



1980-9

## **Vu, Min Interview**

Carole Hensley

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### **Recommended Citation**

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<https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/witw/44>

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# Stockton Immigrant Women Oral History Collection

by Sally Miller

## **VU, MIN THU (Vietnamese)**

September, 1980

Interviewed by Carole Hensley

Transcribed by Unknown

Hensley: ... Before you came to this country, your name, your age, where you were born.

Vu: My name is Min Thu Vu. Vu is the last name. Actually it is my husband's name and if I were still in Vietnam, I could have kept my maiden name, but since we came over here and I thought well the change maybe would be more convenient for me because people kept asking me, "Oh, you're married, but you kept your maiden name?" It's rather strange in the States to do that so that's why I decided to go ahead with the change and so I'm married and have a young girl, Lei, and she just turned four last week. Before I came over to the States, I just graduated from the School of Law at the University of Saigon in Vietnam, so I've had high school and college. I went to a French high school and a French grammar school so I had a French education, plus you had to take Vietnamese even though I went to a French high school, and in fact, English was my second language taken at school so that helped me a lot when we had to leave and come over. So I just graduated, as I told you, and I had planned to go further with my studies in Saigon, but we had to leave.

Hensley: Why did you have to leave?

Vu: Well, we didn't have any choice because we didn't want to be ruled by the communists because this was my parent's second migration because they had to migrate first in 1954 when the communists took over North Vietnam so that was the first time then, and so they knew a lot about communism and they also knew that we could not survive, that we would have no future if we stayed and furthermore my father could be prosecuted, I think because he taught Law at the University of Saigon and he was in Labor Relations and he traveled a lot so I don't think the communists would leave him alone when they took over.

Hensley: Where was the first point that your parents migrated to?

Vu: The first place?

Hensley: Uh huh, in 1954.

Vu: They emigrated to the south to South Vietnam, because as you know now Vietnam was divided into two parties until 1975 when the communists took over the south. Before that then the north was communist and the south was non-communist, but now it's communist all over again.

Hensley: Can you tell me about your very young childhood, where you were born, when you were born, your brothers and sisters?

Vu: I was born on February 8, 1952 in Hanoi, North Vietnam. Hanoi is the capital of North Vietnam. I was just in Hanoi for two years since in 1954 we had to move south so I don't remember a lot about Hanoi, just what my parents have told me since. It seems like it was a beautiful capital. There were lakes in the city and the willows around the lakes and I remember the streets were named according to the specialty that they carried, see like there was the street of the wicker things and the street of the oranges, the street of the ice cream cones and things like that so it sounds like it was really pretty and really peaceful. But then in 1954, we moved to [ ] Saigon, the capital of South Vietnam and I remember that I had a very happy childhood because I was the eldest in the family and my parents had waited about seven or eight years before they had me so I was kind of spoiled you know, and so it was nice. I have a lot of brothers and sisters. I have five of them, two younger sisters and three younger brothers. I went to school as everybody else, but not everybody else because as you know in Vietnam still, education is not obligated for everybody because the school system is not quite as good as it is here, you know, as expanded, because Vietnam is still an underdeveloped country. But I was fortunate enough to have a French education which is I can say, one of the elite parts of the society there. So, I had a happy childhood and I went to grammar and high school and then to college.

Hensley: Obviously, your family were academics if your family taught, but in many other families was there any sexual discrimination in sending children to school? Would they say yes boys should go, but girls shouldn't go?

Vu: Not that I know of. Among our relatives or neighbors or friends, but what you mentioned could probably be true in the past you know, but not in my generation though and maybe my parent's generation, yes, but not ours. No, there was no discrimination.

Hensley: When you were young, very young, a child, was your family very religiously oriented?

Vu: I am not sure. I wouldn't say very religiously oriented, but yes, my family is and is still, my parents are still religious, especially my mother.

Hensley: And what religion?

Vu: Uh, Buddhism.

Hensley: Did they ever send you to church and how did you feel about it?

Vu: Oh yes. I remember that I went quite a lot of times with my parents, especially on special occasions like the New Year, you know, and then special holidays, religious holidays. I felt quite good about it.

Hensley: Do you still practice any Buddhist practices at all?

Vu: Yes still, but not as much as I would want to. As you know, well we still practice like on special holidays, but we have to go to Sacramento because there is no Vietnamese Buddhist temple in Stockton. There is a Japanese temple, but it is different. It's still Buddhism, but there are a lot of different aspects. There are differences. We have to go to Sacramento on special occasions. We still practice it at home, like the death anniversaries. I don't know if you know about that?

Hensley: No.

Vu: That's one part of Buddhist religion. You don't celebrate birthdays as much as death anniversaries because it's a way to express love towards your ancestors and to express your loyalty and your love and your respect, so we celebrate that.

Hensley: How do you celebrate it? In what ways?

Vu: We have an altar for them and then like, are you familiar with Buddhism?

Hensley: No, not at all.

Vu: Well we have an altar and then we have a Buddhist statue and then whenever we want to celebrate and to remember something. Then we light the incense and we pray before Buddha for our ancestors, but always we pray to Buddha first and then the ancestors and then we prepare a big dinner, you know, especially the dishes that the ancestors liked when they were still alive. We have a family get together then and talk about the ancestor.

Hensley: For how many years after one has died is this practiced?

Vu: Oh, well the first year after he died.

Hensley: But it's not carried out like each successive year, with each anniversary?

Vu: Yes, it is.

Hensley: Oh, it is?

Vu: Yes.

Hensley: But for how many years would this go on? Would you be celebrating someone who died fifty years ago?

Vu: Yeah, uh huh, we would. It depends actually on the survivor, whether he or she wants to do this.

Hensley: What were your parents doing before leaving Hanoi? Was your father still teaching and what was your mother doing as well?

Vu: Well, okay. In Hanoi, I think my father was still going to school. He was working at the same time too and at one time, I think in Hanoi, he was a judge and so, but he was still working towards a higher degree. My mother has never worked outside the home.

Hensley: Never?

Vu: No. Well, she did a lot of volunteer work in Saigon, you know like when the Red Cross and the Blue Ladies and things like that in the wartime, but she has never worked for pay.

Hensley: Did your mother have as much education as your father did?

Vu: No, she didn't. I think she went to school up to grade eight and it was quite high then, especially for girls. She went to a French high school and a French grammar school, too.

Hensley: How did you feel when you left Vietnam? When did you leave Vietnam?

Vu: We left Vietnam on twenty-sixth of April in 1975.

Hensley: And what were the circumstances that led up to it? Why did you choose the United States and how did you feel in general?

Vu: It's rather a long story. In Saigon my father taught at the university as I told you, and I think he was only working part-time as a law attorney. He had quite a lot of American friends in Saigon that he had connections with, and I think he won a case for an American gentleman and taught the last days of April in 1975 while Saigon was very chaotic, because people were starting to leave and we all knew, you know, in our home, that Saigon may fall, but we would have never thought that it fell so quick, see, because it fell on the thirtieth, the last day of April. So, I had the impression that my parents would like to leave, but there were rumors mentioned that to be able to leave you had to be working for the American government in Saigon or have some connections with the American people to be able to leave, otherwise you have to pay a lot of money to leave and well, my father wasn't working for the American government or anything like that so. Actually, we didn't have any hope because we didn't have enough money either even though we were middle class, but we couldn't gather such a sum that they asked, you know, to be able to leave. So just one day, that American friend that my father didn't remember about, he just came to my father and asked whether he would like to leave or not and my father said, "Oh yes, you could be my savior." So, it was all arranged, but it was kind of terrible because you don't know anything except you could be leaving at any time. You had to be all prepared. I think that all of us had on hand, you know, a suitcase about this big with some clothes in it, just clothes, because we couldn't take anything else with us and there were also rumors that they would be all checked at the airport and if you take anything else besides clothes, those would be confiscated. We didn't put anything in except some clothes and so I don't know how long we waited, on week or two weeks, but then on that day, just the kids was home. I was the oldest. My father had a meeting at the University and my mother was at the hair stylist, I remember that. So, when the phone rang and the man at the other side of the phone said, "Well, are you ready? You have to be there at such and such time." That was fifteen minutes. He only gave us fifteen minutes to be at the place where we would have to be and so, oh my. My mother grabbed her motorcycle and went to the university to get my father and then I rode my [cady]. Well the [cady] is like the motorbike that you see, like the mopeds, so I rode up to the hairstylist and then fifteen minutes afterwards we were there. [There was a building] still in the city though and I just remember that it's just like a private house, but a lot of people were there already and they started to call a list out now and so went then by bus to the airport. At the airport we had to wait one day and one night before we can board the flight.

Hensley: You said they read lists of people who would be accepted. How did they decide who would be able to go and who wouldn't? And who was this deciding?

Vu: Yeah, I think officials, you know, that are working for the American government or upper officials in the Vietnamese government. I'm not sure how they go about the list, but I've heard that at the beginning when people started to leave, you know, that you had to be working for the American government, so it would be up to the American officials to make up those lists, but toward the end, I think, those who could leave did. I don't know if there was as much control towards the end as there was at the beginning.

Hensley: How did you feel about leaving? Were there things that you missed and that you know that you would miss?

Vu: Yeah, I don't know. It may be kind of personal now, you know, because yeah. Well, it has a lot to do with my leaving too, but I don't know how to say it. Yeah, it was terrible. I remember that I was crying all the time, but most of it was because I knew I was leaving the country and I may not be returning any day later on and I've grown up there, and I know love there and I've know a lot of things that I knew that I would need and not be able to come up with. Most of all, see, I was engaged when we left, but I knew that my fiancé, well we were almost married, but towards the end, you know, we didn't have time to have the ceremony, but we did have a judge preside at the wedding, so I was actually married. He wanted to stay until the last minute and try to get his family out, but at the end he couldn't. So when I left I wasn't even sure that he would be able to make it because you never know, you don't know if you will get out or not, and so it was terrible and it was all mixed up. I didn't know anything except I just remember that I was crying so much that people turned their heads to me, but luckily, he got out, but his family stayed there. So, there were a lot of mixed feelings and I don't know. It seems to me like one part of me was left behind. I can say that.

Hensley: In what ways?

Vu: Well, I think like tenderness and youth do, you know all those things. In a way, the part of me that is really Vietnamese because I did know then that I would have to adjust when I come to the States whether I wanted to or not. It would be survival for me to adjust. So, there is only that part you know and the national costume, like I don't see the national costume out on the streets anymore and I kind of miss that. See because we have the, it's called the [Áo dài]. It's kind of a tunic. This one has long sleeves and it has slits on both sides. You wear it with pants underneath. So, it's so pretty, like at the time when schools get out and on the streets cause the school uniform in Vietnam is just a white [Áo dài], that's for Vietnamese high schools. It's so pretty and the boys wear white shirts

and navy pants and I kind of miss that. There are a lot of things that I miss too, now like in Saigon there are a lot of small shops that sell like ice cream [ones] and there are fruits especially that I miss a lot and the streets are narrower and there are tall trees. Oh, I miss a lot.

Hensley: What did you like most about Vietnam?

Vu: I don't think I like one thing more you know, but there are many things that I would say it wouldn't be most, but I like atmosphere of I would say Saigon, not Vietnam because I wasn't able to travel much, especially with war times. There was no security outside Saigon, but I like the atmosphere of Saigon. The spirit of it. When you enter Saigon, I think you can feel it right away. There is like a spirit of fraternity among the people there and especially among students, I would say. It's like a big family because Saigon is not that big. It's smaller than Stockton even, I think. I think so. Yeah, the size would be small compared to Stockton, but I think it has more people than Stockton. But there is that fraternity spirit, you know, there is something very tender in the air, like a, I don't really know how to express it, but there is that something that I miss that I haven't found here anywhere.

Hensley: What were you anticipating when your whole family decided it would be coming to the States? Were you anticipating anything about the United States in general?

Vu: No, not anything special, just that it could be very different. I think we were all scared, especially my parents I would say, because they had all the responsibility to take care of the kids and to survive and to make...

Vu: She's been to some weddings you know and that's her wedding gown.

Hensley: How easy was it to adjust for you and your family? First of all, where do you get into the United States and did you make any stop offs at other countries first?

Vu: Our first stop was Guam, but we weren't allowed out of the camps. We just stayed in camps among ourselves. We didn't notice any difference or anything like that. The first stop in the United States was Camp Pendleton, down in San Diego area. Still, there we didn't have a lot of communications outside the camp, except at mealtime. Then we were served by American soldiers and I think that was the only time when we came in contact with American people. They were pretty nice. They were nice to us. After that our family got sponsored to [ ] [Hope] Village, and that's up by Auburn, but Sacramento and Auburn. By Colfax. In that area. One more time then we were just among ourselves then and the ones that got sponsored then just got out of camp with the sponsors and I still remember my family did not get sponsored at first because it was quite a large family

and it is rather hard for a large family to get sponsored as a whole you know. I do know of many cases where families had to split because the family was too large, except when the sponsor is a church and the whole congregation then would be able to take care of a large size family, but otherwise the family would have to split up. And I remember, yeah it was almost the same case with my family because my younger sister got sponsored first by Stanly and Helen [ ] and we are still in contact with them and they are fantastic people and I until now I don't even know how lucky we were then. So she got sponsored first because they wanted a student, some girl that would stay with them because they are an older couple and their kids are away so they wanted a girl who would keep the lady company because she doesn't work. She just stays home and needs company, so they sponsored her.

Hensley: How old was she, your sister?

Vu: Let's see, '55, I was twenty-three. She was twenty-one. That was really hard for us. That was really hard for us. That was the first time we got split up. Actually, it wasn't the first time. It was the second time. One of my brothers, the oldest one, went to France to continue his studies, but it wasn't under the same circumstances. It was our parent's will to let him go for his future and it was very common practice then, to let the kids go abroad and study so that they can have a better future. In her case, it was different. The family was together in a new country and then she has to split up.

Hensley: What were the camps like? You mentioned the San Diego camp.

Vu: Yes, Camp Pendleton. I think the whole camp was about four or five sections and they were all made of barracks, you know, like tents, that they put up overnight. They only had a couple of buildings for the refugees and all the other things were barracks and tents and we had cots to sleep on. It wasn't the most comfortable that you can imagine.

Hensley: How long were you there?

Vu: One month.

Hensley: What were the sponsors like?

Vu: I wouldn't know how to answer that question, but in our case, we were very lucky because as I said my sister's sponsors were fantastic people. They belonged to the First Congregational Church here in Stockton and they came to like our family a lot and then they see Hu is not that happy, you know to be by herself. She was crying, even though she tried to hide it, but they still realized that she was kind of unhappy separated from her family, so they asked the congregation to sponsor us and that's how we got to be

together again and that's how we got sponsored to Stockton. Luckily, my father found a job right away.

Hensley: What is your father doing now?

Vu: Now? He is working for a law firm, downtown law firm now.

Hensley: Here in Stockton?

Vu: Yes, as an assistant.

Hensley: Is all of your family, besides the brother who is in France... Is he still in France?

Vu: No, he's here now.

Hensley: Is all of your family here?

Vu: Yes.

Hensley: And what are they doing?

Vu: Going to school, most of them. I'm the only one who doesn't go to school anymore. Like Hu, the one that comes after me, she is working for her master's degree at Davis. Tuan, the one who comes from France is also studying at Davis, for his master's also. Another sister is going to Sacramento State and a younger brother is at Davis also in engineering. The youngest one is still here and is a senior at Stagg High School.

Hensley: Oh, he's a baby still.

Vu: Yeah, a baby still, but he will be leaving next year and that kind of makes my parents real sad.

Hensley: All the languages that you spoke, that you learned, French, English, as well as Vietnamese, in your home, which languages were spoken mostly?

Vu: Vietnamese.

Hensley: Always?

Vu: Yes.

Hensley: Did you ever have an extended home, having other people other than your immediate family living with you?

Vu: Uh, yes, at one time, but that was only my fraternal grandmother. I just remember her living with us at one time and then she died. But we've always just had our own family.

Hensley: Did you ever work at a job outside the home, like a part-time job?

Vu: Do you mean in Vietnam or here?

Hensley: In Vietnam.

Vu: No.

Hensley: No?

Vu: No.

Hensley: Did any of your brothers or sisters? Oh, you were spoiled so...

Vu: Yeah, but I think it's just the different customs you know. We didn't used to work unless we wanted to, you know, unless you wanted to have your own bit of pocket money, then you do, but usually you don't. Because study takes a lot of time and the study system in Saigon is more similar to the French system than the American system which meant you have to study a lot harder. There are more lectures to study, I could say, like you had to assimilate more things at one time. So, we didn't, but I remember kids, like my husband, he used to teach part-time, not teach, but rather tutor the high school kids in math or maybe English or literature. There are students that do that, but we didn't. I guess we were too lazy to do it.

Hensley: Did you help around the home at all?

Vu: Oh, sure, I did a lot of housework, even though we had two maids, a cooking maid and a housemaid.

Hensley: Is that common?

Vu: It is common among the Americans.

Hensley: So, you classify your family when they were in Vietnam, in the middle class or upper middle class?

Vu: Yes, upper middle class.

Hensley: What influence did your mother have in deciding major family decisions? Was she more influential than your father or did they more or less have an equal role, like deciding what the kids would do, just little things and the really big?

Vu: I would say they are equal in the decisions. My mother belongs to the, how would you say it, the older generation and as an Asian woman she may not have as loud a voice. Do you know what I mean? Like here, women speak out. They just tell what they think is right or not according to them. They have their own standpoints and their own viewpoints and things like that, but all the older women were not supposed to have a voice in the family, I guess you've heard about that, especially about Asian women. But with my parents, I think my mother had a lot to say, even though she didn't raise her voice or anything or even though we couldn't hear her talk about it, but I think she had a lot to do with the decisions, because for one thing, my parents loved each other very much and I'm sure that my father would give a lot of consideration to her advice and things like that.

Hensley: Is there a major age difference between your parents or is it the...

Vu: No, there's just four years difference.

Hensley: What religious or holiday customs do you still observe here in your home from Vietnam?

Vu: Of course, mainly the New Year, the New Years Day. We still have that and then like I said before we have the death anniversaries. Then there are like, special Buddhist holidays or celebrations that we still observe. Like we go to Sacramento and have gatherings there.

Hensley: Do you and your family still get together a lot, your immediate family, your mother and father and brothers and sisters?

Vu: Yes, uh huh, almost every week. Yeah, almost every week my sisters and brothers go home. If not every week, then every other week. They know that my parents are getting lonesome and so they are trying to [visit my parents every other week].

Hensley: How old are your parents?

Vu: Let's see. My father was born in 1922 so he's fifty-eight, and my mother is four years younger.

Hensley: So, they're still young.

Vu: Yeah, but you know, if they were still in Vietnam they would be considered as older people.

Hensley: Oh really?

Vu: Yeah, and my father would be retiring soon.

Hensley: What's the usual age for retirement in Vietnam?

Vu: I think it was, well toward the end I think it was fifty-five. Now it's sixty-five. Here it's sixty-five, right? I think it varies between sixty and sixty-five in Vietnam.

Hensley: When you were growing up, back in Vietnam, did you belong to any groups in school?

Vu: No, I didn't. I wasn't the assertive type then. Well, our whole family belonged to a [ ] club in Saigon. That was the only thing. Oh, let's see, yeah in fact, I went to the Girl Scout Group for several years. Yeah, that was the only thing.

Hensley: As far as assimilation, it seems that you have assimilated quite well and well, last night for instance, I went over to a Cambodian woman and interviewed her and she was mentioning different things about dating there, and I asked her how she would handle dating with her own daughter here in the United States. She said she would handle it just the same way. How do you think you would?

Vu: The same way as in Cambodia, you mean?

Hensley: Uh huh.

Vu: No, I think I would be a lot more open. I'd like to know all my daughter's dates. I would like to meet them in person, you know. I wouldn't try to influence my daughter at all, but just to let her know and maybe to help her realize what would be right or what would be suitable for her. I think I would be very, very open about dating here because I think that's a good way to handle it, not to put [ ]. I don't think that's the proper way to do it.

Hensley: Here in your home, do you speak mostly English or Vietnamese because your daughter seems to be adept in both?

Vu: Well, I would say equal and equal.

Hensley: Really?

Vu: Yes. Usually when there is no one else around then I speak Vietnamese to her. She went to pre-school, not the whole year last year, but just about three months and she really picked up English fast. Her dad speaks English to her and well she's watching Sesame Street and she loves that. She's picking English up really fast. Last year she didn't speak English at all. I think kids really pick up things fast.

Hensley: Have you gone to school in the United States at all?

Vu: No, not actually to school. I just took some typing courses at night school for adults when I just came. Then I started to look for a job right away. There were a lot of openings, you know, like work related to the Indo-Chinese, like I did some work as a teacher's aide before I came to the Catholic Charities.

Hensley: In middle school?

Vu: Yes, at El Dorado School, elementary school.

Hensley: You had mentioned that you wanted to continue your education. Where and in what area?

Vu: Well, I've been thinking about going back to law school here, but I don't know if I have the will now to do it again because I would have to start almost all over again. There is lots of difference between here and Vietnam. Well, they have the French influence in Vietnam which doesn't mean anything here and so I would have to start over again and so I don't know if I want to go through that again, one more time, especially here in English. I've been thinking about accounting, or business of some kind. But I still haven't decided yet. Right now, I think I may go to work part0time and then go back to school. There are financial things that you have to consider too you know, especially now that we are buying a house.

Hensley: Would you wait until she was raised up, a little older before you go back or...?

Vu: Yeah, I think I would, to see how she does in school She's supposed to be small, but you never know. Too small means dumb, huh?

Hensley: This is her first year or has she already gone?

Vu: No, she's already gone three months last year.

Hensley: What did you think of American schools for that age as opposed to ...

Vu: Preschools?

Hensley: Yes, preschools.

Vu: Oh, it's very good. It's very good for all the kids to go out at such an early age. They learn a lot, especially socially. They learn to get along with others and not to grab everything, you know, not to be too exclusive because they have to share. I think it's good because I kind of a helping mother for just one day, while the substitute was in Dameron Hospital, they asked me to come just for three hours to see how it was. The preschool that she's

going to is supposed to be one of the best ones here. She's looking forward to going back.

Hensley: What is life here like for people from our country who are still entering and those who are having some problems adjusting? Have you been exposed to many Vietnamese or any Indo-Chinese besides yourselves?

Vu: That are having a hard time to adjust? Yes, I have because for one I was working for the Catholic charities office that is helping the refugees to be settled here, especially with the ones that are coming in now. Anyway, after 1975, after the first wave of refugees, well people that are entering now are, I would say, less educated and they have a hard time adjusting. But I don't think it is a serious problem because I think it has been and it will be the problem of most immigrants. It is always hard at first. It was even hard for us to familiarize with the customs and just the way of living in the States. I think people learn very quick and you have to give them some time for though and what you can do to help is just to instruct them, to tell them what's going on and things like that because it's new. Almost everything is new. It takes a while to learn everything. But I am sure they will do very well in a few years.

Hensley: When you first got here did you face any prejudices of any kind from people?

Vu: No, I think we were fortunate enough that we didn't have to.

Hensley: Do you feel affected by, for instance, the Record and their generalized statement on Indo-Chinese and dogs and cats?

Vu: Oh sure, you can't [ ] [like that].

Hensley: Do you have any relatives in Vietnam still?

Vu: Yes, a lot of them.

Hensley: Are you in contact with them at all?

Vu: Yes, uh huh, you know, they still write, and we still write, especially my mother.

Hensley: Oh, you mother is still there?

Vu: No, no. I mean especially my mother. She is very eager to write back and forth, very eager to hear about the news back there.

Hensley: So, she is still very close to the old country then?

Vu: Yes, especially now that she's staying home, she's not getting around much.

Hensley: How about you? Are you still close to the old country? Do you feel affect by what happens there?

Vu: Yes, yeah. I think all of us are in some ways. I don't think the ones of my generation or my sisters and brothers will ever forget of not feeling close anymore to their country. Even though they may be very Americanized on the outside, still in the inside, in their hearts, I think they still remember and they still long sometime for their friends [for the past]. While it may not be true for, let's say, for my youngest brother because when he came here, he was born in 1963, he was only twelve, and it may not be entirely true for him, but I'm sure he still does.

Hensley: How about Lei? Would you like to instill some Vietnamese values in her and are you and your husband working on that?

Vu: Yes, I would like Lei to be [of a harmonious mixture, you know] of both countries, just retain the good values of the Vietnamese society and pick up good ones here. I would like her to be a mixture.

Hensley: Since you've been here, have you participated in any groups or organizations at all?

Vu: No, I haven't been really involved in or belong to any groups, but during my [brief] time at Catholic charities I've been in contact with a lot of different personalities, you know, from different groups, but I've never been really involved. I think I am shy by nature. I'm really shy and sometimes I still feel scared or at least apprehensive to go out even though I speak English well enough to be understood, but.

Hensley: Very well.

Vu: I don't know. I'm still very apprehensive sometimes. Like for today, I was apprehensive since yesterday or the day before because I knew you were coming, and it was supposed to be an interview. I was scared.

Hensley: Well, are you now? No?

Hensley: To what extent were you working with the Catholic charities? Were you able to see a lot of other Indo-Chinese coming in and did you work and negotiate any things? What exactly were you doing there?

Vu: Oh, okay. Well, I was doing resettlement work which means I was very involved with the Indo-Chinese refugees that are coming in because like my duties were sometimes picking them up at the airport and that could mean anytime, like at eleven I could receive a call from San Francisco saying that there are refugees arriving now so I would

go and then after that I would take them to different agencies in town, you know, to get them settled down because like you probably know, first of all that they receive aid from the federal government and it's administered through the county so I have to take them San Joaquin County to Public Assistance and to register for work at the State Employment Office and about their health too, I have to take them to the office of different doctors in town that take MediCal, so I would work really closely with the Indo-Chinese refugees in settling them, [ ] or even school things if they get in trouble with Mexican kids or Black kids, or schools call us, [house] [ ] and courts and so every kind of agency. It was really very involved.

Hensley: What kind of problems do Indo-Chinese children run up against in the schools here? Are teachers sympathetic? Are there a lot of little childish racial games being played?

Vu: I think for the most part the teachers are very sympathetic because there are like English as a second language teachers you know, that are familiar with minorities and the children are assigned to those classes. I think there are still communication problems because they are very short of aides inside the school system. In fact, last week I was offered a job as a teacher's aide, but I didn't want to take it. I'm looking for something else. But there is a strong demand for aides, so it's mostly communication, especially with the other kids too, you know. You're trying to say one thing and they're trying to say another thing, but nothing serious and I don't think it's racial at all.

Hensley: You mentioned Mexican kids and Black kids.

Vu: Yeah, the reason I mentioned them is because maybe they are more aggressive and that's why those troubles occur. Well, there's a tendency to make it a racial thing [ ], but I don't know if that's true or not. It's just a personal [ ].

Hensley: You mentioned your fiancé. Is this the man you are married to now?

Vu: Yes, I'm very fortunate.

Hensley: Can you tell me about the engagement and the courtship, the Vietnamese courtship?

Vu: What do you want me to tell?

Hensley: Well, did your parents have any rules about dating? Was it a fixed marriage? Did your parents decide?

Vu: Uh huh, I know what you mean. No, it wasn't a fixed thing.

Hensley: How did you meet your husband, first of all?

Vu: Okay. I met him at a special school in Saigon that was giving English courses, you know, to Vietnamese. It was called the American Vietnamese Association and it gave English classes, English courses to Vietnamese students and Vietnamese people who wanted to improve their English skills. So, I met him there and then, well.

Hensley: What was he doing? Was he a student?

Vu: Yes, he was a student. In fact, my parents weren't very much for him because he is younger than I am, three years younger. Well, it isn't a lot you know, but it was quite a bit especially in Vietnam.

Hensley: Oh really?

Vu: Because older Vietnamese people still believe that for a marriage to be a happy marriage the husband has to be older because he has to be the head of the family and for the Vietnamese still, you know, especially for older people then, age is the sign of wisdom because the older you are then the more experience you've had and so it's a sign of wisdom they thought. And so, we met at the school. We didn't think at all at first about dating each other or about even falling in love or something like that. We were just friends at first, but we were a little bit attracted to each other because he came up to me first and introduced himself, so that's the way we met and after that we starting going out with friends first and then little by little, then one day he proposed and then that was it. In the meantime, then he came a lot to visit me at home, so my parents met him. But I had known a lot of other guys too so, see because it's a sign that you are in a decent family and the boys that know it always come to visit you at home because they want you to know that they don't have anything that they wish to hide or things like that. So, everything in the open. That was very acceptable in Saigon rather than just meeting in secret and things like that you know. So decent girls never meet in secret unless the boy is totally unacceptable to the parents, then you would have to do that if you were in love. Otherwise, they just come to the house and we sit down and talk, chat and things like that.

Hensley: How long were you dating before he proposed to you?

Vu: It wasn't very long, six or seven months? Is that long or not? I don't know.

Hensley: I don't know.

Vu: Well, that seems really fast to me.

Hensley: Yeah, that does seem fast.

Vu: I think that shocked my parents, especially coming from a younger guy. They would say "Oh now don't believe him, honey. He's too young for you." So, I had to go through a lot of hard times with them, but he proved himself, so we were able to marry.

Hensley: What was he studying?

Vu: He was in like the polytechnic school. It's like a school of education that at first you took a mixture of lecture and like practice, like technical things and then theologies at the same time. But he wasn't able to go on to school when we got here because he had to find a job right away, so he began working right away. He still wants to get his degree in engineering, but it takes time.

Hensley: You were married right before you came over here to the United States?

Vu: Yes.

Hensley: When you were in the camp at Fort Pendleton were you able to be together, you and your husband?

Vu: Oh no. That's a terrible story too. Like I said, then I didn't know whether he would be able to make it out or not, so we left...

Hensley: You left without him?

Vu: Right, because as I said, he wanted to stay to the last minute and to try to get his family out if he can. So, then we went to Camp Pendleton. In the meantime, I hadn't heard a thing from him, so I thought "Oh, my God, maybe this is the end." So we were in camp about three weeks when someone said they were calling me to the office, because we had a trailer that served as the main office, and I thought maybe they just wanted me to help in the office, but I went in and there stood Wei's friend. Luckily I knew that friend back in Saigon and he said he had just heard from Wei. He's in Fort [Chaffee]. So that was the first time I heard. Then a week later I got his first letter. He went to [Fort Chaffee] in Arkansas and so after he got out of camp, well he got sponsored to Louisiana and he worked there for a while as a [ ] helper. Then he flew to California and then I went back to Louisiana with him for about five months and I got pregnant with Lei and I wanted to come back here to be with my parents. So we stay here since then.

Hensley: How long were you here in California before you finally heard from him, a month or so, or before you finally got together at least, before he flew out and took you back to Louisiana?

Vu: We went to Camp Pendleton in May for six months and he flew out in the end of October.

Hensley: How did you like Louisiana?

Vu: It's okay. It's too humid though and oh my I hate roaches! At night you could hear them fly across the room. Oh, we had roaches back in Vietnam too, but oh, I can't stand them. See, like in hot weather in the summertime after you take a bath, after you get out you're all sweaty again, see. It's so humid. That's why I didn't like it that much. But I think New Orleans is very interesting. Well, we lived in [ ] City which is about the same as from Stockton to San Francisco, so almost every other week we went to New Orleans. It was quite interesting.

Hensley: What is your husband doing now?

Vu: He's a mechanic now, working at Holt Motors. Do you know Holt Motors? It's a really big company.

Hensley: How long has he been working there?

Vu: Not very long. He just switched. Let's see, five or six months.

Hensley: What was he doing when you first came to California? What kind of job did he get? Did he have a hard time finding one?

Vu: Yeah, but I think he's always been lucky with his jobs. It wasn't the kind of job that he wanted, you know, but at least it was a job. One of the first jobs he did was a station attendant.

Hensley: Where at?

Vu: Ah Tye Brothers, a Chinese station on the corner of El Dorado and Lafayette. It's still there. Then he came to Pepsi Cola, just as a CETA worker and then he was laid off. Then he was jobless for a while, but not for very long. Then he worked with A and A Tool Rentals as a mechanic and now Holt Motors.

Hensley: How does he feel about not being able to go on and finish his education and to be doing this work?

Vu: Very frustrated. He tries to hide it, but there are times when he just explodes, and I understand. Especially now that he is working rather closely with engineers at Holt Motors more and he's realizing that they don't have much more knowledge than he does. It's just the degree that makes the difference. He's very eager to go back to school. He's taking electronics and mechanical engineering now.

Hensley: Where at?

Vu: Well, right now, he's at Delta and then he is going to transfer to Sacramento. But it's hard you know. He's working ten hours a day and going to school three nights a week. It takes time. But like you say, it's never too late.

Hensley: I just think it would be really hard for him and then his coworkers because.

Vu: It's an adjustment that you have to make because before we leave, a lot of us have made that choice. Either freedom or... Either you leave or you stay. If you leave then you have to have in mind all the perspectives and all the things that could happen, so you have to make sacrifices, that's for sure. You can't have it all. But at least here you have the opportunity to go ahead and climb up if you want to, [it depends on you]. If you stay there in Vietnam, there is no future.

Hensley: Here in your family, you and your husband and Lei, who had the upper hand? Who do you think influences more, you or he?

Vu: Influences more? With Lei you mean?

Hensley: Uh huh, who influences Lei the most?

Vu: I really don't know. I think it's mostly he, I think. While Lei's very close to me and she loves me very much, but I can see, we can both see the difference in how she acts with him. Well, she loves him that's for sure, but she admires him a lot too, and I don't know. It's like well, she looks up to him a lot. So, I think he has more influence and she listens to him more than she does to me.

Hensley: She minds him better probably.

Vu: Yeah.

Hensley: I didn't mean that like she doesn't mind you. Do you and he ever have any problems here, between yourselves? Major problems?

Vu: Major problems in our marriage? No, no, I don't think we do. Well, we've had problems of course, but not major ones. I think all the times we've quarreled that it was my fault because he is a fantastic guy, you know. I think he is spoiling me too much and sometimes, I don't know, I think I'm demanding too much. Maybe I want too much too quick.

Hensley: Demanding in what respects? In material things?

Vu: Yes, sometimes in material things. He's trying to be a provider, but he wants to do more than he can and that sometimes leads to frustration and things like that. So I think I'm

usually the one who is at fault. I know that I am. I'm trying to change, you know, to do my best, but there are still things. I'm impossible really!

Hensley: Would he mind if you were to go back to school or if you were to try to work?

Vu: Would he mind? No. Like I said, I can almost do anything that I want to do. Because he gives me, you know, like carte blanche. Yeah, I can do anything I want to, but on one condition, that I be happy. Because if I'm happy then he is happy, but if I'm not happy then he can't be happy.

Hensley: Who handles finances, takes care of the bills?

Vu: I do.

Hensley: Who makes most of the decisions regarding Lei.

Vu: Well, we both do.

Hensley: Does he help you take care of her?

Vu: Yeah. Like now, well she's still getting up at night if she needs something and when he sees that I'm tired then he gets up with her. When she was younger, he changed her diapers and things like that. I'm really fortunate I'm telling you.

Hensley: Does he ever help you with the house or the cooking? Especially when he wasn't working, did he help you?

Vu: Yes, he did and he still does now because he washes the dishes and he vacuums. I don't vacuum.

Hensley: You're rotten.

Vu: No, well I mop the floors and I dust. Sometimes when there's company, you know and things like that, he cleans the windows. He helps me a lot. He's very Americanized. Well, he seems to be more comfortable with Americans now than with Vietnamese.

Hensley: Oh really?

Vu: Yeah.

Hensley: Why?

Vu: He's getting really warm with his coworkers and he has a very open mind for one thing. Yeah, I think that helps a lot.

Hensley: What's your greatest satisfaction as a mother? What would you like to see Lei accomplish more than anything? What are your greatest concerns?

Vu: Well, for satisfactions I would say being able to be with her because I think I value that more now after I was working a while. I missed seeing her while I was working with Catholic charities. I was working about eight or eight and a half hours a day so I didn't see her much. I'm so fortunate to have my mother as a babysitter with her. Well, I saw her in the morning when I took her to my mother's, but most of the time she was still sleeping in the car. Then at night when I got home around six thirty, then I was too tired to be able to really be with her and enjoy being with her. What I value now is the time I am spending with her and doing the little things with her, you know, like go to the super market, go to the store and get the goodies for her or clothes. I also enjoy the school things and to be able to take her and there, just be able to laugh with her and know her. She's a complicated child. She has a complex personality you could say. She's very stubborn for one thing and she won't do what you want her to do, at the time. Then after you've expressed your anger or your frustration and after you've turned your back then she does it, but she won't do it before then, no matter what. So, I'm having very hard times with her.

Hensley: It's probably just a phase she's going through, maybe?

Vu: Yeah, I'm hoping so. It's still very valuable to me.

Hensley: And what's your greatest concern? What do you want to see her do or be or cultivate?

Vu: Uh...

Hensley: Throughout her life, not just as a child.

Vu: Well, most of all I just want her to be happy in whatever she does later on and I wish that she had a profession she really likes because there's nothing more miserable than doing something that you don't really care for. I don't care if she's an engineer or a scientist, just that she will find happiness and be happy with her life. I don't care that much about titles, you know, just as long as you're happy and you make people around you feel happy.

Hensley: What would you think about an interracial marriage?

Vu: Interracial marriage? That's fine. Well, if she finds the right person and she's sure of the love she will get and she's sure of the happiness then it's okay. I'm sure that we will be happy about it, too.

Hensley: Does your husband have any differing views in raising Lei?

Vu: Yes, I think so. He thinks that I'm not being firm enough. Well, it's just minor things you know, like I should be more firm, and not let her manipulate me. Actually, he would be very open to all kinds of things, but he really cares to get a good education, both inside the home and outside the home too. We care a lot about that.

Hensley: Is he still in contact with his family?

Vu: Yes, we still write and we still send goods to them.

Hensley: Would there be any way that you could go back there for a visit?

Vu: Not that I can see for now, not until there's any kind of relationship between the States and Vietnam because I don't think the States has recognized Vietnam as a [ ].

Hensley: How do you feel about that? Do you feel any hostilities toward the U.S. at all for that?

Vu: I don't really know. I still have a lot of mixed feelings. I don't know if there is something to do with it, but like, what would you think if I told you that I don't feel like I'm ready yet to become a U.S. citizen, even though I'm eligible to apply for my citizenship now after five years you know?

Hensley: Why do you think that you're not ready to apply for citizenship? Do you not feel close to this country or?

Vu: Yes, uh huh. I cannot feel that close yet to this country. And I think it's mostly because I don't know most of its people yet, so that's why I'm still sort of scared.

Hensley: Sure.

Vu: There is still, well nothing anymore is new to me because like you said, I seem to be very assimilated, but still inside me there is something that says there is still something strange, something that I don't think I understand to the very heart of it.

Hensley: Do you think it's just the U.S. or do you think it's probably all the western world?

Vu: Yeah, it could be that. It could be just a country that is so much different from ours. I don't know, but I have that feeling that I wouldn't feel that strange if it were a European country though.

Hensley: Oh really?

Vu: Yeah. I think maybe that is because of the French influence that we've had, but I think there would still be that feeling, not to feel really at home, really integrated yet, that you can only be a part of it.

Hensley: How does your husband feel about becoming an American citizen?

Vu: Oh, he's applied now.

Hensley: Oh really?

Vu: Yeah, like I said, he's very Americanized. I wouldn't say Americanized, but maybe westernized and so he doesn't have the objections that I do and the major reason why he is doing it that he is hoping to get his family out, you know, because if you are a citizen then you can petition for your own immediate family to get out if the Vietnamese will let them out. He's trying that.

Hensley: How do you feel about American politics?

Vu: I don't know that much about politics.

Hensley: Do you know much about the legal systems here?

Vu: Yes, well not much, but...

Hensley: Being a lawyer, how do you see out democracy and freedoms here?

Vu: Well, I value freedom very much. That's what we came here for, but I think it has its pros and cons too, like everything else. If you abuse it, if you abuse your freedom, then it's not going to produce good things.

Hensley: Do you feel that it really exists here?

Vu: Democracy? I think it does, maybe not democracy in its whole because I do know there are a lot of [influences] that you have to be aware of, but I think it exists, maybe not a hundred percent, but at least eighty percent.

Hensley: How do you feel about the Women's Liberation Movement?

Vu: Well, like I said, I don't get involved much in the different movements that go on, but I don't take it seriously, well except for...

END OF TAPE

Hensley: Would it be accepted in Vietnam do you think?

Vu: The Women's Liberation Movement?

Hensley: Uh huh.

Vu: Well, yeah, I think so, but it would run into a lot of opposition, especially from men of course. But I think in the end it would be accepted because like I said, towards the end of 1975 or even before that, we had women entering politics and women attorneys. We were pretty much in favor of it as far as the liberation was concerned. Well of course there was still a lot of criticism going around against those women, but still there were quite a few that were very much into it.

Hensley: Do you think men here act very much different towards women than do men there, in Vietnam? Do you think men in Vietnam respect women more and aren't as much of womanizers as men here are?

Vu: There is a bit of difference, I've noticed. I think men here act more equally to women. I think well maybe this is just on the outside, but like, you know, in everyday life they don't show women the courtesy of respect that women are usually due, but I can only speak of Vietnam. I don't go out a lot, but I've noticed usually when two companions go together they, like before they enter a car, the man rarely opens the door for the women. Well, men still open doors for women, but not all men do that. But in Vietnam, I don't know, but I think men show their love more. I'm not sure if that's respect or well non-respect, but sometimes if you look down on women sometimes you feel obliged to help because you consider them weaker than you are, so that's why you help them. It may be another form of, what should I say...

Hensley: Patronizing?

Vu: Yeah, uh huh, or it could be just the difference in customs, but I think here men regard women as their equal more and I don't know if that's better or not.