

Interviewee: Hoang Nguyen
Interviewers: Priscilla Li, Gordan Liu
Date/Time of Interview: February 26, 2020
Transcribed by: Priscilla Li
Edited by: Gordan Liu
Audio Track Time: 1:00:28

Background: Hoang Nguyen was born in Hue, Vietnam as the eldest of 8 children. While studying business and economics in college, he was called upon to serve in the military. He served as an officer in 1972 until he was called to serve at the headquarters as chief of staff for a colonel. When the city he was stationed at was captured by North Vietnam, he escaped to Saigon by boat. Then, he was rescued by the US Seventh Fleet and was sponsored to Houston, Texas by his brother-in-law. Once in the US, he studied engineering at Texas A&M and then served in the US army as a civilian. This brought him to work across the US to support his family. Today, he has worked at Schlumberger as a manager for the past 20 years and gives credit to his military experience for the leadership skills he uses in his career.

Setting: The interview was conducted at Mr. Nguyen's home in Sugar Land, Texas. Thieu Dang was also present at the interview.

Key:

HN: Hoang Nguyen

PL: Priscilla Li

GL: Gordan Liu

TD: Thieu Dang

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off, pause

Italics: emphasis

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

(?): unclear or inaudible word/phrase

Interview transcript:

PL: So, today is February 26th, 2020. Um, we're at the home of Mr. Hoang Nguyen, and we're interviewing him for the Houston Asian American Archive. Uh, my name is Priscilla Li.

GL: And I'm Gordan Liu.

PL: Okay, so we'll start out with the first question, which is: where and when were you born?

HN: Uh, first of all, my name is Hoang Nguyen, I'm, uh, was born in Hue, which is the central city of Vietnam in 1952. Um, in the family of eight, I'm the oldest. Um, my father worked for the government, and my mom, she was always a housewife. Um, you want me to talk about my school, or childhood, and all that, yeah. Uh, mm— I attended a Catholic elementary school taught by Catholic priests until I was like 12 years old. After that, I attended another French Catholic school, which was taught by French priests in Hue. Uh, [clears throat] I gr- I- 1968

we— our family moved to Danang. Danang is a big city that located around two hours south of Hue, where I attended high school. And I graduate high school in 1970.

GL: How did Catholic values shape the person you became growing up?

HN: Yeah, I'm a devoted Catholic just like my, my, my father, and my mother family, we are very religious. That taught us a lot of value, faith, and love one each other.

PL: Um, and as the eldest child, did you have the responsibility of taking care of your younger siblings?

HN: Um, you talk about my family, my—yes since I'm the oldest, I always, you know, take care of my, took care of my seven other brother and sister. Since my father always away from home, I'm just like a father in the house, and, you know, they—I put a lot of discipline on my kids—brothers, and sisters, so after I graduated from high school in 1970, I went to Da Lat University, which is located in highland Vietnam. Um, and um, major in Business and Economic. Um, remember in 1970, the Viet—the American troops start, started to withdraw from Vietnam. Um, and uh, they have a program called Vietnamize the War, means: they want us to fight by ourselves, okay? So the government decided to draft a lot of young men to the army to fill in the void of the American troops who withdrew, right? So since, based on my education, they want me to become an officer. In 1970, I was drafted—in '72. After two years in college, I was drafted to military. They send me to school—name is the school of uh, army the, the Military School of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, where I was trained to become a young officer. In 1973, one year later, I was graduate from that academy, and assigned to battalion combat. So I spend a couple years in combat as a young lieutenant.

Let's talk a little bit about the war, right, I was in—the war was terrible, and since the American troop withdrew, we very much fighting the war by ourselves, without a lot of support. Without a lot of artillery support, or air support, or even evacuation support for the wounded soldiers. Um, um, we desperately fight the war, and then, later on, we know the Americans already want to abandon us. Later on, we know that. But at that moment, we didn't know. We just want to keep fighting for our freedom against the North Vietnamese, who came invading us, and want to lib—what do you call—liberate us, yeah. We don't want them to liberate us. But that's what they want. And again, I been in that combat zone for two years, and involved in a lot of fighting. I was fortunate to not been killed. Um, uh, in 1973, 1974, I was very fortunate to be called in back to the headquarter and serve a colonel. Uh, he's a chief of the province, and then, you know, he want me to serve him as chief of staff. So uh, that why I survive the war, while most of my comrade, most of my young officer, my uh—was killed. It was a lot of young officer was killed. I mean our—the death rate for young officer is very high. Life expectancy for a lieutenant out there in the war is like a couple years, like that. So anyway, um in, in the April of 1975 when the North Vietnamese pushing to capture the city of Saigon, right, they have to go through our province. So there was a lot of fierce fighting, big battle, and then they capture our province. But I was fortunate to escape by foot back to Saigon, which was the capital of Vietnam. And from Saigon, I was again fortunate to get on a boat to get out of the city. So a lot of my friend, my soldiers, my comrade was—got captured, got killed, but I was fortunate to get out. So, that's it.

I get on the boat, get out of Vietnam, and from there, I was picked up by the US Navy, the Seventh fleet. The Pacific Seventh Fleet picked me up and then send me to Philippines, and finally in Guam Island. Guam Island is a small island in the Pacific owned by the Americans. Um, from there, for a few months, I was sent to California to a camp where they are processing my paperwork in order to settle down me, settle me down anywhere in the States. So um, by the time, my brother-in-law was a medical doctor in the army, Vietnamese army medical doctor. He was in San Antonio, to attend some extra training, so he got stuck here, he couldn't go home, right? So he also got a reason to stay. He's the one who came to Houston and sponsor me. Because when we are in a camp, somebody has to spans—sponsor you in order for you to, to be leaving, to come out and live in a—with a sponsors. So we came, I came to Houston, because he lives in Houston. If you ask me why I end up in Houston, that's the reason. I don't know where; I can't go anywhere. When you're in camp, anybody sponsor me, I can go. But finally he sponsor me and I came to States, came to Houston in July 7 of 1975. That's the day that I came to Houston. That's it. Alright.

PL: What was the year you got on the boat and was able to escape Vietnam?

HN: I'm sorry?

PL: What year was it that you got on a boat and escaped?

HN: July—oh no, April of 1975. [**PL:** Okay.] And then 3 months later, I landed in Houston. After went through many different processing camps. Yeah.

PL: Um, and then going back to when you were in school, college for Business and Economics, and then you got drafted. Can you describe how you felt during that time and how your classmates felt?

HN: In Vietnam right? [**PL:** In Vietnam.] College in Vietnam. I was—that was the most joyable years in my life, two years when the war was out there, the war was terrible, but I'm still in college, so I'm enjoying my life you know, until I was drafted, and I said, "Oh, it's my turn." Anyway. [**PL:** Oh okay.] So I'm, yeah, um—where I met my wife. [**PL:** Oh.] I met my wife when we are first—we were freshmen at University of Da Lat. [**PL:** Oh okay.] Yeah and when I was drafted in the army, and then I graduated from the school in the army, I marry her, and our son was born in 1973.

PL: Okay, so while you were in combat as a lieutenant, what was happening—where was your family, your immediate family and um—

HN: My, my, my, my mom and my family is still in Da Nang, where I attended high school. My wife's family is in Saigon. And my wife, my son is in Saigon.

PL: Okay, and so then going to your migration out of Vietnam, how did you get your family to come—to join you in the States?

HN: When I went back to—when I went back to Saigon, I mentioned to you that with my—the city that I was stationed was captured and I escaped by foot back to Saigon. My wife’s family was already get out [**PL:** Oh okay.] so when I came back and look for them, and they all gone, okay. So I know they’re already gone, so it’s okay, I’m not worrying about them anymore; I’m just find a way to get out. And when I came to Guam island, I looked through Red Cross, and I found them, they already been through the same place I, I, I was there, but they ahead of me, like a month. So they already in San Antonio.

PL: Oh, because your brother-in-law? Okay.

HN: Yes, right.

PL: Um, so I guess, when you were growing up as a child in Vietnam, what kind of like, I guess, subjects interested you? Um, because you ended up studying Business and Economics in college in Vietnam.

HN: Yeah, it’s strange, that I don’t like Math. You know, so I decided oh, I’m going to go to Business Administrations, or Economics or something. Um, I’m, I’m not very good in Math, but because I don’t like Math, you know, so that’s a subject I don’t like. Does that answer your question?

PL: Mmhm, or and then what led you to choose business as like a major form, like your study, like, your major I guess. Because you didn’t like Math, so that’s why you chose Business?

HN: Uh, because I don’t like Math, so I choose something else that's away from Math.

PL: Okay. Okay.

HN: Economics, Accounting, you know, Business Administration, something like that, but later on, when I went to A&M, I will tell you the story about differently. So the second part is I came to the United States in July 7, 1975. Okay, so when I came, many questions you have in there was different culture, different things. Oh, something, different. You know, um, I never thought in my life that I would come to United States. Okay. Uh, so when I get, when I arrives, um, I start—and remember this, most of my childhood life, all the way from ele—something like elementary to, all the way to college, French is the second language. Okay, so when I came here I say, "Oh my God, what I'm going to do?" S—it completely—English is completely different. So I um, I had, I, I, I reunited with my wife and my son in Houston, okay. So, it’s hard. The hardship begins when I have to go out there and look for work to pay for the apartment and food. Um, and uh, I decided to—since I was only 23 years old, I decided to go back to school. How do I do that? First thing I need to do is to learn English. Okay. So I worked as a store clerk at a convenience store. Me and my wife both work. She work first shift, I work second shift. I go to school in uh, I went to school in the first shift. And the school called English as Second Language, um, so I learned about English for like a year, almost two years. Working as a clerk, and learning English. 1977, two years later, I apply for Texas A&M. And they accept me, after I pass the TOEFL, you know what the TOEFL means, right? The TOEFL is hard. Very hard. So anyway, they require like 550 points to be accepted to the college. [To VD: Thank you sir.]

So...accepted into uh, Texas A&M, and I did something really amazing. I attended the School of Engineering, which is a lot of Math [All laughs]. You know, and I was struggling a little bit at the first year, but I manage to went to school, have a wife, have a kid. Life was [sighs] unbelievable. You know, make—my wife was—she's dedicated, she's dedicated person. She support me the most, the best out of everything she can do to get me through school. So I have to say that it's my, my uh, my degree in Engineering at Texas A&M was, you know, is her, for her too, you know. Um, so in 1981, I graduated from A&M with an Engineering degree. Um, with a ton of student loan, believe it or not. You know, I just borrow as much as I can to support back to her and my son. So, life in campus, A&M campus was not very [laughs] pleasant, since I have little money to spend to survive. Um, sometime I was talking, thinking about maybe I was in combat in Vietnam, and my life was a lot better than I went to stay on campus at A&M. It's awful, right? But that was a strange thought. Going to school is different, I'm telling you. I can do anything, but go to school is—so I admire you guys, young and intelligent, smart to get into Rice, right.

Anyway, um, I—1981 I graduated from A&M. The economy—Houston economy was going down, due to the oil and gas recession. So I couldn't find me an engineering job. I went and worked for a financial company and learned to become a financial planner with an Engineering degree [laughs]. And a couple years later, I was approached by a recruiter from the US Army, and he asked me, You want me—you know I want to join the, I'm not say join the army, but I come to work for the US Army as a civilian. Not a uniformed officer, okay. So I say, "Okay, why not?" They pay me salary and insurance, and all that. Send me to school. So again, back again I go back to school, which I don't like much. [All laughs] So after two years, from the graduate school in Texarkana Arkansa, I graduated again. I graduated so many times in my life. Um, because of the obligation with the US Army, I have to work for them—they send me—they send me to school for two years, I have to work for at least for two years to meet the obligation. So they sent me up to, all the way to New Jersey, and uh, to work as a production engineer and as far away from—my family's still here, my wife and kids here in Houston, and I'm away. So I find a way to met—to meet the obligations, complete the requirement, and go back to Houston. In 1990, move back to Houston. And I was fortunate to get a job from oil and gas company. And, believe it or not, 30 years already, from 1990 to now to 2020. So I've been in oil and gas for 30 years, and during that 30 years, I've been a manager for 20 years. I'm still working with Schlumberger as a quality engineer.

PL: So what kind of challenges did you face along the way, like moving from Arkansas, you said, to New Jersey, and also like being away from family? Um, I guess challenges in the sense of socially, as well as at your job, what kind of challenges did you face overall?

HN: What kind of—

PL: Challenges, um—

HN: Oh, yes, yes, yes. Be—I, I spend a lot of money from my salary buy an airplane ticket. I miss my family so much, I like to fly home every weekend. But it costs so much, but anyway, yes, life was alone is miserable. Uh, I don't know what my son was doing. When I was away, my

wife and my son had to live with my sister-in-law, because you know financially they have to stick with them to survive. Anyway, life away from home in military was miserable and also away from work, for work is also, you know, not pleasant. So um, so I find any which way I can come home, home here in Houston. So um in 1990, I finally came back to Houston.

PL: Um, how about language-wise and being accepted as a Vietnamese—uh as, a person of Vietnamese descent, at the different jobs you held? Um, did you face any discrimination, or had like language barriers? I know you said you went to ESL school.

HN: Um, for work?

PL: Yes.

HN: For life, yes, uh as an immigrant come to the United States, um, I was facing the difficulties, just like all the immigrant come from the whole world. The first barrier is the language. Um, it was easy for Europeans or even the Filipinos because they are, they are closer to the English than us. Our language is completely different. Okay. We don't—uh, Chinese is different than us, Cambodian different from us, and yeah. The language is a lot. Since I, uh, went to school the first year as a freshman at A&M, I was—I have a lot of hardship because of the language. Even, even after I graduated, I still um, not fluent enough to uh, to compete with my other, you know, my other candidates in order to get the job. And uh, as an Asian, as an Asian, as an immigrant, for us, for me, I have to be, I have to be a lot of dedication. I have to put more work, more dedication, maybe 50% more than a white, white man, in order to be equivalent. Do you follow me? [**PL:** Mhm, yes.] You know, as an Asian like us, we gotta work a lot harder, a lot of dedication in order to be equivalent to the same guy who speak English. So I told my kids that, I say in order for you guys to be successful, you gotta be—if they have a Bachelor, you have to have a Master, minimum. If they have a Master, you have to have a PhD, in order to be the same level with them, you know what I'm talking about.

GL: So what are some other lessons you try to ingrain in your children? What values did you want—

HN: The value I want them to is—number one is they have to have um, they have to look at—family is the number one, okay. No matter how successful they are, family is always the number one. They have to think about that. Um, the value of the family, and the value of uh, since you know we Asian, we always say we respect our elderly, respect the grandparents, and parents and all that. Um, for the, for the—if I call myself as the first generation, my children are the second generation. The second generation have—what I'm going to make sure with them—have to follow our cultures, our tradition as close as possible. Because, if not, then they will rip away, okay. I'm not talking about the third generation, yet, okay. But I'm talking about the second. I have to pull my son, my daughter as close to me as possible, and ask them to speak Vietnamese in the home. They go to church with me, they eat the traditional food, they celebrate New Year. You know all that have to be, I have to insert all that in their head, so they don't never forget. But I'm telling you, they will, okay, some day, if we don't enforce that. Uh, I worry about the third generation later, but for—I don't know. Are you second generation or third?

GL: Second.

HN: [to GL] you born in here?

GL: Yes.

PL: Same.

HN: Okay, see, I—my son was born in Vietnam, and he came here when he was two. And he just like an American, he doesn't speak well Vietnamese. He spoke Vietnamese. My daughter too. Both of them. But they are not fluent like, like I want them to be. Okay.

PL: Um, I guess can you describe your time at, is it Schlumberger? Um, and like the [HN: Schlumberger.] Yes Schlumberger, and like the strengths you feel like you had to succeed in such a major um, company?

HN: Um, the reason that I was—I have to say that I've been success as a leader in the company due to number one, I was trained in Vietnam, in military to be a leader. And I brought that with me. Insert in my—I have, if you want to be leader, you have to make sure you uh, you have to make a good example for people to follow you. Um, so when they, when they ask me to become a manager, I say, Wait a minute, manage a bunch of—a lot of people, you know, white, black, or you know, different kind of people. can I do this? Uh and they said, Why not, try. And I was successful at the first time. I pull people together because I, I—number one, I respect them as a human. When I ask them to do something, I ask them with a different way, rather than be a boss. Okay? And I am there when they needed me. And I support them everything they need. And, and, and, and it become a success. You know, when you be a leader, when you want to become a successful leader, that's what you need to do. And, and, amazingly, that I had been a manager for 20 years, and most of my college who was manager with me, they lost job, they demoted, they got laid off, and I'm amazed I'm still around. And, it's just amazing. I have to say I'm very fortunate. But uh, the leadership I learned from the military school, was, was very, beneficial for me when I came here and applied what I learned into the working life.

PL: So you didn't change your management style throughout—you kept it the same, like the mindset to lead a group of people? Like your management style didn't change?

HN: Mmhmm [shakes head].

PL: No? Ok. And then I guess can you describe more of—I guess examples of like challenges you've had in managing different people from different backgrounds? Um, anything off the top of your head that you can mention?

HN: You're asking about management style?

PL: Mmhm. Or like an example that you've had, like a challenge to manage like different people, that you've faced?

HN: Oh, I have a lot of stories to tell you, but um, but um, let me, let me rephrase the question so I understand. You ask me about management style through different types of people? Okay. [clears throat] First of all I treat them the same. Either they're Vietnamese, they Asian, they black, they're Mexican, they're white. Doesn't matter. Um, I treat them the same: fair, always fair. Um, and um, if they, if they um, they come to me for any reason, even besides working environment, their problem at home I help them out too. Um, I can give them time off to go support their mother, their cousins, and a couple times I gave a guy money so he can go buy school supplies for his kids. Um, and when the guy went through the divorce, he came to my office and cried. I was there as a counselor. [laughs] Um, uh you name it. I am everything to them when they need me. But uh, the most important thing is I always give them—I'm always leading by example. I want them to do something, I do first. I want them to be on over there to work Sunday, I come to work Sunday. I want them to feel like I am with them. I'm not the boss, I'm stay home, drinking beer, and let the people to work, you know? Uh, so leading by example is very important [clears throat]. Be with them, be fair. And support.

PL: Um, and then— [HN: Gi—] oh, yeah, go ahead.

HN: Go ahead.

PL: Oh okay, from leading by example in Schlumberger, how do you engage with your community in Houston?

HN: Engage in community? [PL: Mmhm.] Uh, Schlumberger has a lot of projects, called employee engagement. We have like um, right now, I'm in the community—uh in a committee to, to do something called United Way. United Way is a campaign to raise money for the needy in Houston. Uh, everything, every dollar that we raise, the company match a dollar. And then we, we go for 5 million dollars, you know every year, to help the United Way. Uh, that's employee engagement. We engage in food drive. We engage in school supplies for kids. You know, we raise a lot of money, and we put them in the backpack, and we'll send thousands of backpacks like that throughout the Houston community. So it's a lot of engagement with the community.

GL: What motivates you to engage in your community in this way?

HN: I'm sorry?

GL: What motivates you and drives you to engage and give back to your community?

HN: Um, I, I feel this, I feel when I came here, I felt like I am very fortunate, okay. Um, I came from the poor country, uh, and when I came here, I feel like I have—I'm grateful, I'm very grateful, and I'm very thankful that I have the opportunity to come here, to come to this country, to excel to my ability. To have freedom of speaking. Freedom of religious. You know, all that, and uh, on top of that, I have the opportunity to raise my kids the way that they want to be raised. So, I think I need to pay back to the community, that's it.

PL: How would you describe the Vietnamese American community in Houston?

HN: Um, in 1975, when I came here, there's not many, okay. But, '75, what's that now 45 years later? We have a big community here in Houston. Um, I um, yeah I enjoy the food [laughs]. Um, I, I, I cannot talk about the community, the, the, the—what do you say? The Vietnamese uh—community? Mr. Nguyen [sic] here may know more than me about it. But I try to limit myself not to engage too much in political activity, “political activity.” I can do anything, but not “political”. Anything that gather, and you know things like that, I try not to. I would rather spend time do some charity work. Um, again, talk about charity, I involve in an orphanage in Vietnam. We save—we collect a lot of money, send it to Vietnam, and help out the orphanage. Where I been—I came, when I worked for the—many years ago when the company send me back to Vietnam to work with the oil and gas company in Vietnam, I had a opportunity to visit a lot of orphanages. That's all I'm interested in. I will see, and then I say, Oh kids. [exhales] And I come home, and I say I got to do something. So the next trip, I'm back to Vietnam, I brought a lot of money. I collect from friends and charity, and then I buy blankets, food, and try to help out as much as I can.

PL: Um, when was the first time you went back to Vietnam after leaving—after migrating to the US?

HN: I came here in '75, and I come home, back to Vietnam in 19-like-98, 90, no 80-si—80, si—'88.

PL: '88. What was that experience like?

HN: Oh, unbelievable...I cannot describe that feeling. When I left the country when I was 23, and I came home when I was 33, or something. Oh my, I just—oh, that's the best feeling ever, to come back to my country the first time. It was amazing, amazing. And I came back many, many times after, the total is 17 times.

PL: 17 times. Do you go like every other—

HN: The company send me, I go [**PL:** Oh okay.] Yeah.

GL: Do you take your kids to Vietnam?

HN: Yes, uh took my—first of all, my son—I have a son born in '73, he's 47 years old. My daughter is 37 years old, born in 1983. So I took both of them back to Vietnam twice. They love the country. Oh my—especially my daughter. She loves the food. She loves all the ancient cities. And she love Hanoi. She loves all that stuff—and she plans to go back many, many times. Again, I took her back one trip. I took her back after she graduated from medical school. And we contacted the medical school in, in, in Saigon, and they said they—one of the condition for my daughter to graduate from medical school is to have, to spend few months, working, volunteer in the hospital. So we chose Vietnam. I say, “Honey, go back to Vietnam and do that.” So she went back to Vietnam and volunteered for a few months. And that's what make her love the country.

PL: Um, and do you still have family in Vietnam right now?

HN: Uh, not many. I, I, I sponsor my mom, and all my seven brothers and sisters, and they're all here with me.

PL: Okay. What year was that when you sponsored them?

HN: Uh, you know. Not all at one once. A year, and two years later, and 4 years, and 5 years, and—but finally they all here.

PL: Are they in Houston?

HN: They all in Houston. One in Canada. [**PL:** Oh okay.] Yeah.

PL: Um.

HN: One thing that I like to, to mention is my, my father, um, when the Communists took over the country in 1975, he escaped. They captured him, but he—and tried to put him in a concentrate—concentration camp but he escaped. They capture him back 2 years later, in 1977. And again, send him to the camp. and he died 10 years later in the camp. My father passed away in a concentration camp.

PL: Um, and were you able to—or how did you figure that—how were you notified of that?

HN: Uh, I received a telegram.

PL: And, I guess looking back at the war, what is your perspective on the war today?

HN: Um, it's a game of politics. Um, American have abandoned us, that's what I always say. Just like they abandoned Iran. Um, I feel like um, if it's not the interest of the US, then we are nothing. They spend billions of dollars, and 55,000 dead in Vietnam, and we lost about 2 million people, and the whole country was destroyed by the war for nothing. So, when, when the US lost interest in Vietnam, they get out. So to me, it's good to become America, US enemy, than become their friends. It's better to become their enemy. Because they never abandon you. They abandon, abandon friend, but they don't abandon enemies. I have bitter in my mouth right now talking about the war. It's just a waste of time, money, life, and it brought Vietnam back to like 50 years behind those countries like Thailand, and Singapore, and Korea, you know what I'm saying? So, we, we feel like we're very unfortunate. Very, very unfortunate.

GL: Do your opinions about US involvement in wars, does that affect how you view America in general? Or do you separate foreign policy with the country itself?

HN: Rephrase the question again.

GL: Um, so does your opinion about the US and its involvement in wars, does that shape how you view the country as a whole? [**HN:** Oh!] Or do you see the US—

HN: I understand, yeah. No, that's different. Have nothing to do with it. The people of this country is nice and beautiful, and very g—you know, I would say, generous. America is always generous with everything—all the rest of the world. I'm not viewing the policy of this country and just using that and judge on the people of America. No, that's totally different things.

PL: Um, what are your hopes for, I guess third-generation Vietnamese Americans and your children?

HN: I hope they will be as successful as the second generation. Let me say this to you, um, always, this has happened to all, everybody, most of the, the immigrants who, who come to, who came to the United States. The first generation works real hard to make ends meet, right, and raise the second generation. The second generation always the most success, always successful, and they are the most successful. But the third generation become, if you don't—if the second generation don't make the third generation as the first make to the second, then things go slow down; they're gonna go down. They don't have the discipline. My, my children don't have the discipline that I push on them to their kids. Does that make sense?

Because I set goal. I set objective for them. When I, when I, when I told them this: I came in here, speak almost nothing English, okay. Speak no English at all. And I was 23 years old. And I was 25 years old to start college. And if I can get a master's degree, my kid have to have a PhD degree. They have to do better than me. Right? And fortunately, both of them achieve those. I set a goal, and they met it. They—do they like it or not? I don't know, but they met the goal I set.

GL: So, why do you think that your kids have such a different approach to parenting than you had when you were raising your kids?

HN: Say it again.

GL: Why do you think your kids have different approach to raising their kids?

HN: They become Americanized. Simple. Well, I came in here with a different culture, right? Different tradition. I apply that to my kid. But do my kid applies anything to their kids? I don't know. They may pick a little of what I give them and give it back to the third generation. But how do they apply or how much effective? I don't know. But when I talk to a lot of different people like my bosses, my friends, who immigrate from Germany, England, and all that, Italy, they say, the third generation—their third generation, is psst going down. They know that. I hope it not happen to our Asian community, that way. But to them, you know, I mean.

PL: Um, so how would you identify yourself?

HN: Define myself?

PL: Yeah, identify yourself.

HN: I'm a dedicated person, I'm uh, fun. I'm very fun, funny person. I enjoy life. Uh, I work hard for my life. Since I was 12 years old, I have to be the father, the oldest—with all my, you

know, my siblings. When I was—join the US army, join the army, I was a leader. I came in here, and I work hard, and raise kids, and family. But again, I value people. I appreciate and grateful for the country that accepted me. I did everything to pay back. And in the meanwhile, I enjoy my life. This is the country—this country has offered us, a lot of things that none other country offer. Healthcare, for example, you know. Educations. Job opportunities, all that, so. I took opportunity. I'm an opportunist. Opportunist, right? Is that right?

PL: Yes that's right.

HN: So everything opportunity, I grab it. And I'm a musician. [**PL:** Oh, so—] I sing Vietnamese, I sing English songs, and I play keyboard, guitar, that's my hobbies. It's a lot of uh, instrument you can see in this room [**PL:** Do you—]. We met uh, like once a month, together all friends around, drinking wine, and then singing.

PL: What kind of Vietnamese songs do you—

HN: Folk songs in Vietnmaese.

PL: Folk songs. Okay. Did you pick it up, um—?

HN: I was learning guitar when I was like 12 [**PL:** Okay.] and the keyboard, I was learning a few years later. Just recently.

PL: Um, and what would you consider your major accomplishments in life are?

HN: Um, my major accomplishment in my life is to uh, raise my kids successfully. Support my wife. She had been—she had cancer for like 20 years, 30 years. So it's really hard. But we support each other, and she overcome that illness. That is number two. Number one is to get my kids to have the education they needed. Um, both of them married. And I have three grandchildren. Um, another accomplishment I have was I have a very successful career. So raise kids, have a good career, support my wife. And the next one I want to become a successful singer, but I don't know when that will happen [laughs].

GL: You got plenty of time [**PL:** Yeah, you have time.].

TD: He's a very good singer. [HN laughs]

HN: Just kidding. Alright.

PL: Are your children in Houston?

HN: Yes, one of them isn't. My uh, my son is a pharmacist. He marry another pharmacist, and both of them have one kid. One son that live in Houston. My daughter is a cardiologist. She's now assistant professor at University of Chicago. Her, her husband also a medical doctor. And both of them have two kids that live in Chicago. So my wife will travel to Chicago like once a month. Go take care of the kids.

PL: So besides traveling to Vietnam, what other countries have you—

HN: Oh, I've been, I've been in um, Western Europe, most of the countries. I've been in North Europe, Asia, a lot of countries. A lot of countries. [laughs]

GL: We were wondering what legacy do you want to leave behind you for future generations?

HN: Legacy...hm for my uh, my next generation or?

GL: You can interpret as for your family, or Vietnamese Americans, or just for society. What impact do you want to make for the future?

HN: Hmm...what impact for the future?

GL: I would say you've already made quite an impact...

HN: What else?

GL: Yeah. Or even you can reiterate what you've already talked about. Just what you want your lasting impact to be?

HN: Um, I have to find the right answer, good answer. Mm, last impact.

GL: Or another way of looking at it is, how do you want to be remembered?

HN: Mm. Um, I don't know what else, what, what accomplishment, what else that I need to do. But I would like to be remembered as a very funny person, very loved, uh, loved, very outgoing person, very friendly, very generous to charity. probably that's it. I'm... I'm, I don't have a big um, bigger goals. All this objective and goal and everything that I set I already accomplish. But I have a lot of good friends. I have to say this. I live a full life. When you say you live a full life, I don't need anything else. I don't need money, I don't need to be rich. I don't need to be—All I want to be is healthy, to stay with my grandkids. Other than that, I don't have any dreams, or anything else. But become uh—my good health. Good health is my number one that I like for now. Other than that, I don't need anything else. I accomplished most everything I set to do.

PL: Um so, is there anything we haven't asked you that you would like to talk about during this interview?

HN: Um... I think we cover most of everything. I, the Asian community in, in the United States is growing and I can see that most of the famous universities accept a lot of Asians due to their intelligence, hard working. Um, so that is the thing that I will—I like the most. I like the whole world to, the whole world to recognize Asians as a group of very very intelligent, very smart people. And look around Houston here you see a lot of successful kids. My, my wife's family almost has 20 doctors in the family and lawyers [laughs]. So the second generation was unbelievable. Like I mentioned, I don't know about the third generation, but that is something I

love—I enjoy the fruits, you know. And I know, very sure that you both will be successful. You're smart to be accepted to Rice. Congratulations, you did a good job. Anyway, I don't have anything else to say. I thank you Mr. Nguyen [sic] here, introduce me to you [**TD**: Dang, Dang, Dang.] I hope that my English is understood. Uh, and uh, and uh, I very um, thank you. Thank you so much for spend time in the cold evening to come to my house. And uh, you know, interview me. This is the first ever, in my life, I was interviewed. So I hope that I'm doing okay.

PL: Yeah, of course, thank you for—

HN: Uh, if I, if I struggling a little bit here and there, it's due to my—number one is my memory. Number two is I'm struggling to find the verbal, the word. I mean, English is an art. Language is an art. If you don't use it, you forget. You know, so there's so many words I've been using, but when you ask me and I say Oh I can't find the word. Anyway. Again, if you don't have any more questions, I appreciate your time, and I wish you successful in your life, which I know that you will be achieve. And remember one thing, You gotta do better than white people in order to become [inaudible]. This is their country. I'm not a racist but I'm saying, You gotta do better.

PL: Well thank you so much, Mr. Nguyen, for letting us come into your home and interview you on behalf of the archive.

[Interview ends]