair and so many things that they’re selling in the market.
HMD: what about your neighbors, what are they like?
HMT: My neighbors, a lot of Chinese people and family surrounding. They’re nice and quiet and very polite
HMD: What kind of local gathering or events were there?
HMT: They gather to do business
HMD: Business gathering?
HMT: Yeah
HMD: In the big market place?
HMT: Yeah, mhm
HMD: What about the holidays, like Tet? How do you celebrate that?
HMT: We have three days holiday for the whole year that they call Vietnamese Tet or Chinese New Year. We close business for three days and after that we reopen after the three-day holiday
HMD: Did it feel good when it was Tet? Good spirits?
HMT: Yeah, when I was young I was very excited to have new clothes and we went out to see the dragon dance and we have li xi co tien o chong bao do. Has money in the big red envelope, new shoes, new clothes, and everything was… good food, family gathering reunion. We were all happy because we had three days off for the holiday, for the whole year we had three days off for the whole year.

HMD: What about birthdays? How did you celebrate birthdays?

HMT: Actually, we do not celebrate birthdays.

HMD: No celebration of birthdays?

HMD: In Vietnam, what types of different jobs did you have?

HMT: Oh, just a full time student.

HMD: Full time student?

HMT: And helping parents to take care of the young brothers and sisters.

HMD: Are you the oldest in the family?

HMT: No, I am the second oldest in the family.

HMD: Second oldest, okay. So if you were a full time student, could you please describe the schooling in Vietnam?

HMT: The last time I went to school was in High School. And….

HMD: Describe your school was it a lot of children running around or…

HMT: No, my school is two stories and… noi bang ai dai, khong biec noi. Con gai bang ao dai di hoc.

HMD: The girls would wear an ao dai to school.

HMT: Yeah, me too.

HMD: Okay, what were your teachers and friends like?

HMT: Oh, they’re very nice and lovable people, a lot of teachers worked very hard in order to help the students and the students studied and worked very hard too. I love my school, love my teachers and love my friends. I still remember them, but I don’t want to think back about it because it is not happy.

HMD: Okay, what was your favorite part about school?

HMT: Recess! I like recess haha because I can have something to eat, I like to eat a lot.

HMD: Okay, what do you remember most about your parents in Vietnam when you were a child?
HMT: Oh my parents? They worked really hard to raise the family and I cannot do nothing to help them just take care of the young sister and brothers. I’d like to help, but I was young and I had to go to school.
HMD: What about your grandparents?
HMT: Oh my grandparents?
HMD: Yes, what do you remember about them?
HMT: Oh, they… they lived in different cities.
HMD: In different cities?
HMT: Yeah, we went to visit them during the New Year, which we call Tet. During the whole year we only visit them during Tet.
HMD: Okay, what about your last name? Your family name? Do you know anything about it?
HMT: Yeah, my family name is Truong. And I know that my last name is my family name and that’s all I know. But the meaning it is a popular last name.
HMD: It’s a popular last name?
HMT: Yeah
HMD: Okay, okay that’s good.
HMD: What about your languages? What languages do you speak?
HMT: My language? I can speak Vietnamese, Chinese, Hakka, a little bit Mandarin, a little bit Cantonese, I can understand, and English, a little bit. Not fluent, but I can speak a little bit and understand it too.
HMD: What do you think is your favorite language to speak?
HMT: My favorite?
HMD: Yeah
HMT: What do I think?
HMD: Which one do you like the best?
HMT: A little bit for everything
HMD: Hmm okay, which occupations have your families held in the past?
HMT: They do the business, kind of like the Chinese herbs/
HMD: The Chinese herbal shops?
HMT: Yeah, my father’s family did that and my mom’s family was the same.
HMD: How much education has your family had in different generations?
HMT: As I know, high school. That’s what I think but I’m not sure.
HMD: What about your grandparents? How did they meet and why did they marry?
HMT: Arrange marriage
HMD: What about your parents?
HMT: Arrange marriage.
HMD: Do you have as spouse?
HMT: Oh yes. I have in my family. Two sons one in UCLA and one in Irvine, UC Irvine. But my husband passed away in 2005, so now I’m by myself with my children.
HMD: How did you meet your spouse?
HMT: We both met in school
HMD: What about your children? One is in UCLA one is in UC Irvine. What do they want to do?
HMT: The older son he is working on his masters and wants to become a teacher. And he also has a part time job. And my second son is a full time student and now he’s interviewing me.
HMD: Does your family keep an alter for your ancestors?
HMT: Only me, I keep alter for my mom and husbands memory.
HMD: Why? Why just you?
HMT: because my mom died in here and I will never ever forget my mom. And my husband in here too, so I don’t want to forget them.
HMD: Do you practice religion?
HMT: Actually, as I know it is just Buddhism but we don’t really practice religion
HMD: Do you go to the temple?
HMT: I just go to the temple when my mom and husband died, but since then, very seldom, no.
HMD: What special food traditions do you have in your family?
HMT: We like noodle soup.
HMD: Noodle soup?
HMT: Yeah, the boiling noodle and chicken soup, so we often have noodle soup.
HMD: Okay, do you have any photo albums, scrapbooks, home movies, or anything like that around the house?

HMT: Family albums, yes we do have it. My husband has my children’s baby pictures and my wedding pictures. In the family album that’s all we have.

HMD: Okay, and who made them?

HMT: Oh my husband made them.

HMD: When was this do you remember?

HMT: More than twenty years ago. That’s the first album that he made, he made the pictures of the wedding and then after we had children, then he had the baby pictures in the same album.

HMD: Okay, I’m going to ask you questions about wartime and political experiences now. How did the war in Vietnam affect your family and your community?

HMT: Actually, we were not involved in the war, but the war affected my family and my uncle. My uncle was a soldier and he got hit by Viet Cong bullets and was disabled. His arm was paralyzed and his leg was in pain up to the point when he died. Yeah that’s all I remember.

HMD: Okay, where did you live during the war?

HMT: In South Vietnam

HMD: Was it the same city?

HMT: Yeah it was the same city, big city

HMD: What do you remember most about that time period during the war?

HMT: It was scary. A lot of people died and loud noises because of the guns firing and bombs. But we were not in that situation, but we can hear through the news and through the newspaper and radios. It was very sad and scary. Very nervous too. Yeah, that’s all I remember.

HMD: Where were you during the last days of the war?

HMT: Inside the house.

HMD: What were your memories of that final day?

HMT: That final day, I remember I left school early because lots of people were surrounding it and they were back and forth in too many different directions and I didn’t
know what was happening so I just left and went home early that day. That’s all I remember from that day.

HMD: Could you describe what was happening during the Fall of Saigon on April 30th, 1975?

HMT: Actually I wasn’t there, but I can remember not most of them, but some through the radio and the newspaper after that and the television.

HMD: What was life like after the war? Was it a lot of different?

HMT: Yeah a lot of difference, kind of like… I don’t know how to describe, but it’s a lot of meetings and activity of the laborers and moving, people moving around, even though my family went to the country work on the farms. But not live there. We went to the farm in the morning and got back at night.

HMD: What was it like leaving your home and your country and coming over to the US? How did that feel?

HMT: It felt like a big different. In here it’s more like very clean in the air and the streets and quiet place. And the weather is kind of like cold, but the people are very nice and polite. They’re not so noisy back in like the people in the market.

HMD: What do you think of US policy during and after the war?

HMT: Actually I don’t know nothing about it.

HMD: Why did you decide to come to the US?

HMT: I did not decide to come here, my grand moms family left and took me with them. And my family was okay so I went out with them, but I had no decision at that time. I didn’t know nothing, I just followed them and come. Yeah.

HMD: Do you remember how young you were?

HMT: Still in High School.

HMD: How did you leave to come to the US?

HMT: By boat. We were in the ocean for seven days and nights. They were little bit of water to drink, no food and the big storm. High waves, dark, just sky and the ocean is very dark. The color I remember was black, the water was black. And then we went to Indonesia. The government let us live in the camps for more than twelve months then they moved us to Singapore and waited for the airplanes so we could have a trip to the United States.
HMD: During your immigration to the US by boat, did you encounter like pirates or any threats?
HMT: No
HMD: And after you landed in Indonesia, that was a refugee camp right?
HMT: Yeah
HMD: Okay, what was that like? What was the refugee camp in Indonesia like?
HMT: Oh the people lived next together, just like in jail, but not actually, but I remember we can smell stink because so many people in the camps. There was a lot of mosquitoes and flies. And the weather was very hot, and the water wasn’t clean. There was also a lot of dirt and mud, but it’s okay. Even though it was not clean, the neighbors were friendly.
HMD: What about after Indonesia? You went to..
HMT: Singapore
HMD: What was the refugee camp like in Singapore like?
HMT: They have it kind of like an apartment. We have room and the door. We have private rooms. A couple of weeks and then we have the flight so we can get on the airplane so we can have the trip to the United States. First stop was in San Diego. I lived in San Diego for a while and then we reunion with my childhood friend and neighbor when we were young, we met in San Francisco. And then when I got married to my husband we moved back to San Diego. And then we have two sons.
HMD: Did you like the refugee camp in Singapore better or Indonesia?
HMT: Of course Singapore better
HMD: Okay, what was your first impression coming to the U.S?
HMT: Nervous because I didn’t understand English very well. I can’t speak and they were very little Vietnamese people, they were all American, but they are very nice and helping people, they are very loving people
HMD: And so you said, when you came over here you met up with your old childhood friend in San Francisco?
HMT: Yeah, yeah actually my aunt’s nephew or cousin or niece or I don’t know, but we knew each other when we were young, so we unioned with them for many years, then we had a job and everybody in different places up until now.
HMD: Okay, so first you lived in San Francisco then you moved to San Diego?
HMT: First I depart in San Diego for a couple of months then I moved to San Francisco, then I went back to San Diego.

HMD: How come you decided to live in San Diego? And in Southern California?

HMT: Oh because my husband here, my husband here in San Diego.

HMD: How did you make a living after resettlement, did you find work?

HMT: Oh yeah, first job I did newspaper delivering.

HMD: Newspaper delivering?

HMT: And then I worked at McDonalds, restaurants, and food services. And then the bank as a clerk, a research clerk for more than twenty years and then my husband died. And then I had a job as a caregiver, taking care of my husbands mother for a couple of years and then I found a job at school working in the cafeteria as food servicing.

HMD: Which one would you say is your favorite job out of all of them?

HMT: I think it’s food servicing because right now I work at that job and that should be the last job of my life, I think. That’s what I would like.

HMD: How do you feel about your decision coming to the U.S?

HMT: I have no decision, I told you back then when my relative family I went with them and I didn’t realize that when I left I would never come back. Right now I… have no idea. I didn’t know the decision of leaving or coming back or… I don’t know.

HMD: Okay, that’s okay. What about in America? When you found your first job was that through friends, family, networking?

HMT: Oh yeah friends.

HMD: So your first job was the newspaper delivering.

HMT: Mhm, through my friends.

HMD: Okay, in the U.S what was different in the U.S compared to your old home in Vietnam? Was it a lot dirtier, cleaner, people?

HMT: Much cleaner, very clean. People polite and very organized. And uh they all have plans they all have my plans. But back in my country I don’t think they have plans they want to do something they go ahead and do it. Yeah that’s a different one according to my knowledge?

HMD: In the U.S. have you ever-encountered racism or discrimination?
HMT: I did, but I don’t really recall it, I try not to remember I’m not really outspoken because of my accent and I’m afraid people don’t understand my English so I’m more like quiet like when I was young back in my country.

HMD: How do you identify yourself with American society? Would you say you’re more Asian, Asian American, Vietnamese, Vietnamese-American, Chinese, and Chinese-American??

HMT: Of course Asian American

HMD: Why Asian American out of all of those?

HMT: You see because my children were born here. Even though they’re American, they’re Asian. No matter what, they look Asian even though they’re American. So why not Asian American.

HMD: Okay, so you consider yourself that too?

HMT: Yeah

HMD: Okay, the culture, was the culture in Vietnam a lot different than the culture here, the way of living?

HMT: The way of living? You mean my family or society?

HMD: The society over there compared to the society over here.

HMT: A lot of difference.

HMD: A lot of differences? What were some of those differences?

HMT: Over there in the morning every house they have the big door open and they kind of like crowded people and noisy. Even though my family has business. But in here we just get out to work and close the door, we get home we close the door. Twenty four seven the door is always closed and back in my country we have a big door and the whole house is open, but over here we have small doors just to get out and get in, that’s what I know. Yeah.

HMD: Do you like the culture there or the culture here better? Or kind of a mixture of both?

HMT: The culture there and here? To me… I have no idea. To me, I don’t know.. Yeah I don’t know I can’t answer.

HMD: Well right now since you’re in the U.S. are you a U.S Citizen?

HMT: Yeah I’m a immigration U.S Citizen
HMD: Was this by birth or naturalization?
HMT: Naturalization.

HMD: Why did you decide to become a U.S. Citizen?
HMT: Why did I decide to become a U.S. Citizen?
HMD: Yeah, was it for opportunities or work?
HMT: I remember that time my husband told me to become a citizen and then we got married and then we have license to marriage.

HMD: A license to marriage?
HMT: I don’t know? Yeah, I didn’t know I had to become an American Citizen. My husband helped me to apply for it and we have all the tests, oral test and written tests and American names and then we started to get the marriage license and drivers license and on and on. But yeah, that was my husbands decision I think, because he reminded me and helped me get to the place to apply, but I didn’t really know at that time.

HMD: So you are a citizen and you’ve been naturalized. Do you remember what the naturalization process was like?
HMT: Oh yeah, first we had to apply for the application and they sent the letter to me and then I went back to the immigration office for the test and they asked questions about American history and they helped me to write a couple of sentences and then they interviewed and at that time it was pass or fail. And then later they sent mail for… for the…

HMD: Is it a certification or…
HMT: Yeah, for the certificate like American Citizen Certification

HMD: During that process was there a lot of American history, did you learn the language or oral history or…
HMT: Oh no, not really it’s just general questions about American History and the governor, president, state. Most of the questions were American History.

HMD: Did you find it hard to learn that?
HMT: No, not at all

HMD: Well since you’re a naturalized citizen now, you have the right to vote. Did you ever vote in the United States election?
HMT: Yeah I did vote.
HMD: Why did you choose to vote? Because most people don’t, so why did you chose to vote?
HMT: Why did I choose to vote? Because I’m an American Citizen, I like to vote for the society.
HMD: So since coming to the U.S. have you gone back to visit Vietnam
HMT: No
HMD: Not at all?
HMT: Uh-uh
HMD: Why?
HMT: I have no house, Uh-uh even though if I went back I would have no house, it’s not mine no more
HMD: In your opinion, what do you think will become of Vietnamese Culture in American? In the younger generation?
HMT: I want them to become a good citizen, study hard, and work hard so they can have a good job. And helping the young people… to be a good community and helping surround people.
HMD: How do you think the Vietnamese community has changed over the last few years?
HMT: Over the last few years? Actually, I wasn’t involved in the Vietnamese community a lot in the past few years so I really don’t know, but I realized that they have organizations and meetings and celebrations and parades. Because I don’t have time to join it, but I knew. The community was very… very helpful.
HMD: Okay, and then do you visit Little Saigon?
HMT: Oh yes, a couple of times
HMD: Couple of times? Why did you decided to visit Little Saigon?
HMT: Because I wanted to see the Saigon but I didn’t’ know how to drive, I cant drive up there, so my husband when he was still alive he took me up there. We went to Phuoc Loc Tho and a lot of the Vietnamese stores and restaurants. I like Vietnamese food, so I ate a lot at that time, but since he died, up until this point I haven’t went back. And then up until now I haven’t gone back there. I want to, but I can’t drive.
HMD: So what do you think of Little Saigon? Is it a strong, good community for Vietnamese?
HMT: I don’t know a lot, but I… actually I don’t know.
HMD: What is your favorite thing to do there while you’re at Little Saigon?
HMT: Oh eat, eat Vietnamese food and just see signs
HMD: Okay, what is your favorite Vietnamese cuisine or dishes?
HMT: Pho and banh xeo and a lot of things like chai do and nhieu cai banh
HMD: Let me see, what do you think are the most important things that future generations of Vietnamese Americans should remember about the past?
HMT: Don’t forget the culture. And respect the old and be nice to the young. Study hard, work hard, and be nice, be good. Yeah. That’s all I want my children to become.
HMD: Why do you think remember the culture is an important part that we shouldn’t forget? That the younger generation of Vietnamese Americans shouldn’t forget?
HMT: Shouldn’t forget?
HMD: Like where we came from, our language, where we live, our food, and our history?
HMT: It’s up to them, whatever they feel comfortable. They live their lives, but I cannot control them, but I remind them not to forget the culture and family life. That they have their family. That’s their choice, but I want them to still have the… culture like Tet, Vietnamese Tet, and Chinese New Year.
HMD: Are they’re any more stories you’d like to tell?
HMT: Any more stories? Uhm… I want my children not to forget home, wherever they go they remember they still have home. They come to visit on the holidays wherever they have vacation, whenever they have weekends to see the family. And when they go out they be a good boy, don’t do anything that is dangerous. Be nice and have a good job, helping people… and visit home whenever they have time.
HMD: Okay, are there any other memories as a child or an adult that you would like to share? Aside from the children growing up being respectful, successful and coming back, and giving back?
HMT: Like giving back to the society?
HMD: Yeah like any more stories?
HMT: For myself? Or..
HMD: Yeah for yourself, would you like to share?
HMT: The only I give back is the… to the community, actually I’m not. But for my nephew and niece, because I was so busy to take care of the family first and at that moment I’m taking care of my family, but the community I don’t have time. I’m by myself, I work and I have a small nephew to take care of. But I wish when my children they more knowledge than me, they will be better.
HMD: Then they will take care of the community?
HMT: Yes, of course. Because, see when I first came I learned English, not fluent. Because when I came in I was mid-age. I wasn’t young, not old, but right now I’m kind of like busy for myself, because I’m by myself. And my kids still need my help too and I have my nephew and my niece need to be taken care of too. So for my community that’s why I’m not involved, because I have no time.
HMD: So you came over here with your mother right?
HMT: No I can’t with my grandmother’s family, she died already.
HMD: It was just you?
HMT: Just by myself
HMD: And then you sponsored everyone else to come over?
HMT: After I had a job for five years, I sponsored my parents and my siblings to the United States
HMD: And now it’s the same thing where you’re still trying to help the family?
HMT: No, actually I’m helping my nephew and niece. Not my family. They’re old, they have their own lives, now I just take care of the babies in the relative family and I work. Yeah. Taking care of the myself, the house, my relatives babies, my children.
HMD: Okay, well that is it; do you have anything else you would like to share?
HMT: ….Uhh no.
HMD: Well thank you very much for your time, I really appreciate it.
HMT: You’re welcome