Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: UNG CANH BUI

Interviewer: Steven Bui

Date: February 23, 2012

Location: Garden Grove, California

Sub-Collection: Vietnamese American Experience Winter 2012

FIELD NOTES

This interview was conducted in the living room of Ung Canh Bui’s house in Garden Grove on a Thursday, February 23rd, 2012. We sat at his dinner table across from each other with the recorder in the middle. Present during the interview were the Narrator, Ung Canh Bui, the interviewer Steven Bui, and Ung Bui’s wife and daughter sitting on the sofa next to the table. We followed protocol and signed all consent and release forms prior to beginning the interview. The narrator asked if he could take photos later during the daytime in his garden instead of at night. He was very proud of his garden and definitely wanted it in the photographs. The interview was split into four parts with a break in between and the fourth part being less than a minute just to end the interview.

Ung Bui was wearing sweat pants and an old ragged t shirt at the time of the interview. He seemed fairly nervous and hesitant at first during the beginning of the interview. It could be because this had been the first time he had ever done something like this and he did not know how the interview would go. At first, he gave me mostly short answers at the beginning of the interview due to his nervousness but as the interview went on and he got more comfortable, he began to talk a lot more and give longer answers. He stammered while answering questions sometimes but his English was good. He smiled often in the beginning of the interview as he answered basic questions about biography. However, when it came to the question about his parents, his facial expression changed to a more serious one and there was some sadness in his voice. It was very easy to tell that he loved his family very much, especially his mom because it was hard for him to talk about her passing away. Besides the subject of his mom, Ung seemed to enjoy talking about his life as a child. He was very happy and energetic throughout the interview and liked to make jokes at times. He also loved talking about his family especially saying how they always loved one another and cared for each other. After the biography questions were answered, we took a 5 minute break and we went over the next set of questions I was going to ask him in the interview so he could be a little more prepared.
In the second part of the interview, when it came to the topic of the Vietnam War and the Fall of Saigon, the mood of the interview changed to a much more serious one. Ung did not smile as much throughout this section of the interview and was not as energetic. He told stories in a serious tone about the things he saw and experienced. He talked about life in the air force base and it was clear that life in the military was hard for him and he was very unhappy from the fact that the War had separated him and his brothers from each other and their family. Ung told multiple stories and talked about many of his experiences during the war but they were mostly fairly short. I had to ask him quite a few questions to get him to continue talking about the topic if I wanted to know more about it. However, he talked much more while answering questions about his life during the Vietnam War than when he was answering questions about his biography. This could be due to the fact that the biography questions in the beginning were just to warm up and to get comfortable answering questions. Ung did not like talking about what he saw very much during the war and during his escape from Vietnam. It was too hard for him to talk about. When Ung started to talk about coming to America, he was very excited and happy and seemed very proud of the life he rebuilt in America.

At the end of the interview Ung did not have any more stories to tell and we shook hands and I thanked him for being my narrator. It is recommended that next time I give him the questions in advance so that he has a fair amount of time to think about how he can answer the questions and give longer responses. This could have helped him with his nervousness at the beginning of the interview.