

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

Interviewee: Le Phu Nhuan
Interviewers: Tiffany Sloan, AnhThu Dang
Date/Time of Interview: June 28, 2019
Transcribed by: Tiffany Sloan, AnhThu Dang
Edited by: Niky Bao (8/12/19)
Audio Track Time: 1:12:00

Background: Mr. Le Phu Nhuan, born in Saigon, led a harsh early life which involved a lot of running and hiding from the war fires throughout the two back-to-back war periods in Vietnam: the French colonial operation and the Vietnam War. Despite the hardship of the wars, his strong work ethic and passion for journalism earned him a spot in the first generation of Vietnamese reporters that were professionally trained by the American professionals, and later enabled him to become the Editor in Chief of the National Press Agency, the national voice of South Vietnam government, during the Vietnam War.

Setting: Mr. Le Phu Nhuan was interviewed on June 28, 2019 in the Video/Photography studio in the Digital Media Commons of Fondren Library. There was the presence of a translator, Mr. Thieu Dang, but Mr. Le Phu Nhuan answered the interview by himself. The interview lasted about an hour.

Key:

LPN: Le Phu Nhuan
TD: Thieu Dang
TS: Tiffany Sloan
AD: AnhThu Dang
—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop
...: speech trails off, pause
Italics: emphasis
[Brackets]: Actions [laughs, sighs, etc.]
(?): unclear or inaudible word/phrase

Interview transcript:

TS: Hello! We are here today on June 28th 2019 in the basement of Fondren library in the Digital Media Commons. My name is Tiffany Sloan [**AD:** I'm AnhThu Dang]. And today we are interviewing... We have a translator here, Mr. Thieu Dang, and then we also have our interviewee, which is Le Phu Nhuan. And so today, Mr. Nhuan, we want to ask you, first off, can you tell us about your early life in Vietnam?

LPN: Um I was I was born in 1940 in uh Phu Nhuan in Saigon city during the wartime, the World War II and between a lot of conflicts between the Japanese troops, Communist troops and National troops, National Vietnam troops. And uh my mother died — I was just a few months old, so my father took me to the center of Vietnam where my grandparents lived. And from there, because of the war between French colonial and the uh United Force of the National Vietnam of the Vietnam troops in order to fight against the French — French colonial troops. And because of the attack of the French colonial troops, my father and I have to move from place to place. That's why in my early life I learn from someone who knows more than me. It means maybe older than — than me, and they know some uh mathematics. That's it. That's why most of my early life I learn uh mathematics and uh how to read, and write in Vietnamese. Maybe that is — that is my destiny. That's why later I became a journalist. And uh when I went back to college in America, I was real good in mathematics even now. And that's my early life and uh that's why during the war so most of us did not have uh birth certificate. And when we came back to the 60 under the King Bao Dai regime, before I was living... In the first 10 years I was living in the area in the zone controlled by anti-colonial French. We called uh Viet Minh. And uh maybe un-until 1951 my father discovered that the Communist was uh they camouflaged under the cover of uh National Vietnam but

they are not. They are actually Communist. That's why my father moved back to the area controlled by the uh King Bao Dai and uh at that time I was about 11 years old, 1951. That's my early life.

TS: Um can you talk a little about some values or customs that you learn from your family and your community?

LPN: Um my family and my country? As you know — as I say before, I was born in- during the war, so my culture, my family is, is not like in America. In America, play hard— work hard play hard. My culture is work hard play less. We spend less than what we have because we don't know what happen tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow we don't have enough rice to eat. That's why that's my way. And I still keep it that way up till now. You are [like] my children now — born in this country. They may buy football tickets \$300 but I never do that. I never can do that. And most of my generation do the same as mine, That's my culture. And uh it's, it's good for me because uh, I heard some advice — some financial advisors here always uh “Spend uh less than what you have. And uh below your means, and within your needs.” That's, that's my way now. That's also my culture.

TS: Um so you said that you didn't really have formal school in Vietnam. Can you talk a little bit bit more about your academic in Vietnam?

LPN: Uh formal school. Well after I went back to the area, the city controlled by King Bao Dai government, I went to a public school. And uh the last one is Chu Van An high school in Saigon. In the same class, same— same level like him [points to Mr. Thieu Dang]. The same Chu Van An uh high school [**TD:** 1961], 19— I graduated high school 1961. After that I attend uh Pharmacy college, college of Pharmacy in Saigon University. Because my father was uh a doctor in (Ori)-Oriental Medicine, he wants me to be a pharmacist in order to help him to handle his business. After 2 years, I found that this not for me. I don't like the formula, remember just all kinds of formula. I dropped out, and I move back to Da Lat where my father lived. I attend uh the Da Lat University in the political science and management for 2 years. Actually I want to uh complete 4 years but after 2 years, the Vietnam Press Agency, I mean the Nation Press Agency that we talk later on, they make announcement that they want to have some offer, a training course for reporters, for the young people who have the uh, at least uh 2 or 3 years in university education. And I applied and I passed. And then after training course I became the first reporter, young reporter in Vietnam trained by American professors. That's uh I mean, that's formal education that I have in Vietnam. That's why I became the— I work in this way, in this field, in writing field.

TS: So um you said previously you kind of going to school to become a pharmacist [**LPN:** Yes] When you were a child, what was your dream job? What career did you want to pursue?

LPN: At that time I didn't-didn't know anything. Just running from place to place to— Because of the war, almost every day. You know my school in uh... When I was about 5-6 years old, that's in the mountain. We avoid the raid, the bombing from French colonial. I have no idea about the future. We don't know even the next day or the next month so I have no, no idea about my far future. No dream. At that time dream is survive every day. That's it.

TS: And then you said the Nation Press Agency kind of came in to recruit. So what was that process like?

LPN: What?

TS: Um the National Press Agency kind of came in to recruit new students [**LPN:** Yes] So what was that process like?

LPN: Oh... You know, at the uh press in Vietnam before 1965, all of them were old people. They did not have any kind of training in journal—journalism. They just write what they uh they know. That's it. There's no techniques, special techniques for journalism like in uh in America. But this is the first group of young people. They have 2, 3 or 4 years in uh college so they can adapt the new way of journalism: how to write news, how to write feature, how to write editorial. That's, that's the new generation. That's why I was in the group they recruit about at least uh 2—300 hundred people apply for, and we have to pass the ex- exam. And I was among the above 50, was admitted to be in that class. Just about 50. And after that about 30 of us passed the final exam to be a journalist, young journalist at that time. About from 20 to 25. 1965.

TS: And so what did they kind of teach you about journalism?

LPN: Oh a lot of things. General knowledge, about the economy, about the political, about the political system in America, about the United Nations, and uh... a lot of things. General knowledge required for a journalist and then technically, we have to how to write the news, or how to write the feature, how to write the editorial. That's what we need to be a journalist at that time.

TS: Um whenever you started working with the National Press Agency, what were you doing?

LPN: Yeah before that, after I graduate that uh that training course of the uh National Press Agency, they call briefly “Việt Tấn Xã”, it means “Vietnam Press” at that time. But now if you go to the uh website of uh Vietnam Press, this is from the current administration, not from the South Vietnam before like this. I applied for the war reporter for the uh National Broadcasting System— that's Radio Saigon. They have a system uh along the South Vietnam, everywhere. Because at that time I was young, I want to see what happen on the battlefield. So I want to embed in the military unit of South Vietnam in order to make live report through the radio station. And because uh at that time the war situation is very intense, very fierce, so most of that time, Air Borne division unit have to jump into the stronghold of the enemies— at that time was Viet Cong or Communist. And in order to embed the uh unit of the uh Air Borne division to do like that, I have to pass a training course to wear a parachute. That's right here. I have to jump from air airplane to a stronghold. And uh after a few years, I became the Chief of uh reporter. Then a few years later, I become Director of radio station Quang Ngai in center Vietnam. And finally, they transfer me to be an Editor in Chief for National Press Agency, briefly called as Việt Tấn Xã or Việt Nam Thông Tấn Xã.

TS: And so—

LPB: Like AP or AFP in France or AP in America. Like Reuters.

TS: And so um who was your audience? Who was— did you want to hear this voice(?)?

LPN: Uh what uh... for the Press Agency? Okay. The National Press Agency, as uh, as it's called, it's the voice, the official voice of the government of South Vietnam, of the Republic of Vietnam. That's why our audience is around the world. Any country they know about the point of view of the South Vietnam government. And that's why all embassies, consulates in Vietnam, all of ministries of the government and almost the 40 or 50 uh newspapers published in Vietnam, they want to know because we have all kind of news, not about Vietnam, but from America, from France, from our allies, from the North Vietnam, from China, from everywhere. That's why very broad audience. Anyone need to know about Vietnam, South Vietnam, they need our uh Vietnam the the— That's what our news.

TS: And how did you distribute this news?

LPN: Oh we can send to them at that time. We did not have the uh computer like now. No website. We have to print it. I don't know how to— Roneo(?) We have to print it by Roneo(?) machine. You know Rodinho(?) machine? [**TD:** Copy] The copy. Not really copy [**TD:** Mhm]. And and yeah? [**TD:** Yeah] But... very uh early age. And then we uh just say copy. And then stabled. And then distribute to anyone who order and ready to pay for it.

TS: And then how did the National Press Agency form? Do you know about that?

LPN: Form?

TS: Yeah. How did it become an organization?

LPN: Oh we have about 200 employees. Half technically and administration management. Not half one-third. And two-third are for us—are under my control. My direct boss is a General Secretary, but I help him as an Editor in Chief. I control all off ... Anything go out, before that, have a go — I have to approve it before that distributed. So we have uh French section, so we translate— we have a translator to translate all French news to Vietnamese. We have English copies section to translate all of Chinese. Section from Chinese, from Khmer — it means Cambodia. So we have a lot of of section and then— that's translator. And we have uh special correspondent almost in any embassy that we have public diplomatic relation with. And we have uh correspondent around the country because in each province we have uh [clears throat] information office. So in that office we have a correspondent. They have duty to report to us every change, every news in that province. And in the central office, we have a special group of reporters. They cover all kind of news in the center of in the city, in the capital, Saigon capital. So we have many many sources of news come from my desk. That's why at that time even though I was 34—35 but very busy every day. That's why I say "Work hard, play less". Almost nothing at that time.

TS: And so can you talk about your experience as a reporter? And how that prepared you to be Editor in Chief?

LPN: A reporter? So no... this is wartime. I saw a lot of things happen on the battlefield. The people died every day. In front of me. Not 10, not just 100. Thousands of them. And I saw a lot of widows. They come out to uh, take home the corpse of their husband. So, I want to report all kind of things during the war to my audience. That's what my dream. And even now whatever I know I write on my Facebook. On uh the internet to, to share my feeling with my audience, whoever you want to read me. Because I work very hard and very seriously. That's why my boss always choose me, choose me to be a leader of the group from the beginning. Just I was about 25-26. I was Chief of the reporter group in the big office. And finally I have an Editor in Chief. It's not easy post at all. It requires your effort, your concentration, your thinking. That's why I advise my— I talk to my son who, before he wants to be a journalist "To be a journalist, you don't have enough time to sleep. Your brain has to work 24 hours. Seven. 7 days a week." Just an example. At 5 o'clock in the morning, president of uh some, some, some country die. Just say uh President Kennedy die, for example. If you don't know it, at that time, and you sleep. At 6 o'clock in the morning, you come up— you go to the office you don't know anything. You don't — you are not journalist. You gave uh, on the radio. If your news comes out just after 1 minute, you're out. You fail. You see. That's why when I work hard, and seriously, with all my effort, and with my mind. That's why they chose me, as Editor in Chief for National Press Agency.

TS: Um [clears throat] can you talk about some of the challenges you faced as an Editor in Chief of the National Press Agency?

LPN: Oh yes, a lot of challenges. Because it is the official voice of the nation, I have to be careful. Everyday I have to listen and read about all information about (the) what the president want, how about

the general on the battlefield, on the military zone, what happen over there. And you know anywhere not everybody is good. There are always some good, some bad, even here. You see, ev-everywhere. Even in the government. Even in the army. Even in the university. Because I was here, I know. That's why you have to know who is good who is bad. But [if] the bad is a general. If I hurt him, if I tell something true, he may kill me during the war. That's a lot of challenge I have to view. Be very, very careful about approve some news to go out— that's a big challenge for me every day. That's why I told you I play— I work very hard, almost no play at that time.

TS: And then can you talk about some of the rewarding parts of the job? Like something you really enjoyed?

LPN: That's what I say. They chose me to be a leader, a chief. Always on the top. From I was just 24-25 years old up to the end of the Vietnam War. That's a big award and I was so proud of it and now I'm still proud of it.

TS: And then can you talk a little bit about what happened to the National Press Agency when the war ended?

LPN: Yes I just s-said before. There's management, human resource, financial uh whatever, that's third of the uh of the agency. Two-third is under my supervision. It means uh for the news, feature, editorial, typing, receive information from around the world, receive the information from the office around the country, and the uh reporter from reporters. Whatever we have all kind of news to represent the voice, the point of view of South Vietnamese government. That's what-that's what the-the role of the uh the National Press Agency.

TS: And then can you talk about how that changed after the war?

LPN: After the war? [**TS:** Mhm] no it ju— it did not change anything. Just the same, but we try harder. We may talk about it later, about the uh about the Vietnam War. About the uh Paris Agreement ending the war in Vietnam, and restore peace in Vietnam. After the war, you mean, different for me. To me, the war never end. But to American people, to the world, the war ends in 1973 — when the Peace Agreement, Peace Accord, Paris Accord signed in 1973. So the American troops can withdraw, but to us, we have to stay, and to fight against aggression from the North. So my work is harder and harder. No change. That's big change. It means if change is big change. Very hard. Try to keep the spirit of fighting for our fellow fighters and for our people. That's very hard for us and maybe we will discuss later for the Paris Agreement.

TS: Um can you talk about some significant achievements that you think the agency made while you're the Editor in Chief?

LPN: Oh yes we did the best to uh— we did the best to represent the voice of the government of South Vietnam. I think uh we achieve that goal. It's very good. And now I still proud of it. Very proud of it.

TS: Um I guess we can move on to talk a little bit about the Paris Peace Agreement and can you talk about that kind of changed the atmosphere of Vietnam and kind of like the fighting spirit you would say?

LPN: You mean the fighting spirit? It's the catastrophe. Big disadvantage for the South Vietnam people. As you know, South Vietnam troops, the government never sent troops to invade the North Vietnam. Only North Vietnam invaded— sent troops to invade South Vietnam. What we fight on the battlefield is just to defend ourselves, defend our freedom and democracy for all our people. Not for just for Vietnamese in South V-Vietnam but in the future maybe, for the North Vietnam. And at that time, you

know the US government try to replace French colonial troops in South Vietnam for what? They try to prevent the wave, Communist waves, come-come South, go South to maybe to Malaysia, Singapore, to Indonesia, to Australia. They try to prevent the wave, Communist wave. And that's why they try to help us help South Vietnam to fight against the Communist troop of North Vietnam. After about uh 1973, about 8 years, not wait, we do have — we do not have to wait until 1973, but since 1978, after 3 years, from the date that US troops set foot in South Vietnam 1965, because of anti war in Washington DC, and because of the need of the President Nixon for his campaign for president, they try withdraw from South Vietnam. And how to do that? They have to negotiate with North Vietnam, secretly. And they got the deal. But even Nixon and Kissinger expect the North Vietnam to violate and the Vietnam, South Vietnam, will collapse. But they do it anyway.

They— How about you know anything about the Peace Accord, Paris Accord 1973? You can find it in any website: Wikipedia or any website about Paris Accord 1973. They call for what? Withdraw all of US and ally troops South— out of South Vietnam within 60 days. It's means no more help from outside for South Vietnam. And uh cease fire in South Vietnam, followed by delineation, draw the map between two zones controlled by two different sides: one by Communist, and one by South Vietnam government. It means they allow, the United States administration at that time, allow the Communist troop from North stay inside Vietnam. That's there one disadvantage for South Vietnam. Can you believe them? They also call for no introduction of war materials from outside into South Vietnam. No more war material, no supply, no administration. Nothing from America and allies, from the United States. And no introducing, introduction any military personnel from outside into South Vietnam. At the same time, the North Vietnam allowed- were free to do so. They continue to receive supply, administration, war material, milit- military personnel from China, from uh Soviet Union, from East Europe, from Cuba, from everywhere. You see the—the—the difference? That's not fair for South Vietnam. How could South Vietnam with about 20 millions people and about less than few hundred [thousands] soldier...

The America gave us airplane, but now no fuel. We have tanks, but no fuel. No ammunition. We have a lot of guns, no ammunition, what could we do in that sit-situation? How could we survive? Anyone can't survive. And you talk about the spirit, fighting spirit, of South Vietnam. Even in that situation we try to fight, we continue to fight after at least 2 years, 73 until 75. Who can do that? John Kerry says that we uh in South Vietnam soldier did not want to fight. It's a lie. You are student. You can read more story about Vietnam war. One of them, I propose, I suggest you to read the book of Larry Birdman "No peace. No honor in Vietnam" And you know that's the other side of the war in Vietnam. And you talk about the fighting spirit. Just say American troop first. At that time, most of them about eighteen, twenty, up to twenty-five. Was very young. Like, like you. You live in this society, in high standard of living. You have everything. Now put you in the jungle. Mosquitos, insects, everything. How 'bout your fighting spirit in that situation. And like I say, that's why. The president (Ngô Đình Diệm) in 1963, 1960- '61. The Kennedy administration, - they want to send troops to South Vietnam. But Presi-, President (Diệm) refused. What he asked for is uh, military aids. Give us (?) enough war materials, and we will fight against the communists. Because we know, North Vietnamese communists are Vietnam. Vietnamese. And we are Vietnamese, we know Vietnamese, know Vietnamese. We can fight in the very, very tough situation. We can eat any kind we can find in the jungle. But American troops cannot do that. So you can think about the fighting spirit of each group. And in the last two years, we fight in what? We fought, we have a gun but no ammunition. No (?). Airplane, tank, no fuel. What could we do in that situation? They say, "why we collapse?" How could we not? That's, that's my feeling about the, the uh, the ending of the war, not stopping, no restore peace in Vietnam. No, not at all. Now if you look at the situation, situation even now, you know. It's very bad for Vietnamese people.

TS: Um, can you talk about your life, kind of after 1973 and then up 'til whenever you came to America?

LPN: Actually, after the uh, 1975. I was put in a hard labor concentration camp. Like many hundreds [thousands] of uh, officers in South Vietnam. For almost seven, seven years. As you know, in concentration camp in communist country, you can imagine. You work very hard every day, labor camp. And even people outside the camp, most of the people don't have enough food to eat. No rice. They haven't anything else. Can't find anything else to eat. Now we were in a concentration camp. It's very hard for us. And they bombard me every day a week with the communist uh, let me see, ideology or whatever now uh, uh, Ho Chi Minh, about Ho Chi Minh ideology, communist, it's the best way to view the country, whatever. Every day. Work hard every day, and at night, we have uh something they said "learning" the communism. But after seven years, I was released. With uh, three years, three years uh, uh, house, kind of house arrest. Stay at home but we have report to police(?) every uh, every week. But at that time, that was 1983. You are, you hear about "boat people"? So, I try at least eight times to escape by boat. I did not have any money at that time. Nothing. But because of the people who organize the uh, the boat, you know, to escape, they know me. So they told me that I can pay if I reach America, settle in America. So I, I pay back to them. About at the time about 2500, yes 2500 dollars, and I paid the last time was (?), 1993. I went back to college for two years. At that time I want to become an engineer in computer science. But after two years, my English teacher, my teacher in English, the same age with me, but he was my teacher. He told me "no, Nhuan, you are too old for engineer." [laughs] Nobody hire you. They hire people about 25 years old, not 44. At the time I am 45 years old, 44.

"-Now, I give, I got, have some of the information about the (?) social worker. Asian, Vietnamese social worker. Working for welfare department of Pennsylvania. You can apply. "Fill in! Sign in! I apply for you."

- "Ok, you can do that."

And I passed the civil exam. And I, after two years I have about, 1986, I became a social worker for the welfare department of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. And I retire 19— uh no 2003. And because I, was uh very cold in Philadelphia, in north. I moved to Houston. It's warmer. Like Saigon in Vietnam. Am I right? [TS: Uh huh, absolutely.] That's why I like the weather here [laughs] that's why. I feel good.

TS: And so was Pennsylvania the first place you came in America?

LPN: Yes. Because at the time my sister and brother lived there. That's why they send me.

TS: And then, whenever you came over did you come alone? And then...

LPN: Alon-, uh with my niece.

TS: And then-- um, did you meet your wife in America, or when you were in Vietnam?

LPN: No, the uh, after seven years in concentration camp, I know that at the time we were, had four children. Small children. And my wife ha-, had find a way to feed, to raise children, our children. And because of a special situation, we divorced. After seven years she has to work for, for people who are in the system. So they have to be kind of communist. That's why we could not live together anymore. So I escaped by myself. It's—, it's sad story but... But now, after now, I still send money to her almost every year. I gave her my, my house. The uh, the big house in Saigon now, cost a lot, a lot of money in Saigon City now. You cannot imagine the price of the uh, real estate market now. Maybe one million dollar for that house. But ok. We can talk each other. We respect each other, you know, that's good.

TS: And so, what were your first impressions of America when you came to Philadelphia?

LPN: First impression, ok... Uh, it's just hard for me. Before I came to the United States, I have high expectation about the uh, Philadelphia. Where they, they have uh the Liberty Bell and everything, I learned about it. But because, be-, the main reason, because my brother and sister were refugee too. They have to rent a house in a very, very poor area. That's why when I enter that house I was disappointed. But ok, most of us went to college. We uh, because uh, they asked me to go to work right away. No, no, I have to go back to school, college. And I apply for guaranteed student loan. And uh, I attend college. And then become an employee of the state. And now I have health insurance of the state of Pennsylvania. I feel happy about it. Not much. But just enough to be happy.

TS: And so what did you start doing when you came to Houston?

LPN: No, I retired. [TS: Oh ok] And uh, I (?), not work, but I try to have some activity with the community. With um, with Dr. Dang. We have a lot of things to do for the community.

TS: Can you kind of talk about what you did with the community?

LPN: It's not specifically. But whatever, I try and -- before, this community was uh represent by the first generation. The old people. But about six years, seven years ago, Dr. Dang and me and my friend, we agreed to convince the younger people, younger generation to do community work. And at that, at that time, I tried to very hard, to fight against the old generation. And to have the young generation replace us. And we succeed. And now if you go to the Vietnamese Community Center, you'll see the young generation. They were, they are engineer, they are doctor, realtor. That's, the, the very, very active representatives, that we always try to find a way. Even now. That's the way I tried to do in my eighties.

TS: And then, do you have any values or stories you hope the next generation knows?

LPN: Not me, not much. Just uh the regular or normal people. But if you asked about the, my dream for the future, my dream is the ending of communist regime in Vietnam. Restore peace. Restore freedom. Restore democracy for all Vietnamese people. A lot of people ask me "Why? You are too old? Eighty, what are you doing now?" No! That's, that's my dream. For my people, not for me. If, for myself, oh I'm happy here! I'm not rich but I most, almost have, almost everything I want to. Some kind of wine, I can have it. Some kind of Cognac I can have it. Medication, I have it. I have insurance from uh, offer by the government. I have almost everything I want to, to be uh -- I have a house I pay off. I have a car. -- Why do I have to care about the people in Vietnam? Because my heart is there. I want (to), - my people live in freedom and democracy, with all kind of value. They can say whatever they want to say. They want to express their ideas about Vietnam. Uh, that's, that's what I dream. Then before I die if I can see the communist, and I don't say, I don't mean about the people. But the communism. The ideology. The administration collapse. And give the Vietnamese people some kind of freedom to live. That's what I dream the most until the end of my last breath. Ok?

TS: Mhm. And so, um, did you kind of miss the pace of life under um, whenever you were working with the National Press Agency? Whenever you eventually came to America and started a new job?

LPN: No because you know that's at the end of the (...uh--), of the government of South Vietnam. We have no choice. In the uh concentration camp [laughs] we work in labor camp, like a labor camp. But my, that's why I feel so thankful to American people. They open arms to receive us. To help us to um, -make a new life here. That's why I feel so happy every day. I swear to you that every day when I have enough one bowl of rice, or one piece of steak, one glass of wine, I always thank God, thank the people here. That's what I have. Don't need a Ferrari or whatever, luxury, luxurious life. No. That's enough. That's my happiness. That's what I think about. Of course, I'm a US citizen. I care about the, this country. But at the same time, my heart is still there. Because I lived there for forty-three years. I grew up there. [TD

clears throat] That's why I still miss my motherland. This is my country, but Vietnam is my motherland. So it's still in my heart. That's I always think about.

TS: And then, whenever you were working as a social worker, in Pennsylvania, did you enjoy watching--

LPN: Yes I did, yes I did. Many times [laughs] just say, I confess [laughs] this is not good to tell. But when I sit in this table, I interview people for the welfare department. A lot of people come in to apply. They sit on the other side. I sit on this side. I interview them, everything. They ask me, said "oh man (?), you have to be on the other side." But that's what I told my clients, always. If they are young. A lot of time they abuse the system. A lot young girls, have children at the young age. Sixteen, seventeen, nineteen. And because uh, the children don't have uh, they don't have uh, a marriage certificate, so, they said that's uh, the young girls with dependent children they can continue to collect welfare. I told them, "look at me." My English is not real good. I'm not a native speaker. I came here very hard situation. I learn English in Vietnam by book. Not by ear. That's why very hard for me to listen, to understand what people say in this country for the first few years. And you are native, just try to learn something, some skill. Go to community college. I help you. I provide grant for you. Money, food stamp, medical, cash assistance, and even childcare. Go to college. At least one year. You have just one certificate so you can find a job".

That's what I always tell them. Some of them agree, but some of them disagree. They say, "you come back to where you come from." That's what, that's what they said to me. Uh, I am, I was not uh, angry. But I say "You too. Your family too." Your family come where? From where? From Europe? From Russia? Uh, from Africa? From Australia? People around the world come here to be American. Me too. So don't say it that way, try to learn something for you. Go home and think about it". That's, that's the way I, my experience to be a case worker, social worker for the welfare department.

TS: Uh, looking back, what would you say is one of the biggest accomplishments that you were the most proud of in your life?

LPN: Not much. Just working hard, play less. That's even now. That's what I told my, I always tell my, my children and grandchildren, that's, work hard. And always honest to yourself. You can lie anybody, to anybody, but you cannot, you cannot lie to yourself. You know you. That's the honest working hard. That's my way of life. Very simple. But not easy.

TS: And so, if you had the opportunity to do it all over again, would you do everything the same? Or is there something different that you'd do?

LPN: Almost the same. With my principle, that's my way. Mhm. And uh if you uh, my way of life, to any, anyone, to my friend, or anyone, you always you, one person. Many people say the fifty-fifty. That's equal, between you and other people. To me forty-nine to fifty-one. That's my way. I am ready to yield one percent (1%). Forty-nine, you get fif- fifty-one. But if you come forward, fifty-two, fifty-three, fifty-four, fifty-five, I stop there. No way, no more for you and me. I try to avoid-- that's my way of life. I always tell my children that way.

TS: And so, can you kind of talk about what stories, or what legacy, you want to leave to your children if they were to watch this like generations from now?

LPN: A legacy is, is very important for me. Now [laughs] I'm normal people, very normal... the legacy is what I, if you can say some kind of legacy, that what I just told you before. Just work-, working hard. Stand up, stand on your own fe-, own feet. Don't depend on anybody. Don't abuse anybody. And be honest to yourself. That's what I think is good for any person or any of my children.

TS: Um, if there was a moment in your life that you would go back to relive, what would that moment be?

LPN: It's very hard life, my. During the war, it's... I don't think of any good time in, in my life in Vietnam since I was born. My mother died when I was a few months old. Even now, I still miss, I still wish to have some kind of caress from my, from my mother. From my father. From my relative. During the war it's very hard for me. But the peaceful life is here, in this country. That's why I told you I feel so thankful to people in this country, to help me to make a new life here. And I wish anyone to come here, from other country to come here, feel the same way. To be thankful to these people. Don't abuse the system. If you can do, you can stand on your own feet, you can work, don't abuse the system.

TS: Um, are there any changes that you would make to the Houston Vietnamese community?

LPN: This is a big for me. Big, big question for me. But... I wish that we... that we will have a, to get together, more, in order to build a good community. But it's very hard. You know why? Because the, the war in Vietnam divide us, divide us. Even in every family, in my family, there are some go to the North, to join the communist force. Some, we are still Vietnam, in South Vietnam. So divided. Even up to now. And even in Houston. The first gener-, generation where real refugees, political refugees. But after that, a lot of people come here not refugees. They come here because of many reasons. Uh, for uh learning, or for because of uh, business, they can do business here a lot. Many other reasons, not political reason. That's why we have a mixed community here. A lot of people come from communist; a lot of people come from the South. So actually, this community become divided by many factors. I try that they will understand each other. And we are in America now. What we want, we have a good life if we go to work. There's no reason to be uh, homeless. Now you have a good time here, but please don't forget your motherland. People in your motherland. They also need the freedom, they also need democracy. They also need uh, new, a good life. They don't want their home, uh, their piece of uh, ground, taken by the communist party. They want to express their ideas. Feel free to do so. That's what I always talk to my community group in order to look at the future, for Vietnam and even in this country. Because we are citizens of this country, we also have responsibilities for this country.

TS: Um, do you think that there was a moment when you remember you felt for the first time that you were American? And can you tell me about that?

LPN: Not real American. I am half and half. You know, I grew up in Vietnam. Forty-three years. Then I came here about, less than forty years. Not equal. Even the, - my way of life now is kind of American way. And I learn the freedom here. That's in, in my blood now. That's the American way. But the other side, I still have some way of uh, Vietnamese culture. The food I eat, vegetable I eat, you cannot eat, very v-, so strong. The music we listen, not America music. Not much, a li-, a little bit. But most of the music I learn, I listen.

So half, now for my generation, half Vietnamese, half American. Not real American. But that's good! You see in any ethnic group. Africa, from Africa, they still keep their own, uh, way, of Africa. Even they, they live here for many generations. Half and half, I think it's good. That's why they can enrich this society.

TS: Um, do you have any advice for aspiring journalists?

LPN: As I told you, to be a journalist, you have to work twenty-four/seven. And you have uh the responsibility to tell the truth. Truth is the first thing whenever you write the news. There are many factors in the condition for news, the good news. But the most one is truth. And if you cannot tell the truth, don't say anything. Don't lie. That is the way of my life in, as a journalist. If they cannot tell the truth, they keep silent. Even right now there's sometimes you keep silent, uh, before a s-, crime. You

may, some kind of agree with that. I know. But if, if you cannot— during the war time, that's my way of life in, my principle during the war time. You don't lie if you cannot tell the truth. Just keep silent. Avoid it. During the war time. Because you cannot tell the truth all the truth. To let the enemies know everything about yourself is, is very dangerous. That's, that's my principle when I work for National Press Agency.

TS: Um, do you have any other questions?

AD: Um, yeah. Have you ever gone back to Vietnam, after you left to America?

LPN: Uh, just one time.

AD: So, when was it?

LPN: About uh, 2005.

AD: Um, did you notice any changes compared to when you left the country? Where there any big changes?

LPN: A lot of changes in um, material, [**AD:** <hm>] what I mean, the new house [**AD:** Yeah.] Uh, new building. Uh, a lot. But if you look, if you go to the countryside, because I ha-, I had to go to countryside to uh, remove the uh corpse, remain of my uh grandparents... and my grandparents and uh my mother to uh, cremated and to spread on the ocean. That's my only way, only reason I went back to Vietnam. But, the co-, in the countryside, the life of people still very, very poor, very hard. Because uh, you see, I, I bought some incense (?), I gave the man just one dollar. Oh they feel... so, they feel "thank you, thank you so much" just one dollar. Or my relatives, I gave them five dollars. At that time about 100,000? [**AD:** 1,000] They feel so, so happy. Real poor. Right now. I look at the, on their face. A lot of people, my relative young, younger, much younger than me. And look like my, my brother, my older brother, very old. It's very hard. But now, it's worse, getting worse. Getting worse. You see the building, everything new, belong to [**TS:** communist] the government, the party, the uh businessmen, the foreigners. Not to the people. Not to the people. We have to look at Vietnam that way because I care about my people. Anyway, even in this country, you look at the people, not look at Mr. Trump or his family. You look at the people living around it. I feel, that's what I always worry about. On my Facebook, always something. Even now this morning, I saw an, the video clip, the whole village was taken by the government. They pay them one dollar just (?). They sell it 1,000 dollar or one, uh, square feet. A lot of people cry every day. In my, my cell phone now. I can show you later. That's why I want always care about the people. I want always-- [to **AD**] I hope that when you finish-- do you plan to go back to Vietnam to work or stay here?

AD: Um, I actually don't know I'm keeping my options open. So, [**LPN:** Oh, ok] yeah.

LPN: But even you live here. You can help them, your people. [**AD:** Yeah.] Many ways to help. That's ok?

TS: Do you have any more questions?

AD: I'm good with it.

TS: Do you have anything else you would like to share with us?

LPN: No no that's what I can say to you. Thank you so much.

AD and TS: Thank you so much!

LPN: Like a discussion! That's good.

[interview ends]