

Houston Asian American Archive
Chao Center for Asian Studies, Rice University

Interviewee: Nguyen-Son Le-Hang (Dolly Brenneman)
Interviewers: Sara Davis, Daniel Ngo
Date/ Time of Interview: March 20, 2018, 3:30pm
Transcribed by: Sara Davis, Daniel Ngo
Edited by: Sara Davis, Daniel Ngo, Mai Ton (5/17/18)
Audio Track Time: 1:15:27

Background:

Dolly Brenneman was born with the name Nguyen-Son Le-Hang in Bien Hoa, Vietnam in 1952. She spent her childhood in Vietnam and Paris where she attended American schools. She first came to the United States for college in Buffalo, New York. After working for a few years post graduation, she moved to Houston with her husband. Dolly discusses her experiences growing up during the war, living in Houston as a Vietnamese-American, and her involvement in the Houston community.

Setting:

The interview took place on March 20, 2018 in Fondren Library at Rice University.

Key:DB: Dolly Brenneman

SD: Sara Davis

DN: Daniel Ngo

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]

Interview Transcript:

SD: So, it is March 20th and we're here at Fondren Library with Ms. Dolly Brenneman and I'm Sara.

DN: And I'm Daniel.

SD: And we're interviewing Ms. Brenneman for the Houston Asian American Archive.

DB: Hello. [all laugh]

SD: Um, so, to start off the interview can you tell us, um, where you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

DB: Sure, I was born in a town called Bien Hoa, Vietnam, and that's about fifteen miles away from Saigon, which is the – was the capital city of South Vietnam. And what was your other question?

SD: Um, just a little bit about your childhood.

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DB: Oh, that's a big question. [laughs] Um, first of all, actually Dolly is not my, uh, uh, native name when I was born. So, I was born with the name Le-Hang Son-Nguyen, right. And so, actually we say it backward, Nguyen-Son Le-Hang, because we always have the last name first and then the middle and then the, the first name last. Right, that's Asian way. Uh, so, Dolly was given to me when I went to American school in third grade. Um, there was an American school there when I was phased into it, so that's, um, so that's a little bit of my childhood. Um, I grew up, uh, uh, uh, in Vietnam, but I went to s—uh, I mean in-in, uh, I was born in Bien Hoa, but actually my parents have also a house in Saigon, where I went to school. And so, my grandparents took care of us, uh, because that's where the schools are. And so, on the weekend we would go home and see my parents. And, uh, so I kind of a bifurcation (bifurcation), you know, of, um, my life from the get go of, uh, half of the time, actually more than half the time, with my grandparents, and the other kind of like weekends and vacation time, and so, um, uh, I-I had kind of like a choppy, uh, early childhood because my, um, my school was, uh, closed when, um, uh, when the American escalated the war in Vietnam. So, uh, it was unsafe for th-the contingents who were Americans there. Uh, that's why the school existed in the first place, to support the children of the diplomats and the officers. And so, because of that, um, I suddenly didn't have a school to go, and that was in 1965.

DN: How old were you then?

DB: Uh, I was born in 1952, and so, let's do our math real quick. [laughs] So, and then I guess I was about twelve, thirteen. **[DN: Mhmm]** And, um, uh, the, uh, uh, so the missionaries, uh, there were a group of, uh, American missionaries there. They kind of like have a very, uh, kind of makeshift, uh, uh, school for a few of us, you know. And actually, I was one of the few lucky Vietnamese families that get to send to-to-to get admitted there because of security reason and my parents were very connected, and so that's why I get to be there. But I'm one of thirteen children in my family, and the rest of them all went to French school, and I was the only one that went to this American school. So, you know, I've always had like a very different, uh, background, even comparatively with the rest of my family. And, uh, so, it was a little lost time in a way, you know, and then so, uh, my parents started applying for me to, to go abroad. And it was a tough thing because they did not know where to send me. And so, uh, I was very close to being able to come to United States, uh, a couple years after the school, the American school was closed, but then in 1968, um, Sharon Tate, uh, was murdered by Charles Manson, you know about that story, and my parents thought America was too violent. [laughs] They don't know what it's like today. And so, um, so, uh, they decided not to send me to, uh, America, and so, they started to apply for me to go to Switzerland, or to England, this and that, and finally they just decided, well they're going to send me to Paris, which is already have some of brothers and sisters were already in college. So, I went to a boarding school in, um, it's run by the Marymount American nuns. They run Marymount Loyola there also in New York City. So, they have this small boarding school there and that's where I finished up my high school there. Um, I don't want to, you know, if you want me to talk more there's just so much more, but you know, but that's kind of like, I'm-I'm think more on the level of like education, **[DN: Mhmm]** and so, anything sort of you want me to talk to you about?

SD: Um, can you maybe describe the neighborhood that you grew up in, in – where your parents lived and then where your grandparents lived?

DB: Oh, uh, okay, well I think you know what would be more interesting for you to know my perspective of the war, because that's a big influence of that whole period, **[SD: Okay]** for not just the me, but the world actually, **[SD: Right]** United States too, as well. Um, I, so, I think it's more insignificant about, you know, the house I live in, but I'll tell you that background. The reason my parents sta—is in Bien Hoa is because my father, um, uh, was a physician and he owned his own private hospital in Bien Hoa, and so that's where he practiced. So, he wasn't going to move, you know, that's where he, uh, also was from. He – and, uh, but my – so, um, so my grandfather was a principal, um, in Saigon, uh, m-my maternal

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grandfather. And so, its natural because so then, you know, he keeps us with making sure we're in school, we do our homework. The setting of being with my grandparents is almost like being in a boarding school, we all have rows of, you know, desk at home to do our homework with the lights and all of that. And, uh, we were all good, you know, students, um, and on the weekend, we would be driven to, um, to-to-to-to Bien Hoa. Um, I – my father, uh, was, uh, uh, when he went to medical school, uh, back then it was a French medical school, so it was in Hanoi, and that's North Vietnam. But my dad came from the South. Back then there was no country being split up yet, right? [DN: Mhmm] This is way, way back. And who – are you Vietnamese?

DN: Yes, I am.

DB: Yeah, so I was wondering about that. So, this may be interesting for you. I have a very unique story, which is why PBS taped me. Um, um, so, um, uh, my father, when he graduated, uh, from, uh, the medical school, it was run by the French, so he joined the French Legionnaires, uh, for a short period of time. And then when the French, um, started to give up the country and then Ho Chi Minh was starting to lead the nationalist movement to, uh, take away, uh, to reclaim the country, [DN: Mhmm] uh, my father then joined the nationalist movement. And so, then he start fighting against the French and th—also the Japanese, [DN: Mhmm] you know, anyone who wanted to invade us at that moment in time. So, my father was the – actually the medic chief, and so he was actually, uh, the strategist (-- thiên giáo), so he actually worked with Ho Chi Minh. So, he was the right – you know, so he was very much aligned, uh, and part of that nationalist movement. And, uh, meanwhile, um, he was already, um, married to my mom back in, uh, Bien Hoa, and so he alrea—they already had a child, my oldest sister, who's twelve years older than me. And so, um, then he realized that as time goes on, things were shifting, and so he realized that, uh, Ho Chi Minh was becoming more socialist and communist and that's not what he agreed with. So, then he, um, uh, and also because the fact that he knew he wouldn't want to be, you know, part of the war. He wanted to come home and be with my, uh, my-my mother and my sister. And so he, uh, he spoke to, um, Ho Chi Minh to let him go south to help fight the war in the south and to open up, you know, [DN: Mhmm] whatever it is. It's okay for me to say this I guess, but it was his intention to really just go home [DN: Mhmm], you know. But he was a doctor, he was not a soldier, and so, um, uh, he-he told Ho Chi Minh, he said, uh, "Look," you know, "I need to protect myself." Back then it's not a matter of like you fly home, you know, you take a train home, you have to probably – this part I-I'm a little muddy there and I wish – but both my parents are dead, so I can't really ask them anymore. But, um, uh, he somehow made it home, uh, by foot, but Ho Chi Minh gave him his gun actually to protect himself, so for the longest time he had that as well in the – I don't know. So, um, anyway, uh, so, you know, so then he started to, uh, back in 1948, that's when my, one of my older sister was born. How I know that because that's when he open up his, um, his, uh, his, uh, his, uh, his hospital. And, uh, so I was born in 1952, my father actually delivered me. [SD: Wow] And, um, because he was, you know, back then family doctors, [DN: Mhmm] you do everything. [DN: Yeah] Yeah, yeah, and, um, so, uh, so the unusual other part about that is, um, I come from a very large family, uh, just like everything is large, everything is just a lot of people. [DB and SD laugh] Um, my grandparents on the maternal side, um, they have ten kids, and so, you know, when my grandparents were taking care of us, that means we were intermingle with my aunts and uncles. In fact, some of my aunts were younger than my oldest sister. You know, [DN: Mhmm] because my mother was the oldest daughter, and so, you know, with my – when you have a lot of kids it's kind of like my mother had her first child when she – my older sister – when she – my daugh—my mother was nineteen. So, you know, so that's kind of like, um, how that happened. And, uh, so, we were always, like, very large and, um, so it was a lot of fun, but, they all went to different school, so. Uh, what e—what else can I say? So, oh yeah, so then, slowly because the war escalated so it was very unsafe, so my parents had to send my older brothers and sisters to Paris. And, so, my oldest brother was the oldest one who went to medical school there, so then he started to send the – my next brother and then my three older sisters, so then I was next. It was sort of like [DN: Mhmm] as we go, uh, down younger and younger he start shipping us off. So, the funny part about me, how I, uh, uh, left Vietnam – it was very

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difficult then to-to-to leave. Not just to—because [DN: Yeah] you have money you can leave, so you have to have also connection, and you have to have arrangement, you know. So, the arrangement for me was that, um, in order to leave – and it took them almost a year before I—they could secure a passport for me to leave, but when I left, uh, that was for my junior year in-in boarding school by now, um, and, uh, so I left as a way of going to a convent in-in-in-in, uh, in-in Paris. And, uh, you know, under the auspicious of the help of the, the archbishop. [DN: Mhmm] And, uh, so that's how I was able to, you know – so that's why the priest always tease me, they say that they'll – when I'm really ready to go to convent they carry the suitcase in for me [DB and SD laugh]. So, um, yeah, uh, anyways, so, when I went to, uh, Paris then there was a very small, very small boarding school. There's – when I graduated, counting me, it's twelve kids.

DN: Wow.

DB: Yeah, it's like tiny, tiny, you know, it's a very exclusive, and everyone is from all over the world, right, because they – we just get, I wouldn't call it dumped there, but it's sort of that. [SD laughs] And, um, and so, uh, so then it was natural for me, you know, to apply to come to United States. I wanted to do that, and I—but I did it on my own, you know. So then I got the scholarship to come here because it would – I could have stayed in France because there is a, uh, a co—a university there, the Pa—th-the American University in Paris, but, you know, why there? I want some adventure. So... [SD laughs]

DN: Mhmm.

SD: How did you choose, um, to go to college in New York?

DB: Well it was very—

SD: Or was it just coincidence, what was available?

DB: Well, you know, that is very interesting. I felt like it was going to be fate. Everybody I asked in that little school I was in, they would tell me to go to their hometown, so I figured that, okay, I kind of know the quadrant where I wanted to go, which was in the northeast, because then I can fly home easy to-to see my family in Paris. Oh, then when, uh, uh, in 1971 my parents just, uh, right shortly after I left Paris to come to college, my parents, uh, left the whole country and moved there. So, they still, they still have their home there and everything, but then my oldest sister's brother, I mean husband, was a doctor, so he took care of my father's, uh, hospital. He took over and my sister was a pharmacist, so we're all healthcare people, [DN: Mhmm] we have tons of doctors in my family, and, uh, pharmacists, all healthcare stuff. So, um, uh, yeah, so I-I don't know what the—do they still have the college handbook nowadays?

SD: Mmm...

DB: It's all on computer now.

DN: Yeah, probably.

DB: Yeah, well, back then there's this thick thing, sort of like the yellow page, you've heard of the, [DN: Mhmm] you know, the phone? Okay, for the choosing college it's in a white, thick book like this [DN: Mhmm] and you flip open and – so, I knew the area I wanted to be, so I just flip into sort of those areas. Eenie, miney, mo. So, I say I'm going to apply to four colleges. [DN and SD laugh] And, uh, but it—they had to be within, you know, what I'm looking for, liberal, you know, college, small because I've always gone to a small setting, so I didn't want to be overwhelmed. And I applied to all four, and all four actually

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gave me scholarship. [SD: Wow] But, uh, the one that is in Buffalo, New York was the one with the, uh, presidential scholarship, so they paid for everything for me, uh, except for room and board [DN:Mhmm], you know, but, um, the whole four year they guarantee that, and so it was just something that easy, you know.

DN: Mhmm.

SD: Right.

DB: Um, um, yeah, and I wanted to become, um, a lawyer. I – actually, the-the essay that I wrote to apply, and that how I got the scholarship, was I wanted to be a, um, a judge. I wanted to be a, um, juvenile delinquent judge. Because I, uh, I felt like, you know, it's always good to help, uh, the young generation to be prepared for their future, and I kind of like, I believe part of that social justice in me already being raised Catholic and helping people that are underserved and all of that. So, I wanted to – I just – it just a little part of that for me, I don't know why, you know, I mean even look back now, I say how do I get there because nobody in family are lawyers, you know. And, uh, so I think, uh, that must have struck the nuns, because this is also went to a nun school, so I'm always the nuns, you know, setting. Um, and, uh, and, uh, I think that maybe, uh, swaying them as well, as you know, but when I got into the college I realize, and I came here and then the country, you know, fell apart in '75. So, our country's lost and everything, and so I knew I had to really be on my own. Literally, I was sitting in, um, I actually did my internship, um, on my senior year in, uh, in, uh, Boston. And, uh, it was with Children's Hospital, and I just did a – I stay at Children's Hospital, which is next door to Harvard. And, um, but I was doing a tour around all those hospitals in Buffalo – I mean in Boston. And while I was sitting there one day I saw all the tanks rolling into Saigon and all of that [DN: Mhmm], you know, so it was a very, uh, emotional time for me in a way, you know. And I was just sitting alone there, and nobody understand, you know, all these kids they don't know what's going on, you know, so I felt a little alone there. [DN: Mhmm] But I don't think – I-I'm not a dramatic person, so I guess, you know, nobody know that, but now I look back I say, wow, you know. And back then there were no Asians to talk to [DN: Yeah], you know, very little. In fact, you can count on your hand even if you go to big university, but I in my—I was the first, uh, Asian in my college. [SD: Wow] That's why they gave me the scholarship too I think, you know, just for a little bit of diversity I guess. Um, so yeah, so, you know, li—the country has changed dramatically that I see in front of me [DN: Yeah] in this country. Um, you know, going to have even Asian food, for example, here was, you know, today it's like, it's no big deal, right, you know, you have your choice of the best or the crummy one or whatever, but back then you just go out one so it's the best. [all laugh] You know, and there's no Vietnamese food for sure back then, right. And, um, so, um, yeah it was dramatic time, and, um, but the other thing that's interesting is, uh, when, in 1975 okay, so suddenly the country's gone. Here I have a South Vietnam passport. I came from Paris, so suddenly I'm a person of no country.

DN: Mhmm

DB: And that is very dramatic. Uh, so then, uh, now I start applying fo-for jobs. And they ask, you know, now my F-1 visa expire, which is a student visa. So, um, so luckily, uh, I-I-I actually, uh, the first year I got the job, um, the hospital didn't ask me for it. Uh, I actually had a degree in, um, Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management. And, um, so then, um, but then I – when I quit that job, um, I-I wanted to apply to work for Case Western Reserve University, uh, uh, uh, biometry school, which is – I mean biometry department, part of the medical school. And that's statistics there, you know, and, um, and so, um, because I was doing research work and, um, and that was interesting for me, and I was thinking of getting a master, and so that would be nice [DN: Mhmm], you know, get a free tuition and all of that. [DN: Yeah] And, um, so, uh, but at Case they were willing to sponsor me. Um, they said, but they under federal grand so I have to apply, so luckily, this is for the onslaught everything, plus, you know, when I apply, because they know the wars, you know, Americans lost the war and all of that. So, um, you know,

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shortly a year or so after that I got my green card, so that was no big deal for me after that. Um, but it is interesting, you know, uh, when I applied for the, uh, for the green card, uh, the INS, uh, label me as deportable alien. Yeah, yeah, back then already, see, um, and that's the status they gave me. So, um, so it was a little unnerving, you know, to be considered like deportable alien, I never forget that term, you know, it's the first time I heard that. Today it's no big deal, right, with all of these craziness. But, uh, back then, I thought, well that's so disrespectful to call somebody an alien, you know [DN: Mhmm], and deportable, you know, why don't you give some – and the funny thing is I even challenge them, like this is a joke, but it's kind of like insulting because America's trying to fight the war for years to gain inde— you know, supposedly to free us and all of that, and now you want to deport me back to Vietnam? That didn't make sense.

DN: Yeah.

DB: Anyway, yeah.

SD: So, you mentioned you were the first, um, Asian person admitted to your college. Did you ever face any sort of discrimination, um, from other students or when you were applying to jobs or anything like that?

DB: Yes, I did, but I was too naïve to be bothered by it, you know. Maybe because there were – nobody talking about it, [SD: Right] [DN: Mhmm] so you just roll on to the next thing, you know. But now that I look back, yes, I did face discrimination, but I don't, again, I'm not a dramatic reactive person, so that's a blessing for me, right, um, because it didn't – it just roll off for me, but, uh, you know, I'm a little feisty, you know, I'm independent, so big fat deal, you know. Um, but, uh, when I was in college, um, after the first year I got out of th-the dorm thing I didn't want to li—because the problem with the dorm back then is that, uh, when the holidays come they shut down. It's not like today, I don't know what it's like today, but then I had to have a place to go. [DN: Yeah] Right, so I'm always having to bump into, you know, people that I ask for favor if I can stay with them, and so that wasn't very, um, steady for me. So, I ended up of, uh, leaving the dorm on the second year and I started to rent, and that's when I faced discrimination. So, see I... the, uh, college I was, uh, going to is like West U here, you know, it's in a very ritzy, uh, upscale, uh, neighborhood. [DN: Yeah] And, uh, it's called Amherst, New York. And, so – or Schneider even, if you want to constrict to the little pocket there. And, um, so, I knock on the door – because, you know, these people put notice on the school bulletin saying they have room for rent, uh, which is walking distance to the campus, so that's why I went, and the women say, sure come over, because my English was always very good already, you know, because I went to American school since I was a little kid, so I didn't have any accent, so I guess she didn't picked it up. Plus, she didn't expect, right, because I was the only Asian in the school. [DN: Yeah] So, as soon as show up and she open up the door, and this like I came within ten minutes, [SD laughs] and, uh, she said, uh, “No, it's not for rent.” Yes, and so, you know, the story you hear today, that's true, [DN: Yeah] uh, uh, but then I went to report to the school. [SD laughs] I report to the school that they allow her to post a note, but then when I show up she said no, so they called her. They called her up and they told her you can't do that. [SD laughs] So, she end up renting to me and I wanted to rent from her, you know, [DN: Wow] [SD laughs] just to show her that.

SD: It worked out.

DB: Yeah, well, that's what I mean, you know, you have to really, kind of like, sometimes teach people, right. [DN: Mhmm] For me, I don't just walk away – sometimes I do, but in this case, I don't know, for whatever reason, you know, and she came to respect me very much.

DN: That's good. [SD laughs]

DB: So, that's just one little story, you know, another discrimination I notice now that I look back is, uh, is in my psychology class that I was taking, uh, we were supposed to do the ex—this experiment where we're supposed to go, uh, to do, uh, in partic—this particular experiment I had, I have to have a partner. And we were to go on the patrol car to the different neighborhoods, uh, during the particular time, you know, this is a psychology class, so they had this theory that during, uh, full moon there are more crimes. So, we were to sit in the patrol car to-to – and it went into this, you know, black neighborhood and all of that, and, you know, and they were talking about drugs that they saw these drug dealers and all of that, that was part of that, 1971, '72, [SD laughs] you know. And, um, but it was interesting, in the class, uh, the only person that came and asked if I would be her partner, you know, I didn't have time to really go and ask anyone, she was an African American. And of course, I say yes right away, I don't have a problem, you know, right, I don't know what discrimination is. And, um, but now that I look back, I was probably – she came and ask me because she probably couldn't ask the other white kids, you know. So, I-I don't think of those thing until later on. [SD: Right] Um, but that's part of that whole discrimination thing, you know. Um, um, I think – I think, too, that discrimination goes many ways. Um, uh, I think that, you know, it's called unconscious bias, I don't know you know, but, uh, diversity inclusion is one of my specialty as coaching. And actually, I just finished, uh, sowing up, uh, this diversity summit at which I am co-leading in May, and this our eighteenth year. [SD: Oh] And we have, you know, for corporate people and business, and we have about four, five hundred people come with, you know, multitrack and all of that, and so I'm – I'm dedicated to help people with all this unconscious bias thing, you know, I have my own bias too, and as well as African American have very much bias against me, for example, you know. So, we all – because it's just a matter of aw-awareness and then, you know, you overcome that. Vietnamese people are notorious also for being very bias toward all kinds of things, the Chinese, you know. And so, uh, I happen to know that, you know, it's no secret, we all kind of want to fall into our comfort zone, what we're familiar with. Uh, so in that sense, my understanding is a little bit different too, you know, but even that, um, I had faced discrimination of jobs, um, but I have a lot of, uh, victory stories too, you know, to overcome that. So, um, uh, uh, discrimination is very real and, um, and I think that that's part of why people have, um, war, right, because it has a lot to do with religious, spiritual belief system. Belief system is what people are stuck at. And so, um, anyway, you know, this whole thing, Islam, Jud-Judaism, you know, whatever, Protestant, you know, it start all from the belief system. [DN: Mhmm] They call it religious war, but it's really belief war, uh, so.

SD: Um, so you mentioned that when you went into college you had the idea you wanted to be a judge, but then that's not really what you majored in, and then you went on to business school. So, when did your interests sort of change?

DB: Oh, because I knew that my parents couldn't really support me after, you know, undergrad because of the end of the war. Um, I already also shift and I realized I did not know, uh, that it could be hard, it could be long, and I have to be self-supporting to go to law school, and it was very expensive, all of that. And so, um, my father got sick, and so, they couldn't really be the, uh, sending me, uh, the support that I was looking for. So, I just wanted to get into, uh – actually, that's not a business degree. That's a, that's a, that's a management degree. Yeah, that's a technical management degree in health care. And so, that's why it's a Bachelor of Science. And, um, and I kind of knew that at some point I would be drifting into something bigger than that, you know? And, uh, so that was just a stop gap for me that I would be guaranteed a job, because that's very true. I got a job before I graduated, you know, and like, you know, it's-it's no big deal. And that's – one of my roommates, uh, was majoring in this. I never heard of it before. So, as I talk to her I said, "That sounds good enough, I guess I'll do that." [all laugh] You know, yeah. I was – you know, I'm still trying to figure out what I'm going to do when I grow up now. [laughs] So, yeah, that's how come that happened.

SD: Okay, and so then you came to Houston after college, right?

DB: No, no.

SD: Oh, no.

DB: Oh no. [SD laughs] I did a tour around the United States.

SD: Oh okay.

BD: So, that-that next – the job I got out of college is in Cleveland [**SD:** Okay] at Mount Sinai Hospital in Cleveland. And then I went on to Case Western Reserve, which is also in Cleveland. And then, and then after three, uh, years of blizzards in a row [DN and SD laugh] back then, uh, I said, I'm going west. [SD laughs] And I'm going to California, my sister was already there, um, you know, she made it over. And so, I said I want to be closer to her too, but other than that nobody was that, you know, that I'm, uh, blood related was in the United States other than her. So, um, so I, uh, I made my way, um, to San Francisco. [**SD:** Okay] Yeah. And so, I worked there for a few years and then, then, uh, in hospitals too, and then my – I met my husband and he got me here. [**SD:** Okay] That's how I got to Houston.

DN: Oh, okay.

SD: Okay, um, what were your experiences like working in Cleveland and San Francisco?

DB: Working?

SD: Yes.

DB: Life there? [SD laughs] Um, it was interesting, uh, in Cleveland, uh, it's not big and it's not small, and, uh, the-the only thing that stand out for me is that I hang out with a bunch of Filipino people, and they are a lot of fun. [SD laughs] So, we party a lot. And, uh, so, you know, there are like Filipino nurses and doctors, you know, and they were the Asians then, right?

SD: Mmm.

DN: Mhmm.

DB: Um, and, uh, because the Vietnamese were already present, but except they are barely scraping, right, to survive, th—for the first slew of them that come. Your parents probably made it here, what year?

DN: Uh, they're both – well my mom came... I am – I'm not sure when my mom came, but my dad came in '75.

DB: Okay, yeah, there you go. So, it's a – it's a struggle at the beginning. Uh, and, um, so-so you know, I mean, but I'm always have friends with all nationalities, you know, because that's the way I-I – because I'm so different, right, so, everybody else is different from me. [all laugh] So, um, uh, so – but I didn't really live there that long, but it was a very fun time. I was almost going to get me master in information system, actually. I start even already taking courses, believe it or not, uh, in machine language and all of that, you know, so it's heavy duty stuff. But, um, then I just didn't finish it off and I went west. And so, in San Francisco was, uh, amazing, you know. I loved the weather, I loved the atmosphere, the spirit of it, there's just so many things to explore. Uh, I always – I go through so much growth there, but even in Cleveland too. Um, I didn't think I would want to leave San Francisco ever, but then when I met my husband, you know, he convinced me to come here, [SD laughs] and-and he did promise me that if I don't

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like Houston in two or three years we'll move. But he didn't move, and, you know, we-we – I have children, so I – we – I'm happy to be here now, yeah.

DN: Mhmm.

SD: Um, how did you and your husband meet?

DB: Uh, at a Halloween party.

SD: Ahh. [SD and DB laugh]

DB: In San Francisco, and, um, and, uh, yeah, um, it was funny because, um, uh, he, uh, he worked for a company. He was sent on a special assignment there, uh, it's Bechtel Corporation, and so their headquarters there, in San Francisco, but he worked for the big division here in Houston. And so, he was sent there on a temporary assignment, so he would have to come back here, he already had a place here, so he convinced me to move here. And, so it's a decision for me, San Francisco or him I guess. [all laugh] Yeah, my parents bought me a beautiful home in, you know, Marin County, I really love it, so it was a hard decision actually. Um, but, uh, you know, you just don't know, you just go, you know, you don't look back, you-you just got to make what you, you know, make your bed, what, you know, [DN: Yeah] so-so.

SD: Um, what neighborhood did you move to when you first came to Houston?

DB: Actually, the Heights.

SD: Oh, okay.

DB: And, uh, so I-I'm a pioneer of the Heights, right? [SD laughs] Back in the 1980-81-81. [DN: Mhmm] And so, um, uh, I actually didn't like it then, because I thought it was dumpy, [DN and SD laugh] dirty, and all kinds of things, you know, houses are old, and I like new stuff, you know, and, uh, so that was a problem. And, um, for me – but, um, the people are friendly and nice, you know. It's a very neighborhood – neighborly neighborhood. Um, and I was very active. Very active in, um, and involved in the community. I was, uh, I started – I did a lot stuff – many of the people I was with, uh, because I belong to what's called the Heights Babysitting Co-Op, so it's only the thirty families that are allowed, and we share bas– you know, with raising children and all of that, and they were all leaders of the community. In fact, many of them went on to become, you know, city council members, and, you know, head of HISD, and all of that, and I was involved in, you know, school reform and you name it, you know. So, uh, I've always been involved in the community.

SD: Okay.

DB: Yeah.

SD: And how many children do you have?

DB: I have two girls.

SD: Two girls?

DB: Yeah.

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SD: Okay. Um, did you, when raising them, try to incorporate any of your Vietnamese heritage into their lives?

DB: Well, I, uh, I think they are integrated in terms of food. [**SD:** Mhmm] I, uh, they-they, uh, but, uh, in terms of language, I did not, because my Ameri—my husband is American [**DN:** Mhmm], you know, he's actually Polish American, that's another mix there. [**DN** and **SD** laugh] And, uh, but, um, my family live in France, so I try to get them to go to French school to, uh, the Alliance Française during the, you know, weekends and all of that, so they can learn – so they can speak to their cousins in Paris. [**SD:** Right] And, um, that's my motivation is, you know, so they can talk to, uh, to the – to my family, uh, and the – even the kids in Paris, they don't speak Vietnamese, you know, the younger generation [**DN:** Yeah] and, so, um, yeah. But in a way, you know, I see some-some people know how to do that, you know, I wish I do that. If I was married to a Vietnamese I think I might – would have been able to do that. But, with, you know, and my ex, he's now my ex-husband, he's not exactly like a language person, you know, uh, oriented person. Um, so yeah, it was just too much I think, and it's not like back then there was not like a big community of Vietnamese [**DN:** Yeah] either, so...

SD: Right. Um...

DB: You have lots of questions there.

SD: Yes, we've gone through a lot of them. Um, so you said that you were very involved in the community. What, um, specific organizations are you involved with? I know the Rothko Chapel is a big one.

DB: Oh, that's like now, you know.

SD: Oh, that's now, okay.

DB: Yeah, right, so, um, for one thing I help run the Heights Babysitting Co-Op for a while. So, wherever I go I will take on a leadership role, you know. [**SD:** Okay] Because I like to make things happen and, um, I want to help out, I'm a service-oriented person. I participate, uh, one of the things when the kids were little is that I started what's called the after school – the enrichment program. So, uh, so that's, uh, my kids went to Montessori School, um, and so, um, I wanted to, uh, uh, help with enriching the kids, you know, until the parents can come pick them up. So, there's a short period of there, so I would, you know, we set up like dancing, uh, we set up, uh, I don't know, I can't remember anymore, all of those classes it's been so long ago. But it was about fun things for them, as well as enriching thing for them, and, um, and, uh, and I did that, so that's one of the thing I did. I also help in starting what's called the Holiday Project, um, you know anything about it?

SD: No.

DB: The volunteer center, uh, still do that today. It's – the idea came from me. And it's like every Christmas we would, um, you know, from donations from the different corporations, um, uh, we would raise enough money to, uh, buy gif—little gifts and we would then go and deliver to the underserved, uh, children in the different schools, as well as nursing homes, and skill nursing. You know, people that are basically, uh, isolated, or, you know, needed a little bit of care and attention. And that was a long time ago, and it's still going on.

SD: Wow.

DN: Nice.

DB: And, uh, the first year that I was there, uh, the people that gave seed money to that was, um, Enron, and then they were called something else, I can't remember now, and Ken Ley was part of it. And he – I still remember him holding the 20,000-dollar check, you know, [SD laughs] and, uh, and Rich Kinder was, you know the Kinder Institute here, he then was working under Ken Ley. So, they were there, and he was still then married to Anne Kinder. Uh, so-so, you know, so it's a long history back then, but that's another thing I do that I'm very proud of. Um, uh, let's see, uh, so then Richmond that, and, you know, participated also in, um, in the neighborhood, uh, looking at, uh, how do we improve public schools. Um, uh, oh yeah, and I served on the parish council, which is my church, and then, you know, it's kind of like a board, you know a thing about parish council. [DN: Mhmm] So yeah, I was on – member of the parish council, I would do like I was head of bazaar for the church. Um, so, you know, just things to keep me busy, to the point where one day my ex-husband say, "You know what? You're doing all this stuff, you might as well get paid, so why don't you go back and go to work again?" [Laughs] So then, so then I-I went back to the hospital and work, and then I get promoted, you know. Um, uh, but when I first came to Houston, Here-here's another discrimination story, that's a great story to go on record. [SD laughs] Um, so when I first came to Houston I decided, well okay, I've got some of these, um, management background, I know a lot about records management, and I know this and that, so then I, you know, again back to the old days where you can look at the newspaper and that's how you know where the job postings are. No internet, right, so I saw this big ad, this is literally like within the first month or so that I arrived here in Houston. It said a financial – a large financial institution was looking for a records manager. Well I wanted to kind of to get away from the hospital, try something new, [DN: Mhmm] you know, so I responded to that, but it was a recruiter. And, so I went, I go—I got interviewed by the recruiter, but the moment I opened the door she saw me, I could tell, she was – because I had already an American name, right, Dolly. So, I could tell that she was like, you know, like, "Oh no, not you." Uh, and, um, and so she didn't followed up to line me up with, uh, the employer, and so, when I didn't hear back from her I decided I'm going to look at the yellow page and I'm going to look – I don't know any financial institutions here, but I'm going to look for the biggest ads [All laugh] in the, in the yellow page, you know, financial institutions that list lots of things, you know, there then the call member rings (?), and it was called Texas Commerce Bank, and now it's Chase, you know, they bought them out [DN: Mhmm]. And so, I just called up the personnel department and I say, "I wonder if you have this job," you know, and they say, "Yeah, just a minute." The person literally put me on hold, and then connect me to the exact the recruiter of the bank and I end up with that job. And, uh, and then it's even more funny. On the first day I was there, I went to the person, you know, to get all my paperwork signed all this stuff, and then I, as I leave the department I was standing at the elevator, waiting for the elevator, then I can take it to go to where my office is. Elevator door open, it was that recruiter. [DN and SD laugh] She lost out, I said, "Oh, I got the job here." It was like – it was a great story, right. [DN: Mhmm] Um, so, uh, that's another discrimination, I'm sure, you know, because I don't think she thinks that, you know, they may want me.

DN: Yeah.

SD: Um, so you've been in Houston for a while now. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen since you've been here?

DB: Oh, I see the, um, uh, the, uh, the increase, uh, in the diversity. Um, the richness of that. I see, um, I see, uh, a, um, the growth in so many way, you know, in terms of industries. They've always had oil and gas. [DN: Mhmm] They've always had Rice University, but everything seems to be much bigger, right? And, um, and the healthcare continue to grow. The medical center has always been here. Uh, but I think it's the infusion of, um, different nationalities, immigrants that arrive here. Uh, the best thing I like about Houston is the, um, the number of restaurants now available for us [SD laughs] to go out [DN: Quite a few] compared to back then. You know? Um, and I think also, um, we ha—we have an increase in the

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images that we have that back then I think is more—it's not cow town ever, but that's the image people have of us. I think it's more and more, now, going away. Um, but we have a different perception now because we're an oil and gas, uh, uh, city, so people who are on the liberal side of other part of the world compa—you know comparatively, like, I say, California of Europe, they still think this as a redneck, you know, conservative area. So, I think that that's also slowly going away. So, perception of people, you know, like even my family, you know, coming here to visit me they were shock. [DN laughs] They were shock when they came for my daughter's wedding last fall, how progressive we are, how beautiful the town is, you know, how this and that, yeah. So—the one that never came here yet.

DN: Mhmm.

SD: Um... what do you like to do for fun?

DB: What do I like to do for fun?! I like to cook. I-I li—I enjoy entertaining friends. I love to – it's just very therapeutic for me. I, uh, I just enjoy meeting new people, you know, that's why I go to a lot of events. Um, uh, I, um... I love to learn. I lo—I'm always, you know, um, going to this seminar, that workshop, this webinar, this, you know, bowl (?), this, you know, talk, you know. When I turn on TV, it's really about to be informed, you know, it's not about watching for entertainment of all the, you know, cop show type thing. That's not for me. [SD laughs] **[DN: Mhmm]** You know. Uh, so, uh, and I like to help people. I-I like to, uh, like for example, I got selected, uh, uh, to help the Harvey impacted, uh, communities by providing the psychosocial recovery work. So, I bring the, um, it's a special program that got, um, a huge grant from the, uh, Greater Houston Community Foundation. Um, to, uh, 'cause now we're in the second phase of recovery, you know. First it was the immediate thing, **[DN: Mhmm]** people got to have a house to live, you know, get safe, safety ground, get food and shelter type thing. But now it's really getting into more of the mental and the psychosocial thing, and that's where we step in. So, I just completed eight weeks working with A group to provide them very intensive – it's almost like, uh, a program the skills to overcome, like, for PTSD. **[DN: Yeah]** That's what these people are facing. That's, tha—so, so I'm part of this group. **[SD: Wow]** Yeah. Because of my coaching skills and all of that. So, I get to – it's a special training that we have to go through. It's very effective actually. So, I intend to continue to do this work, uh, as a volunteer, but also take some of the skills and add on to other thing to bring to the corporate world, which is what I'm working on right now to provide workshops to help people. So, I'm always about, you know, making life better for people, so that's what I enjoy doing. Uh, **[SD: That's great]** yeah. Uh, I-I-I like to exercise, I like to, you know, do, uh, um, uh, I don't do enough of it right now, but, um, yeah, because just different reason, but, um, when I was I enjoy, um, um, oh gosh, what do you call that? I can't believe that. Of course, I like it, but, um, Zumba! **[SD: Oh]** **[DN: Oh, yeah]** And, uh, so I was going every week for two or three times, but, um... and I need to get back to that. **[all laugh]** S—yeah. So, that's, I think that's about it. You know, and, of course, with my kids, **[DN: Mhmm]** family time, yeah.

SD: And are both your daughters still in Houston?

DB: Yes, they are, and, um, um, they're, they're both doing very well, and so, yeah, we-we made it a pact that we're always going to be together. **[SD: Aw]** And so, so that, yeah, I'm very blessed. I'm very blessed. 'Cause they, 'cause they could, you know, that's something that, uh, some of my friends say that I'm so lucky. **[laughs]** But, you know, I raised them with the idea that, you know, I have such a small, little family unit, and we're going to hang together. **[SD: Mhmm]** So, um, yeah. Uh, that's a big challenge, you know, to really – as an adult parent and then with adult children, you know, you balance that out. But I think, I think it's all good.

SD: And what would you say is your greatest accomplishment?

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DB: Oh, I'm still living, you know? [SD and DN laugh]

SD: So far.

DB: Um, so, so it looks like it's not the ending yet, so I can't tell. [SD laughs] Um, I, I would like to be healthy enough to live until I'm a hundred and twenty [SD: Wow] I always tell people, so I'm only half way there. So, that's why, to say what's my biggest accomplishment right now, I don't know what to say, uh, other than, maybe, I raised two, two wonderful, responsible children, and they are happy, and they are, uh, good right now. You know, to me, that's a big accomplishment. Um, for me, uh, the other, um... I... fulfilling my purpose in life is not like a book. It's not a movie. [SD: Mhmm] It's ongoing. [SD: Right] And so that's, sort of, I think I'm listening to my own, uh, life's purpose, and I think that's not, I wouldn't call it accomplishment, but I would call it, uh, fulfillment. [DN: Mhmm] So, does that make sense?

DN: Yeah, so I have—

DB: You can keep talking.

DN: I have a bunch of—

SD: You have a bunch of—

DN: —follow up questions, but they're – we're going really far back to the beginning. [SD laughs] So—

DB: Sure!

DN: So, you were saying, um, that your father was pretty closely associated with Ho Chi Minh. So – and then he came South because he wanted to go home. Um, what was your family's perspective on the war then? Did they side with the North? Or—

DB: Oh, no! They're big capitalists, you know. They're, they're, the—no. I mean, uh, so, knowing my father's background, but then knowing that, you know, he actually was very closely aligned with the leaders of South Vietnam. [DN: Mhmm] In fact, all of my brothers and sisters and me, we are all baptized with, uh, godparents, and they were all – because, you know, President Diem was Catholic. [DN: Mhmm] And so, the Secretary of Interior was my sister's, uh, you know, um, uh, godfath—godparents. My, um, my aunt was married to the person, head of the criminal justice. My godparents were, um, uh, the-the known general Huynh Van Cao who was, uh, sort of like, um, not only he was a general, and, you know, in charge of whatever, battalions or whatever, I don't know what you call those things any more, but, um, he was sort of like the strategic, uh, um, um, officer. I-it's like the-the former CIA. [DN: Mhmm] You know, the, that's what they used to be called, but it's for the Vietnamese.

DN: What was his name?

DB: Huynh Van Cao.

DN: Oh, okay.

DB: He's dea—he just died, just only a couple years ago, and he made it. He was actually put into, um, a concentration camp there. [DN: Yeah] And, but hi-his family made it to United States, and they live in Virginia, and then, um, with a lot of intervention, he was able to come, uh, about fifteen years later on. He just died two years ago. He's, you can Wikipedia him. [DN: Mhmm] And, um, uh, in fact, I lost track of

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them until one day I decided to Google – thanks to Google I, um, I-I-I read up about them and I, I – it's one of my intention, unfulfilled intention, uh, is to, uh, to make my trip to Virginia, to DC, and look them up. The two children. And, uh, I need to do that, actually. And – every time I go to DC I have other things to do, you know? Uh, I didn't tell you but another big thing I do is the RESULTS organization. Uh, that's the – for the poverty. Have you guys seen my resumé?

SD: No.

DB: That would have been very good for you, because then you'll know to ask me lots of questions. **[DN:** Mhmm] I have one of the most interesting resúmes, um, because it's all written down. I should probably have come here with it and that way you would know more about, you know, to drill in down. But, uh, yeah, it's always helpful to, um, have a resumé in front of you **[DN:** Mhmm] if you going to interview people, because then, you know, it help me to under—remember too actually.

DN: Yeah. So, you're saying, um, your father was, like, part of the nationalist movement to drive the French out, but then you and your siblings ended up going to French and American schools, and then—

DB: Oh, you want to know even more? **[DN:** So, I was just, yeah, I just] When my father, when my fa—my, my – so my parents made it to France, right? **[DN:** Mhmm] And then they became French citizen and all of that, because it's – because of his French Legionnaire thing and all of that, so when my father died there was a salute with the plane flying because that's the rule for all the French Legionnaire. So, my father had that kind of – it's a, it's a very – so this is what – this story – actually, everyone who knows me know that there are three movies to be made of my family, you know, **[DN laughs]** and me. And so, um, so... let's talk about how war is, you know, um... it really – you stay very fluid... because of the situation changes. **[DN:** Mhmm] And, um, you know, that's not un—diff—that different than American politics now, right? **[DN:** Yup] I mean, I mean I don't need to be saying that. You guys know who I'm implying, right? So, people can – so, whoever is your friend today could be your enemy tomorrow. Whoever is your enemy today could be your friend tomorrow. And, uh, know when my family became very capitalist and, you know, **[DN:** Oh, okay] so know they were very much, uh, against the, uh, the whole communist war, you know, thing. Uh—

DN: Did any of them participate in the war?

DB: Uh, you mean do went to, like—

DN: Like, did anyone fight in the war?

DB: Uh, not my brothers, because they went to France, right, for college. **[DN:** Okay] But, um, but, um, my-my-my uncles, **[DN:** Mhmm] they were in the war. Um, and, um, my cousins, you know. And, uh, actu—as a matter of fact, um, some, some of my relatives were, uh, not e-e-exactly anti-communist, you know. Like I have a cousin who she's live now in, in Austin, but – she's a doctor too, she's a cardiologist – and she decided to stay when the war ended. Sh-she didn't want to leave, because she wanted to help out, but then she suffered so much that, eventually, um, she, she has– that's just another whole story by itself. She made it to United States, you know, and so, um, yeah. So, once my father made it home, then, you know, he just become a, uh, uh, a, you know, a family man, a businessman, and, you know, we own lots of land, **[DN:** Mhmm] uh, so actually when the North Vietnam and South Vietnam was divided into two countries in 19—um—51, or something like that, '50? **[DN:** Yeah, something like that] '4—49? Okay, so, uh, a lot of the North Vietnamese migrated south, you know, the one that's against the communist. And so, when they, uh, situated near Saigon, that was my parents' land. **[DN:** Okay] So, it's, it's Ho Nai. I don't know you know much about that. You can talk to your parents. **[DN:** Mhmm] Are you, are you originally from South or North?

DN: Um, my dad's family migrated from the North to the South. [**DB:** Okay, then he would know] My mom's from the South.

DB: It's called Ho Nai. [**DN:** Okay.] And, uh, it's that whole – outside of Bien Hoa. And, um, that's my parents' land.

DN: Okay.

DB: Yeah. Um, yeah, so, what's your next question?

DN: Um, was anyone in your family – well you said your cousin was, like, stay—decided to stay, um, behind, but—

DB: Not all of them. Many of them left too, you know. They all went to France. I have a thousand relatives in Paris.

DN: Okay.

DB: Somebody counted. A thousand!

SD: Wow!

DN: I was just wondering if, um, you know of any of your family's stories havi—like, leaving the country around '75 when it was the most difficult?

DB: Yes, there – some of them, because I have, uh, my, my second oldest brother, he graduated from one of the big school in Paris. Um, it's like, um, it's, uh, Ecole Polytechnique. Uh, it's, it's like a political, you know, that's like all the French poli-politicians, you know, come out of there, the leaders. But then he decided to go back to Vietnam to-to-to work, [**DN:** Mhmm] and he was like assistant treasurer of the country, and, so then, war, you know, uh, then, so then, he was just, like, trying to see how he's gonna leave or whatever it is, and, one day, when they knock on his door and say they wanted him to join the party, that's like a death nail, uh, because then you have to join [**DN:** Mhmm] or you will die. Uh, they will kill you or they will send you to concentration camp or whatever, and so he had to escape with his family and that's very, that's very treacherous. And he finally made it, but it was not easy. Yeah. So, they were in, you know, the island camp off from the coast of Indonesia or whatever it is, you know. So that's one, my one brother. My oldest sister, the same thing, 'cause they stay there, they did not all leave before the war ended. No, they all had their own tragic story. [**DN:** Mhmm] Not all of us, you know, went ahead. [**DN:** Yeah] Yeah, so, um, so, my oldest sister was like that, my second oldest brother, and then a couple of my younger brother and sister because they didn't make it old enough to go to [**DN:** Yeah] school, you know, so that's, so that was very treacherous time. So, they have their whole boat story, you know. Um, yeah, I was just the lucky one, you know, I never know what it's like to, to be like that, yeah.

DN: Um, can you talk a little bit about, about, uh, I think it was April 30th, 1975. Like whe—you probably watched it on the news. [**DB:** Yes!] A little bit more about how you felt that day?

DB: I was in Boston. I was sitting in this, uh, kind of like a school for nursing boarding, you know, uh, dorm. And I was sitting there watching it, and I saw the tank rolling in, yes. How did it feel? [**DN:** Yeah] Um, I fe—I felt that that is when I-I was sort of young, you know? [**DN:** Mhmm] Uh, my perspective is not like today, but even then, I said, “Oh, there goes – my parents can't go back anymore.” You know, everything we own there's gonna be lost. Um, and I need to follow up with that. Um, just quickly before I

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forget. So, my father owned a hospital there. You know about that. And there they have a lovely home right next to that. So, uh, when the communists, uh, took over, they then, uh, also, uh, the head of the area came and live at my parents' home. [DN: Mhmm] So, the home is protected, you know, because it's—so, it's a lovely home. It was built with concrete, you know, so it was not going to go anywhere. And also, the hospital—they now, today, my father's hospital is the hospital for the army officers in Vietnam. [DN: Wow!] And then so, in 19—in 2006 I took my children and my now ex-husband, uh, there, uh, and we were able – it was around New Year – and so, I actually rang the door, uh, not the doorbell but the gate bell, and the officer came out and I said, “This is where I lived. This is where I was born. Is it okay if I show my family?” He said, “Sure.” So, he let us, you know, walk the ground and, you know, so I was able to, to – I have pictures of all of that, so, um, you know, someday I'll give you guys th—into the archives. [DN: Mhmm] You know, you can put all of that in, yeah. Um, yeah, so, um, you know, so it's a lot mixture, you know? And it's not all lost. Now, my home in, uh, in Saigon, uh, I live across the street from General Westmoreland. I went to school with General Westmoreland's kids, you know, who was the commander-in-chief of Vietnam. Uh, and, uh, he has a son that's in same grade with me. And, um, uh, so yeah, another discrimination story. So, they would not let me board the school bus [DN: In Vietnam?] in Vietnam. We had – it's th-the schoo—just for the American kids, you know? [DN: Uh huh] And he live across the street, so his kids boarded, you know, that particular bus, but they wouldn't let me go on that bus. So, I got driven by my chauffeur by my, in my own car, [DN laughs] you know, so, um, so I go—I guess I got a better deal. But— [laughs] [DN: Little bit] [DB and DN laugh]

DN: So, you're saying you went back, um, do you still think of Vietnam as, like, home, or... I mean, you didn't live there for much of your life.

DB: No, yeah, yeah. I don't know what's home. Home is where I'm at. [DN: Mhmm] So, I have – that's another thing, you know? So, I'm-I'm multicultural, you know? So, I'm really – my whole family are French citizen actually, you know, and, I'm the American citizen. Um, so, uh, wh-when my parents were alive I could more or less, but then, they don't – they're not alive. You know, they've been – they passed away a while back i-in the early '90s. So, um, my mother died in '89, my father died in '92, so... So, you know, so, so I don't, like, I just visit my, my brothers and sisters' home, but that's not home, right? [DN: Mhmm] And, um, so, that's how I look at it is home is where I live right now with my kids. So, I would consider United States now home. Homeland is Vietnam. [DN: Okay] Yeah, I would call it like that, and I would call it – and the – fortunately, because that house and everything is there, intact, so I can have – my kids can have a picture of that even. [DN: Mhmm] You know what I mean? So, that's a nice part. But – oh, I didn't finish telling you guys. So, that house in-in Saigon, uh, it has been, um, um, torn down. They built like a, what, a thirty story, [laughs] uh, building of something, you know? And so, uh, we don—we don't get to see that. But when, um, President – I-I-I am tied to many history stuff. Uh, when President Eisenhower decided to, uh, um, to send advisors to Vietnam back in the '50s, you know, back then, uh, when the, when the second world war ended [DN: Mhmm] – this is a little history for you guys. Um, um, uh, so the French, the Bri—the Britain, uh, the En—the, uh, British people, and, uh, the American, uh, they divide up the world. Who's going to take care of who. So, the French said, um, to the American, “You can have Vietnam.” And so, so, the President Eisenhower decided to send some advisors there, and one of the first stateman, stateman Edward Harrimen. You hear about him in the history book, and his wife is Pamela Harrimen, who previously was married to Churchill. And then, uh, you know, and then she, uh, she hosted – she was the doyen, uh, in DC for any democrats who wanted to be elected president. So, in fact, Clinton, President Clinton, uh, not Hillary, uh, was – she was more or less, you know, that's where she – he-he got her endorsement and that's how things got started. But, uh, back to – so, when Edward Harrimen was in Vietnam, he lived at my house. [DN: Oh, um] You know, the house that we owned. So, I used to say, you know, because when we bought it, it was, like, all the furniture was still there, and I would lay there and have a nap on one of the sofas, “Oh, this is probably where—” you know, now that I think back, you know, so it's kind of like a little history. I didn't even know who Edward Harrimen is when I was growing up. But then, now that I have all this history, looking back, so that's

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kind of like another interesting thing. [DN: Mhmm] Piece of little history there that I feel, uh, yeah. And, then, you know, uh, when I didn't really, uh, feel like ready for school I would look over, because we can see the compound, there's a lot of MPs, military police who move in and out, we know there's a coup going on. And then school would be closed, I don't have to go to school, I don't have to do my homework. [DN laughs] Yeah, literally, I mean we – I was correct a few times, you know. So, so we can see what's going on, you know, across the...

DN: Mhmm. Uh—

DB: Tran Quy Quoc (?) is the street name.

DN: What is it?

DB: Tran Quy Quoc (?) is the street [DN: Oh, okay] is the street name where that house is. For some reason it just came up as I talk to you. Otherwise I wouldn't remember. You know, this is very interesting, my memory. [DN: Mhmm] You're really making me remember things, you know. [SD laughs]

DN: The only last thing was, uh, could you write your name down? Your Vietnamese name.

DB: Sure. I'll write it in just... just the way it is. So, everybody in my family is Nguyen-Son. [DN: Mhmm] Okay, Le-Hang. I'm writing in the whole way of Vietnamese [DN: Mhmm. Yeah] with all the accent.

DN: Okay.

DB: Le means pretty. Hang is the (Vietnamese words) which is the, the, the legend of the – in the moon. You know, uh, the, the Chinese. [SD: Mhmm] You know – do you speak Chinese at all?

SD: A little bit.

DB: Oh, so you one of the ABCs.

SD: Mhmm. [DB and SD laugh] Exactly.

DB: Yeah, so, uh, yeah, so, anyway, Son means, uh, mountain. And we're related to Kim Son. [DN: Oh, really?] Yeah, my father had a genealogy dating back to, um, uh, is it 1400 or 1500. My family tree. So, that's something I want to have – to give to Anne, you know, when I can. I actually took it back from Paris and at the airport while waiting for my ex-husband to pick me up, he didn't, he was late, so I had to go call and all of that and then I lost it again. [DN and SD laugh] It was really making me so mad. Yeah, and I lost that and it's so big so, you know, I had to go over to France and get it again. [DN and SD laugh] Yeah, recopied. Um, so, uh, I hope that I really make sense. Did I talk too fast?

SD: No, it was perfect.

DN: No, no, it was good.

SD: Do you have any more questions?

DN: Uh, no, I'm good.

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SD: Is there anything else you'd like to say, or do you think we covered everything?

DB: No, I'm good. [**SD:** Good?] We – you said two hours [**SD:** Yeah] and it's an hour and a half. Perfect.

SD: Yeah, we're good. Okay, well, thank you so much!

DB: You're welcome!

DN: Yeah, thanks!

[Interview stops and starts again]

DN: Okay, so, just covering one more thing. Um, we wanted to ask, uh, what was it like growing up during the war and that period of unrest?

DB: Yeah, so, um, as you know, um, the war was already – President Kennedy, um, um, uh, the war started to send, uh, in 1960, I believe, or '61, under President Kennedy, [**DN:** Mhmm] um, uh, uh, they started sending troops there. And, uh, and so, um, of course the, uh, there's almost like, kind of like a-a-a duel snapshots, uh, as I talk about this. There's what happened in United States and then what happened in Vietnam. There's a corollary there. So, and I was right in the middle of all of that, [**DN:** Mhmm] because I went to an American school where the s—the, the officers that were sent over as the war get escalated with more officers, more soldiers [**DN:** Mhmm] garrisoned there. So, that's the existence of my school, so I see the activity around that. So, um, um, I – so now I, you know, what's interesting is... there's a little hidden idea behind, underneath for me is that I didn't want the war to end because I want to go to school. [**DN:** laughs] Right? [**DN:** Mhmm] So, um, but then you keep hearing about how, how the unrest over here, they want to stop the war. They wanted to, you know, end it. [**DN:** Yeah, in America] Uh, yeah. And so, um, what was interesting is now you look at history, you know, um, President, uh, Nixon, uh, got elected. Part of that is that he promised that, uh, he would actually end the war. [**DN:** Yeah] But that wasn't true, right? [**DN:** Yeah] So, he actually got elected and he escalated the war more. And then, um, also, uh, part of President Johnson, also the same thing that, you know, he was in a quandary, because now – so, anyway, um, uh, and then there's the whole economy there, to, uh, prosper under the occupation of the war with the soldiers being there, you know, the economy, you know, people were thriving. People with homes for rent that kind of stuff, including my parents. Um, so, there's that side effect that people have, you know, so they d—well that for me personally, um, it was very unrest, like we would be, uh, growing up I remember we'll go on vacation [**DN:** Mhmm] and, um, uh, and then, you know, of course, you drive to the country to get to the beach, to get to the mountain, or whatever it is when we go on vacation and we would end up going past the jungle. Uh, th-the forest. We would just be stopped, and it would be like one of the VC, and they were just looking, right? Just a bunch of kids, you know, so we're no threat. [**DN:** Yeah] But still, you know, just remember knowing that you can encounter all of that. So, those, those, you know, kind of like moments, uh, it gives you a little fear, you know, even as a child, you know. Oh, that's the VC, you know? [**DN:** Yeah] And they have the gun there, you know, and they're in their dark outfit, you know, with their sandals and stuff. And so, you know that, um, they're not going to look favorably to us, right? But in a way, uh, so, so there's that always. And then, and then, but then, um, then the Tet Offensive, have you ever heard about the Tet Offensive? [**DN:** Yeah] Okay. So, Tet Offensive is, uh, you know, for her. For her. [**DN:** For the archive] Yeah, and for the archive. Um, uh, that's in 1968, and, uh, the, uh, th-the, uh, the strategy for Nor—the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong were to escalate it and keep, um, uh, and escalate it by shooting rockets into – randomly into, uh, the capital city where I was at. And so, we were sort of trained that – and when we hear the siren at night we'll have to run, uh, away from where we were sleeping down to this, you know, area of the house where maybe we're a little safer. So, g-growing up I remember having to listen for siren in your sleep. And also, and there were nights when you'd have to run twice. And it's not like, no, it's not

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like, you know, once a month. It would be like once a week sometimes. [DN: Mhmm] And, uh, when, there was a period where it was, uh, a lot, and one night, um, there was a siren and we all ran to, and by the time – and there was a huge explosion, and by the time, you know, we felt where we can go back and see what happened, my grandfather, i-it was my, uh, grandfather was the last bedroom upstairs in the back of the house. And, um, his room was already crumbled up a little bit, but the neighbor behind us was dead, you know, with the explosion, the rocket fell right there. So, that's the closest, you know, by one tiny little measly meter [DN: Mhmm] I'm not here to talk to you, you know. So, yeah, there were some scary moment like that, um, it happened. The other thing that, also, that I am a byproduct of the war, uh, in terms of the harm is that, um, uh, I-I don't know whether it's true, but, um, you know, I remember spe—uh, Agent Orange. Uh, smelling it. [DN: Oh, yeah] Yeah, because my father had a beautiful, beautiful rose garden with like around a hundred different species, you know, and I used to – a challenge for me is to guess the name, you know, the (French?), you know, name to, you know, Monaco, Princess Grace, and all of that. They all have their little cute name. And my father would have a name—so I was outside, and, um, because I have a different also, um, uh, schedule of school so I would be alone most of the time, you know, so I have to find things to do on my own. And, um, so, um, my father – so, so then, uh, and I remember going out to the garden and I smell, but it's not the rose smell. Uh, it was grapefruit smell, and that was the Agent Orange [DN: Mhmm] smell. And I didn't even know that, but then you look afar you can see, I learned to detect many of the, um, uh, I know what a B-52 look like. I know a F-14, F-8, F-11, F-15, I can spot those things and know them. But I saw also the, th-th-the, the, uh, the, the airplane from afar that they were dropping the, um, they used to drop the Agent Orange. [DN: Yeah] So, t-t-today my immunity is compromised, you know, [DN: Mhmm] so I wonder about that. Um, so yeah, there were, you know, uh, definitely effect. Uh, there's psychological, you have other fear, sometimes yo—you wonder where you get that. Cer—you get afraid of something, you know, I don't think I have PTSD anymore, but, um, because I am not in the middle of the war, [DN: Yeah] you know, but I kind of like witness around that. Uh, my, uh, my oldest brother, m-my oldest sister, that means my brother, oldest brother-in-law, uh, he was also a doctor, but he was also in the army, and he was telling us a story about how even as a physician, you know, he would say, uh, you know, and he's a pacifist, you know, um, uh, and he would say, well, when you're in the war and when you start hearing really all the, um, the noise of the firearms going off and... he said that you get into a different feel about, you know, the i-i-it's excitement of sort, you know, and, and he said that it really does something to your psyche. [DN: Mhmm] So yeah, but my parents didn't want my brothers to die, so of course— [DN: So, that's why they sent them all off?] Off to, for college, yeah. [DN: Mhmm] Um, and we're fortunate in that sense. Um, yeah, so it was like, you know, school get closed whenever there – we had coup like every few months. And one t—oh, this is another interesting story. Um, uh, one day, again, I was just happened to be with my parents because I didn't have school, and, um, uh, suddenly, um, uh, people rang the, th-the gate bell, and, um, there's this family showed up. This family showed up and, um, they said they were told to come and take refuge at my parents' house. [laughs] And, uh, my parents did not know, at least that I could tell, uh, why they were there. But, it turned out, they were the family contingents of the general that was mounting a coup [DN: Oh] in Saigon. And so, this is their safe house they were coming to seek at our place. [DN laughs] So, that's, you know, it's just funny stories like that, you know, that I think back and I often wonder, you know, I wish today, like, now I'm telling you this with this perspective, I wish my parents are alive so I can talk to them more. [DN: Mhmm] And I wish, like, this type of thing, you know, that they can also record, right? 'Cause they have so much. My father wrote a lot of things down and, uh, over time, moving and all that, I lost that. Wha—he gave to me a copy of what he wrote. And I'm – one of the thing, you know, as a young person you don't think about all of that, you know? I wish I kept that, so that I have more details.

DN: Mhmm. Okay.

DB: Okay.

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DN: Yeah, that seems good! Thank you!

SD: Thank you!

DB: Alright, sure!

[1:15:27]

Interview Ends