Vietnamese American Oral History Project, UC Irvine

Narrator: PHONG ĐỨC ĐỖ
Interviewer: Thuý Võ Dưỡng
Date: August 11, 2012
Location: San Diego
Sub-collection: Thuy Vo Dang Interviews
Length of interview: 01:19:07

FIELD NOTES

Phong Duc Do contacted me via email on May 11, 2012 after reading about the project on Radio Vietnam California’s (VNCR) website. I just began doing the bilingual radio program to disseminate information about VAOHP. Mr. Do is from San Diego and we corresponded for a while, until an opportunity presented itself for me to interview him while at a Society of American Archivist conference in San Diego in August 2012. He was willing to come to the conference site and I reserved a private meeting room to conduct the interview. Mr. Do was very prepared, bringing his family records for me to view. He promised to send me those records along with scanned photos at a later date.

Mr. Do is younger than most of the narrators I have been interviewing. He was born in 1958 and came to the United States in 1991 with his family under the Orderly Departure program, which allowed for former reeducation camp prisoners to leave Vietnam with their families. His father was in reeducation camp for 13 years and he was the oldest male in the family of three children. He had to shoulder much of the burden while his father was away. Both his parents have passed away and he has children of his own. Among his extended family, he seems to be the “family historian” invested in keeping record of their family’s history in Vietnam and the details of their journey.

He is currently an engineer working for the U.S. Navy. His children are teenagers and he does not often talk with them about his past experiences. When he came to the interview, he was somewhat reserved and tentative about his answers to my questions, despite being really prepared. Perhaps this has something to do with the very close, intimate nature of the oral history interviews that seem to have male narrators taken aback or more uncomfortable than female narrators. This is not always the case, but my age and gender might certainly have something to do with Mr. Do’s reticence. In many of the sections of the interview, I had to ask leading questions or give examples.

After the interview ended, we went out to the balcony of the conference hotel and took some photos with the scenic ocean backdrop. Mr. Do contacted me later with the follow up documents. He had scanned the “Gia Pha” (Family Records) that has the listing of members of his extended family. He also sent an article from The Columbian that featured his father, Ma Do’s story. And the last item he included was a photo album he organized in a powerpoint presentation with subtitles for each of the photos included. Once the transcription was completed by VAOHP intern Giang Doan, I sent the document to him and he wanted to correct the grammatical errors. After he returned to me his edited transcript, I sent the document to translator Annie Nguyen.