

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

Interview with: Tanya Truong

Interviewed by: Norman Truong

Date: March 11, 2011

Transcribed by: Norman Truong

Interview Length: 57:42

Edited by: Anna Ta (Jun 8, 2017)

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NT: Oral History Interview of Tanya Truong at her home in Houston, TX on March 11, 2011. Interview conducted by Norman Truong for the Houston Asian American Archive at Rice University's Woodson Research Center...Okay. So you can just start by briefly introducing yourself and your background.

TT: Well uh. My name is Tanya Truong and I am Vietnamese origin. I came here in 1981 when I was 17 years old. I escap—escaped from Vietnam and then my uncle sponsor us, me and my brother, and we came here and stayed in Houston since then.

NT: Okay. Um. Could you maybe start by um talking about your life back home? And I guess, your family?

TT: Um we have—you know, my parents still live in Vietnam, and I—I am the oldest. I have two younger brothers, one sister, and one brother escaped with me when I left Vietnam, and two younger brother and sister still live in Vietnam with my parents.

NT: Okay so um...I guess what um employ—wh—what was your family's business in?

TT: My uh dad was a soldier under the Republic of Vietnam so when the uh country fell into the commu—communism, he just stayed home, and my parent—uh my mom was a housewife and still is a housewife. So she did research, and he's was in you know, soldier—he was a soldier.

NT: Okay. Did you say—are you from Saigon?

TT: Yeah.

NT: Oh—Okay. Um...So what did your dad do before becoming a soldier? Or what was he—

TT: Uh, he worked in the printing business. You know. Back then they didn't have computers and uh they laid out, a—I guess, you have to put the letters together and then...ink it and then print it out and something like that, that what... I remember he told me.

NT: Okay and was it his own business?

TT: No, he worked for somebody's, uh for a company.

NT: Oh, okay. And uh I guess back then did y—h—how old were you when you left Vietnam?

TT: Seventeen.

NT: Seventeen, so...

TT: I escaped when I was seventeen by boat.

NT: Okay. And did you um, have any, I guess—did you work? Back in...

TT: Um no, um no, I—I was a student until the day I left Vietnam.

NT: Okay. Student in secondary school, or high school?

TT: High school.

NT: Okay.

TT: Yes, I just finished twelfth grade in May, and then um, June we escaped.

NT: And how about your uh brothers and sister?

TT: Uh, my br—yeah, they all still were students.

NT: Okay... um, let's see. So, you said you were seventeen when you left Vietnam. Um. Could you—what year was it when you left?

TT: 1981.

NT: And um I guess, could you tell me the story of, just like, in general...?

TT: What? Yeah, the communists took over and then you know with communists you have no freedom. And my parents want us to have freedom and have a education. So my uncle was planning to escape, so my mom left us—left my uncle's family and um we escaped by boat and then we uh we were rescued by a Norwegian um... freight liner, big boat, and they took us to Singapore. And we stayed in a refugee camp for four months. My uncle was here, so he sponsored uh me and my brother to come here.

NT: How did your uncle first come here?

TT: He worked for uh a American embassy in Saigon, so when Saigon fell into the communism, the America embassy t—took all his—all their employees with them or asked if they want to come to America with them, so my uncle's uh family left with the—all the American people.

NT: Okay. And um...what was life like in the refugee camp?

TT: Um. It was crowded. It was a military base area so they had some um small rooms. Each family has their own room. If not, then they make a tent and uh we were there and then they give us two dollars per person a day for food and everything. So you use the few dollars to uh live by.

NT: Oh, wow. So you were in Singapore for four months and then uh came here. How—how did you, I guess—what was the route you took to come over?

TT: Um. By plane... [laughs]

NT: Okay, but did you stop anywhere?

TT: Um... California, for a few hours, yeah, and then came straight here.

NT: Oh, came straight to Houston?

TT: Mhmm. Yeah. Been here ever since.

NT: So why did your uncle end up in Houston?

TT: He was in New Mexico. As I remember, when he left Vietnam, he went to Guam, and then from there, they had sponsorship to come to New Mexico, so he was living with an American family for a few months in New Mexico and then he moved down, stayed there for a few more years, and he thinks that New Mexico was not a right place to raise a family. He had friends in Houston, so he came to visit and then they decided to move to Houston.

NT: Oh, okay. So did he um... did he have any jobs when he first came?

TT: Yeah, he worked in some manufacture company, and his wife was uh, my aunt, was work—working for the city of Houston, yeah. And um 1983, I believe, they opened their own supermarket.

NT: In Houston?

TT: In Houston. Back then you know, there were no Wal-Marts, no HEB, anything, so it—it was individual-owned supermarket. You could survive back then but you can't survive now because of all the competition.

NT: Mhmm. Yeah. So um when you first—so you first came to Houston in 18—in 1981. And you lived with your—did you live with your uncle?

TT: Yeah, we lived with uh—I lived with my uncle until 1988, so I lived with him for seven years.

NT: Which part of Houston did you guys live in?

TT: Um. Northwest.

NT: Northwest Houston. Okay. And what kind of—what was your housing condition like?

TT: Um, he—he—uncle, my aunt, and his uh four kids, and two of us, so eight people in—in a—in one house.

NT: Okay. Um. So, after you moved here, did you maintain connections with um I guess, other family members back in Vietnam?

TT: Yeah, by writing letters. That's the only um way back then, writing letters to each other...

NT: Mhmm. And when did your other family members come over?

TT: Yeah, who? ...My unc—uh my—my uh parents still in Vietnam.

NT: Oh, so you're the only one.

TT: Um, and my younger brother.

NT: And your—oh, okay yeah.

TT: And that's it.

NT: Okay.

TT: The rest of family is still back in Vietnam.

NT: Oh okay. Um. Can you recall any hardships or struggles back then?

TT: Yeah, um, they—the communists took over, and uh as students, we had to do the labor work. Um. If you—because I was young, so I was still okay for me to go to middle school, but like for the older kids who just finished high school, they couldn't get into college, because if—if their... fathers were soldiers under the old government, uh no freedom and i—it was just sad. They controlled your everything. Yeah. It was really um bad.

NT: Uh. So how about um when you first came to Houston? Could you maybe reflect on any... any other types of struggles maybe regarding race or regarding language barriers?

TT: Of course, language. You know, I came here and didn't speak a word of English. Uh. Studied from the beginning... ABC's. Yes, everything. And then I came here and went to high school and went to eleventh grade, so just learned ESL and sat in other classes for one semester without grades. And then after that, they started grading and I went on to um on to twelfth grade, graduated and then went to University of Houston to study.

NT: Uh. Were there other Vietnamese in your similar situations?

TT: Oh yeah, oh yeah, back then, um like in my ESL class, there were a lot of Vietnamese that just came here, my age, um maybe a little bit younger, um...starting you know, from scratch, um so we started learning English and just tried to see if we could go to college and have a better life.

NT: Mhmm, um. How long were you in high school? Just—

TT: T—two years.

NT: Two years, okay. And then, what did you study at um U of H?

TT: Uh, my major was in accounting.

NT: And um, when did you graduate from U of H?

TT: 1988.

NT: 1988. And were there other Vietnamese students also in your accounting classes?

TT: Yeah, yeah there were um some, not as many as now, but yeah back then we uh you know—th—there was a small group of Vietnamese students there.

NT: Yeah. Were there any organized clubs, organizations...?

TT: Yeah, they do have the Vietnamese Student Association.

NT: Did—were you involved in that?

TT: I knew some of them, but I didn't get involved. [laughs]

NT: Okay, so. After coming to America, what was your first job?

TT: When I was still going to um, in high school, I did some sewing, yeah. And, you know, just on weekends for some extra money to help my family in Vietnam. And um. When I was in college, I worked in my uncle's and aunt's supermarket. After graduating from college, I got my first job, and um, keep you know, working since then.

NT: So, you worked—in college, did you take night classes, or were you enrolled in university full-time?

TT: Oh, full-time at the university, and then wor—worked in work-study, yeah.

NT: Work study in addition—

TT: At U of H. Yeah.

NT: What was your job, what was your employment like?

TT: A...at U of H? Uh, different departments. You know, when you—every semester, you apply for whatever was available in whatever departments, so I worked in the education department, and I worked in uh the economics department, and uh, you know, so—three or four different departments, or colleges, you know, two or three hours a day.

NT: What kind of work were you doing?

TT: Answering the phone, running errands, or prepare tests for students.

NT: And um, at your supermarket job, what kind of supermarket was it?

TT: It was a supermarket that sells food and um, just you know, a supermarket. Everything.

NT: Was it Asian-owned? Or...

TT: Uh yes, it was owned by my uncle and aunt own it.

NT: And approximately how many hours did you work there and during what time of the day?

TT: Um I—I worked... all day Saturday. And um during the week, I worked Tuesday and Thursday from four to nine, yeah because you know, I was going to school full-time, so I worked part-time, you know, to get money for gas.

NT: Uh what was your salary like? At this..

TT: Minimum wage, I think five or six bucks an hour. [laughs]

NT: Oh. [laughs] Did you—at—at your supermarket job, I'm assu—everyone else was—was everyone also Vietnamese?

TT: Vietnamese? No, uh because that supermarket was located in a Hispanic area, so we had um Hispanic workers there. Yeah.

NT: And did you interact with the—like, your co-workers, including Hispanic workers on a daily basis?

TT: Oh yeah. Yeah, back then I was taking Spanish, I could speak Spanish, but now, you know, after so many years of not speaking it, I cannot remember a thing now. [TT and NT laugh]

NT: And uh what was your relationships with them like?

TT: Oh we—we get along, it's kind of a family-oriented environment, so we helped each other out and got along.

NT: Okay. How about at your um work study jobs? Did you—

TT: They—they were all Americans, teachers, and office clericals in there. So you know. We got—I had a good relationship with them.

NT: Did you feel that being Vietnamese affected your relationships with them?

TT: No—no, not at school, not at school.

NT: Like, neither in classes nor at work?

TT: No, not until I graduated and started applying for a job, that I could see a little bit of discrimination there. One time, I remember I went for interviews, and this man t—told me that for the same money, he would prefer American people.

NT: He told you explicitly?

TT: Yeah, he told me right there. And I t—told him, ‘Why did you call me in for interview for? I mean, you saw my name, you know I’m not American. Yes, I’m American, but I wasn’t born here. I was American by naturalization.’ So um, so I just left.

NT: Okay, did you—was that a common experience?

TT: Um just that one time, and then um, so far, all my jobs, they’re okay. Sometimes they don’t really show it or talk about it, but deep down, you can see a little bit of favoring more of Americans than Viet—Asians. They respect you because you can have the job done. You know what you’re doing. Um. You’re smarter than other Americans. But they still favor the Americans if your boss is American. Yeah.

NT: Um, so after graduating from college, how long did it take you to find your first job?

TT: Um two months.

NT: And were you very actively searching for a job?

TT: Oh yeah, oh yeah. That’s a full-time job, searching for your job.

NT: And what was your first job, I guess, after graduating?

TT: Working in a small um company, doing bookkeeping, since my major was in accounting. Yeah. I worked there for four or five years, and then uh I transferred to another job, better pay.

NT: Okay. And um when were you naturalized?

TT: I was here ’81, so...I don’t know. Now it’s five years, the requirement, but I don’t remember back then how many years, but um I was in college. So it must be ’85 or ’86.

NT: Okay. So it was during college. So at your first job, was—could you recall any particular poignant experiences?

TT: [At the supermarket,] No, because the...no, because the... surrounding areas were Hispanic people, so they treated you equally just like them. Yeah.

NT: And were you the only Vietnamese person working at the..?

TT: Uh besides my uncle and aunt, it was me, my cousins, and then, it was a big supermarket, and so we hired Hispanics um to work in the meat department, stocking the merchandise. The Hispanic people working the produce department.

NT: Okay, and how about your first job after graduation?

TT: Um, it was a Chinese owned company, but besides me, the owner, the rest were American people working there.

NT: So by then, how fluent were you in English and did you feel that that like affected your job performance?

TT: Uh... I guess you know, in order to finish school, you can read and write, but of course English is...you still learn every day, just more vocabulary to learn every day. I guess, I keep learning.

NT: Yeah, and I guess during or around this time period, how—how was the overall Vietnamese community like in Houston?

TT: It was small, very small. Yeah. When I came here around 1981, even when I finished school in 1988, it was small, it's nothing compared to as of now. When they get—On Sundays, when we went to church, it was just a small group of Vietnamese. Now throughout Houston, there are several churches and tons of people. So back then it was very small, and you know a lot of them. Yeah, yeah.

NT: Did you seek support from any—any of them, any other Vietnamese from Houston?

TT: W—No, we knew each other so if anybody needs anything, uh have hardship, uh anybody can help, will jump in to help. But...Back then, we—we were doing okay.

NT: And um. So was your church uh... was it a Vietnamese church? Or was it a...

TT: It was a Vietnamese mass, but we went to an American church, so I guess they shared, um the preacher let us share the church with American people. That is a [her daughter walks in] — Tiffany, say hi to Norman.

Tiffany: Hi.

NT: Hi. [NT and TT laugh].

NT: So, okay, so um. Did you—do you feel like you made many connections, many connections that last to this day, through church?

TT: Um. Because when I was living with my uncle and aunt, and they are older, so they get really—get involved in the church, so they had a lot of friends. I know their friends, but my younger generation now, we go to church, and then we leave. [NT and TT laugh].

NT: So after your—so going back to—sorry, going back to your first job after graduation, why did you decide to leave and transfer?

TT: It was a small company, lot—not too much um benefits, so moved to a bigger company with more benefits and higher pay.

NT: Okay. So that was—that's your job right now?

TT: No, uh that was a long time ago, so. Um. And then I... I worked at my second employment for seven or eight years, and then they sold the company, and they transferred the accounting department to Arizona, so there was no more accounting uh department in Houston, so that's why I left and found another job in uh the city of Bellaire. So I worked there for a few more years—several, several more years and they sold the company again. So I left, and I've been at the current company for eight years.

NT: Eight years. So, through those prior jobs after the first job, um, were they—who—what kind of people owned the businesses?

TT: Oh, there were all American-owned. Yeah.

NT: And how about—were there any other Vietnamese co-workers?

TT: At my current job right now um, there's a manufacturing department... so there are some Vietnamese people that you know, assemble cables and put all the motherboards together, but um but of course they have some Chinese and some Hispanics, and then we, the engineering department, accounting department, all Americans. Yeah. You know. Me, Vietnamese, Hispanics, one or two Hispanics, but mostly just Americans, blacks and whites, in engineering, sales, and accounting.

NT: Um, how are your relationships with your current co-workers?

TT: We are just like a small family. We joke, we talk, we laugh, we get mad at each other, we curse at each other, [laughs] but we get along. Yeah we—good days and bad days. We learn to live and work with each other.

NT: Okay. And what is the name of your current company?

TT: Uh, Rose Electronics.

NT: Okay. And what part of Houston?

TT: Southwest. Yeah.

NT: Um. Do you have any experiences you'd like to share, I— or I guess, are there any particular experiences regarding race at your current job that you may recall?

TT: Hmm. Not really. The only thing that sometimes my American friends or co-workers, th—that because they work under me, so sometimes they just uh ask that how—how we came here later, they were born here, and I came here just twenty-something years ago, and why we are doing better than them. And I said because we work hard, w—we put education first, so we finish college, and we get good jobs, and you know, some people who work under me are older than me, but they don't have a [college] education, so they get paid less. And um. So sometimes I think they're jealous, that you're younger, you were not born here, but you are doing better than them. But you know, I explain to them that you know, we're family, we support each other, we always put education as very important. And that's what our priority. And we just have more determination than them.

NT: Okay, um. And was it hard finding this current job?

TT: Um. Back then, several years ago, um not really. I don't know about the current market right now, because I haven't been out there, and I hope that I don't have to be out there for—for a long time, but I heard it's tougher now. But back then, you know, you keep on sending out resumes, and they call you for interviews, and you go and they offer you a job and you pick what job you want.

NT: Okay. Um...So at your...could you maybe describe a typical day at your workplace right now?

TT: Yeah, um paperwork, paperwork, paperwork, deadline, deadlines, you know. Because it's accounting, so you—at the end of the [fiscal] year, it's pretty busy, you try to close, month-end closing. And then the beginning [of the month], you have to have um deadlines, maybe the first week to have the financial statements done, so uh just crazy sometimes. Um. You come in, you get busy from the minute you sit down until to the minute you leave, but uh you get the job done, so you're satisfied with what you have contributed to the company.

NT: Mhmm. Okay. Um so let's shift gears a bit. Um so are you currently involved in any community or cultural organizations in Houston?

TT: Um. All I do is, um we take our daughter to the Vietnamese school on Sundays. I used to teach there, but I um I haven't taught there for the last two or three years. But you know, I still go there, I see all my friends there on Sundays. Sometimes, we get together, and eat, have fun, and talk.

NT: Okay. So did you—were these—did you make these friends through Vietnamese school?

TT: Yeah, I met them there, long time ago, when Nathan and Tiffany were several years old, so you're talking about a long time, ten years. Yeah. And u a lot of people left because they're kids are all done with Vietnamese school, and then younger families come with younger kids, so we see each other every Sunday, so we make friends.

NT: And um. During the time—how long did you teach at the school?

TT: Four or five years, yeah, on Sunday.

NT: Was it for—did you receive any pay?

TT: No, it was um strictly volunteers. That school just volunteer teachers, yeah and the family, the parents get involved and form a PTA, help the teachers out and do fundraising for you know, some celebration, like some year-end or school end, the year, or Vietnamese New Year celebration. So the PTA responsible for that.

NT: Okay. And are you part of that right now?

TT: Yeah.

NT: Okay. Um...

TT: Since I am not teaching yet, so I joined the PTA.

NT: So how long have your kids been going to this school?

TT: Long time, seven, eight, nine years. Yeah.

NT: Okay. And um. Are you involved in any other... activities?

TT: No, um I try help out at school for my daughter, when they have the band... you know, band playing, or something like that. I help with the food, with the kids, get them organized.

NT: Um. Have you made any friends with your—your daughter's classmates' parents?

TT: Yeah, we know each other. We all volunteer. When the big celebration comes, we all show up, and work out, and help the kids out, and talk to each other.

NT: Any are they mainly Vietnamese? Or are they—

TT: No, they're all Americans. Um. Well, let me say the band, probably two-thirds Americans, and one-third uh Asian, so uh Asian meaning Vietnamese, Chinese, Indians.

NT: Mhmm. Okay. Um...So would you say that most of the connections you have now today are through Vietnamese school and...?

TT: And the kids' school. Yeah.

NT: Okay. Um...So let's talk a little bit about your family. So when did you meet your husband?

TT: Um. I met him when I was in college. Yeah.

NT: Okay, and he's Vietnamese as well?

TT: Yes, he's also Vietnamese.

NT: Um. And what year did you get married?

TT: 1991.

NT: And what does your husband do?

TT: He's an electrical engineer.

NT: Okay. Um. So... Where have you guys lived, I guess?

TT: I've lived in Houston all my life, since I came to America. He came to uh New York first, and then he went to Pennsylvania for college. Uh. He studied at the University of Pennsylvania. He graduated from there, went to Ohio to work, and then he moved down here, worked for NASA. And now he's working for uh Hewlett-Packard.

NT: So where in Houston have you lived? Have you moved multiple times?

TT: Um well...I lived with my uncle and aunt in Northwest Houston. I graduated, I moved out. I went to Southwest Houston. We moved to this house fifteen years ago, but before that we lived in an apartment, also in Southwest area.

NT: With your—oh, with your husband?

TT: Yeah.

NT: So why, uh—were there any factors back then when you were determining where to live or...?

TT: Um. My friends lived in this area [Southwest Houston], you know, we—college friends. Yeah. So uh I finished school and uh found a job, and they said, hey, you want to move to Houston, move near us so we can hang out, so I moved here and stayed here.

NT: Okay. And uh—do you normally interact with your neighbors on a regular basis?

TT: Yeah, yeah, yeah we chit-chat when we work in the garden beside each other, we stop and talk, or sometime, when there is anything concerning, or whatever that is going on in the neighborhood, they ring the doorbell at night, and we talk. Or you know. We have our—we exchange phone numbers, so anytime, you know, if they need something, anything that concern, they just call.

NT: Okay. So are most of your friends now— are they mostly Vietnamese?

TT: Well, I have my friends at work, so Americans. I have my friends at the Vietnamese school, and I have my college friends, Americans and Vietnamese.

NT: Do you still keep in touch with your friends in Vietnam?

TT: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Half of them still are still in Vietnam, and half of them are here, but in different states, so we talk on the phone, email now, or Facebook. [laughs]

NT: Facebook? [laughs] That's very fun. Um. And your parents are still in Vietnam.

TT: Still in Vietnam.

NT: Do you have any plans of sponsoring them over?

TT: Um they're very old, they're in their seventies. I—I just don't think they'll like it here, because you know, um the language barrier. They can't socialize with neighbors. Um basically, if they come here, they just stay inside the house all day, and I don't think they would like that very much. And uh. We're working all day, and so we can't take them to see relatives except on weekends.

NT: S do you often go back to visit them?

TT: I went back three times. The last time was two and a half years ago, so if we have a chance we—we go. But um. Yeah. But um I left Vietnam in 1981. The first time I came back was nineteen years after, so we went back for the first time in 2000.

NT: Oh wow.

TT: 2000.

NT: With your whole family?

TT: Yeah, with the whole family, and then I went back again in 2005 and 2008.

NT: Oh wow. Um...

TT: But we talk on the phone. You know. All the time.

NT: So most of your family members are in Vietnam, except for your brother.

TT: Right.

NT: Okay. And do you have any plans of sponsoring any of your sib—your—your brothers and sisters over?

TT: Back then, they didn't want to come here, but now I think they want to. So uh. I probably will sponsor them, but it takes a long time to come here, so...but my parents, no, they do not want to come here. So if I have a chance, I come back and visit them.

NT: Okay um. So after living here for about thirty years...

TT: Yeah...

NT: Thirty years—

TT: Yeah, it will be thirty years in September.

NT: Oh wow. [laughs] Yeah.. do you have any thoughts on how the Vietnamese community has evolved or grown?

TT: There are a lot more people since I came here, so they have many organizations within the Vietnamese community, and uh of course there's a lot of the younger generation who get involved in politics, locally, um they're successful in many areas. Um. They stand up for the Vietnamese uh community, for the people. So um so far they have been doing a good job. You know.

NT: When would you say I guess, when would you say the Vietnamese community here actually became a very strong, cohesive presence?

TT: When?

NT: Could you maybe pinpoint a date, or is it mostly gradual?

TT: Well, gradual. From the start, it was just a smaller organization, and now it has grown bigger and then they uh they have many groups. So each different group... mainly have ideas for one area, but they all helping each other to make the community better.

NT: Okay. Would you say um atti—I guess, would you say attitudes towards immigrants have changed over the years, I guess, with respect to your experiences?

TT: Yeah, so when we came here, we were um... boat people, but the generation now, they came here, because they sponsor—their families that have already been here, sponsor them directly to here. When we came here, we faced a lot of hardships, more than the people that came later.

And, with immigration now, even um younger generation, they came here to study, visa student, and then um, they stay here, or they met someone and they marry and they say. So I think it's—it wasn't... they didn't face what we faced back then, because when we came here we were brand-new uh refugees, we had to start from scratch. But the people that come now, their families are already established, and they just sponsor relatives to come over, so uh I think they have easier lives than us back then thirty years ago.

NT: Okay. And how about the way other Americans see immigrants?

TT: From...what—just talking about at work, sometimes immigration conversations just somehow pop up. With Hispanic people, they can see, because—Hispanic people have relatives from Mexico, they want to bring those relatives over, so they understand that why Asians or Vietnamese want to bring relatives over. But for Americans, sometimes they don't see our point of view, um but they know that America is a good country, best la—place to live, so they can see why more people want to come here. But uh. Other than that, they keep on saying, why don't you want to stay in your own country, why do you want to come here, but they are not really against it, so you know, the people at work, they just, they don't really—don't care.

NT: So would you say that there is still some tension with regard to this matter?

TT: Yeah, the people that—some people, they—I can see that they are narrow-minded. They just don't understand. Yeah.

NT: Is this from personal experience?

TT: Personal—yeah, personal experience. But... or, because they work hard, and they can see some immigr—immigrant people. People that came here, they don't have a job, or they don't learn how to speak English. They're not happy about it. They say, 'Hey, you come here, why don't you learn our language, try to talk to us?' Or people that, some reason cannot find a job, and they go on welfare, food stamps, and they don't like it, because all of us are paying to support those people, and they don't like it. But uh, you know, because we are not in those people's shoes, so we don't know why they collecting welfare, food stamps. But it is good that the country, the government is helping those poor people out.

NT: Um so. I guess, I'll switch gears again. So traditionally, people have always thought that women should not work, women should you know, be homemakers. Have you experienced any, anything with regard to this kind of-this kind of view that most-a lot of Asians have kept, since you are—you are a working mom?

TT: It's been—I always think um society now has changed. Um, we want equal rights. So, in order to uh help maintain our [comfortable] lifestyle, two people have to work. Yeah. And uh. It's just—now, one working person family doesn't apply anymore. And I don't—it's good if one person, the husband works and can support the family. It's okay. Uh I guess you can sacrifice something to have the wife stay home. But uh nothing wrong if the mom can go to work and still raise a family.

NT: And your husband feels this way as well?

TT: Uh, yeah, I want to stay home, but he wouldn't let me. [laughs]. Can't afford it, so we both work.

NT: So... so have you—do you usually keep up with um, Vietnamese popular culture, contemporary culture right now?

TT: Yeah, we—we celebrate—we, you know, we celebrate the culture, Vietnamese New Year. Um, yeah. We get together and try to show the kids why we do that, uh for them to keep up with the culture, and hopefully you know, when they grow up, they have a sense of origin, that you know, why we do what we are doing now.

NT: How about pop culture, like you know, 'Paris by Night'? Do you often watch those?

TT: Oh yeah, yeah, every new CD that came out, we have it. It uh is a form of entertainment. And um. You know. They sing old songs, they sing new songs. And um. We like to look at fashion. And yeah. And then even—we went to some of the shows when they came to Houston, so yeah, we keep up with that, yeah.

NT: That's good. How about news, current events?

TT: Oh yeah, we watch that every day. Um. Read on the Internet, read the newspaper every day, watch the news every day. Yeah.

NT: So you—so you do spend a substantial amount of time every day being exposed to Vietnamese language media? Like, radio, TV.

TT: Um, riding—driving in the car, I listen to the Vietnamese radio station, but other than that, I watch the American news at night, reading the Houston Chronicle at lunch. [laughs]

NT: Okay. Um... So...Do your—do your kids also watch—like, do they listen to Vietnamese songs, music? Do you attempt to express, or like expose that to your kids?

TT: Yeah, I have, you know, in the car, we have the Vietnamese station playing, but they put their iPods on and listen to their English songs, American songs. There are some songs, they recognize the rhythms, but I don't think are ever interested in learning Vietnamese songs, they can speak Vietnamese, not very well, but they can understand, because we make them to. But uh of course English is still their first language.

NT: Mhmm...So how have—how would you say your view of the US has changed over— since your arrival, or even before your arrival?

TT: Economically, it is a lot more expensive now, and uh, and I think America is not as rich and strong as it used to be. We are still uh on the top, but Chinese—China is getting ahead of us in a

lot of things, military, education, technology, so we have to um—to do a lot of changes to keep pace with them.

NT: How about um when you were still in Vietnam? What did you see the US as socially and economically?

TT: Uh. Number one. [laughs] They were number one. The land of opportunity. U of H. The number one place to live. And to me, I think they still is... number one place to live uh because they have of freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of everything, you know, you have your rights...so that's good. Other countries, we—they don't have what we have here, so um America is still my number one choice.

NT: Did you think about—did you—or actually, um.. So nowadays, how would you view—or, as like, you talked about how back in Vietnam you always thought of America as number one. Now—nowadays, how would you see American culture? Like. What are your perspectives on culture and kind of American society?

TT: Culture uh in America, make—made up of a lot of different cultures. We are...They have people from everywhere in the world live here. It is nice to learn about a lot of different cultures and socialize with different people other than your culture. Um. And they recognize your rights, and you have freedom of choice, freedom of everything and I think it is a good country to be in.

NT: Okay, I think...I think we're done—or, I'm through with my topics. I guess. Do you have any I guess, anything you'd like to add with respect to any—do you have any experiences in general that you'd to share?

TT: No, but it's nice that you are doing this survey to have an archive of uh the Asian community, and uh, so maybe to keep something for history, and go from there.

NT: Do you think that this kind of project is essential; that we should um... we should maintain records of our histories? [55:00]

TT: Oh yes. I'm sure, I'm sure. I have seen Asian museums, that they interview a lot of people, they have a lot of pictures on the walls, and uh the journeys that how people escaped by boat, by road, by everything, by walking, from Vietnam to—to Thailand, or so they have all kinds of those, I've seen it in the newspapers.. It's just something for the younger generations or our kids and my grandkids to look back on and see how the older generation came here, why they came here, and how they matured, and um made a living here. You know.

NT: So. Why do you think, why specifically do you think that younger generations should know your histories?

TT: I always think that it is always good to know where you came from and um understand... why, or what happened back then. It is good to know your roots, go back to your roots and know your history.

NT: Okay. And would you say that other Vietnamese in Houston would think so as well?

TT: Oh yes. We talk to friends and relatives; they all think that. And we try to teach our kids um the culture. And um. You know. So far, I don't think will forget their culture, but they are adapting two cultures at the same time, so hopefully they take all the goods from both cultures and maintain them.

NT: Okay, I think we are done with this interview.

TT: Okay, thank you.

NT: Thank you so much for your time.

TT: No problem.