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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

TUNG NGUYEN

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Tung Nguyen and is taking place on March 28, 2006. The interviewer is Linda VanZandt. Also present is Von Nguyen, who assists with translation.

[A portion of the recording is conversation in Vietnamese unrelated to the interview and has not been transcribed.]

VanZandt: Today is March 28, 2006. This is Linda VanZandt with the Center for Oral History at The University of Southern Mississippi, and I'm in Biloxi, Mississippi, East Biloxi, on the Back Bay, and I'm here with my friend Tung, and we're going to talk about [Hurricane] Katrina a little bit, and hopefully about Vietnam. Von is here to help translate. So thank you, Von, and thank you very much, Tung, for being here today and sharing your story with us. If we could start by just telling me your name and when you were born and where you're from.

Nguyen: My name is Tung Nguyen, and I am born in Vietnam, Tra Vinh.

VanZandt: And what year?

Von Nguyen: (speaking in Vietnamese 00:01:38)

Nguyen: I came in United States in 1986.

VanZandt: OK. And you were fifteen years old?

Nguyen: Yes. No, I mean, when I come in America, I am eighteen years old.

VanZandt: Eighteen years old.

Nguyen: Yeah. But when—I left Vietnam when I'm fifteen years old.

VanZandt: OK. I see. So when you were born, Tung, what province did you live in and what town?

Nguyen: South Vietnam in Tra Vinh.

VanZandt: Tra Vinh?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, which is south of Saigon?

Nguyen: Yeah, south.

Von Nguyen: Southwest.

VanZandt: Southwest.

Nguyen: Southwest of Saigon.

VanZandt: In the countryside?

Nguyen: Yeah.

Von Nguyen: Countryside, yeah. Tra Vinh is closer than Can Tho. Yeah, Tra Vinh is closer than Can Tho.

VanZandt: Can Tho?

Von Nguyen: But she's been there (referring to Ms. VanZandt).

VanZandt: I have been there. So between Saigon and Can Tho. OK. Around the Mekong Delta? Close to the Delta?

Von Nguyen: Yeah, just around there, but further a little bit.

VanZandt: Further south?

Von Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And what is your father's and your mother's name?

Nguyen: My father name is Nguyen (unintelligible), and my mother name is (unintelligible).

VanZandt: And do you have any brothers and sisters?

Nguyen: Yes, I have four brother and one sister.

VanZandt: And does all of your family live here in Biloxi?

Nguyen: No. I only live with my brother here, but my mom, my dad, still in Vietnam.

VanZandt: Still in Vietnam?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Your mom and dad?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: Oh, in Vietnam.

Nguyen: (speaking in Vietnamese 00:03:32)

Von Nguyen: *Oh, in-laws.* (speaking Vietnamese) Oh, OK.

Nguyen: With mother-in-law. I'm sorry about that. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, that's OK.

Von Nguyen: I thought they were your step or your adopted parents or something. (laughter)

VanZandt: Well, I'll explain for the tape. We just came from one of your boats. Your family owns three boats here in Biloxi, and we just came from meeting, on the boat, your *in-laws*. So your wife, Vivian—

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: —is your wife's name, so these are *her* parents who own the boat and were working on the boat?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: OK. And maybe sometime we might be able to interview them, we hope. But good, so your parents are still in Vietnam. When's the last time you saw them?

Nguyen: Last year. I just go back there and we see them.

VanZandt: You went back. Oh, great. How long had it been since you'd seen them last?

Nguyen: It's over ten years.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness, long time.

Von Nguyen: They live in Tra Vinh, too?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. And who else lives there with your parents?

Nguyen: My old brother.

VanZandt: Your older brother, OK. And what do your parents do in Vietnam? Is your father a shrimper?

Nguyen: Yeah, they shrimper.

VanZandt: OK. Do they own their own boat, or do they work on someone—

Nguyen: They own their boat.

VanZandt: OK. And they've been shrimpers all their lives?

Nguyen: Yeah, right.

VanZandt: OK. And where did they come from, Tung? Where were they born? Do you know?

Nguyen: Yeah, they born in Vietnam, too.

VanZandt: In the north?

Von Nguyen: Tra Vinh, too?

Nguyen: Yeah, Tra Vinh.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, in Tra Vinh, the same place.

VanZandt: So born and lived there all their lives. OK. And if you could tell me, Tung—we'll skip forward and talk about Katrina if we could first, and then maybe we'll talk a little more about your history in Vietnam, but for our Katrina project, one of the reasons why I would love to hear your story is you have a boat here, and the fishermen have been hurt very badly from the storm here. So could you tell me—maybe, the day before the storm, go back to just before the storm hit and tell me if you knew the storm was coming, and what you did to prepare for the storm.

Von Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking in Vietnamese 00:05:52)

Nguyen: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yes, looked like everyone, they heard from the radios and newspaper and everyone about the Hurricane Katrina. And at that time he was still in the sea, on the boat, outside, so. But then before the hurricane come, he came back before, three days and to get the, to move the boat.

VanZandt: So you had been out shrimping, catching shrimp?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: And you came in three days before the storm, and brought the boat?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: And where did you take the boat?

Nguyen: I take the boat to Lorraine Road, uh-huh, and stayed there. And I get all my family down to the boat.

VanZandt: And who is in your family, Tung, besides your wife, Vivian? Do you have children?

Nguyen: Yeah, my wife and my two kid.

VanZandt: What are their names and how old are they?

Nguyen: One is Crystal Nguyen, and she five years old. And one is two years old; his name is Christopher.

Von Nguyen: English names.

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughter)

Von Nguyen: Not Vietnamese name? (laughter)

Nguyen: Because they are American. (laughter)

Von Nguyen: But last name [Vietnamese]. (laughter)

Nguyen: Yeah, last name is Nguyen. (laughter)

VanZandt: Right, yeah. A good Vietnamese name. (laughter) OK. Crystal and Christopher. Very young, still.

Nguyen: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: And Crystal is in kindergarten?

Nguyen: Yeah, she first grade.

VanZandt: First grade, OK. And so you got your family into the boat.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: Where did you live? Where was your home? In East Biloxi?

Nguyen: I live in North Biloxi, in D'Iberville.

VanZandt: D'Iberville?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: And D'Iberville had a lot of damage, too.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: What happened to your home? Was it OK in the storm?

Nguyen: Yeah, my house there was lucky. But it's not flooded, but a little damage.

VanZandt: Just a little damage.

Nguyen: Yeah, a little damage on one side, yeah, but not flooded.

VanZandt: Good, so just the wind?

Nguyen: Uh-huh, just the wind damage.

VanZandt: Ah, that is very lucky. When you got your family onto the boat, was this three days before the storm or the day of the storm?

Nguyen: No. The day before the storm.

VanZandt: The day before, OK. Sunday.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: And did you take some water or food with you on the boat? What did you take with you?

Nguyen: Yes. You know, because on the boat, we already got food and drink, everything on the boat. So just bring my family down there.

VanZandt: Did you bring any change of clothes?

Nguyen: Yes, yes, we got everything on the boat. We prepare everything; then we stay on the boat.

VanZandt: OK. And you went with a lot of other boat owners. Did you take your boat to the back canal and tie your boats together? Is that what you did?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: Tell me about that.

Nguyen: Like every boat come together and tie up, tied up like you know, the line. Uh-huh. And then—

VanZandt: How many boats, Tung?

Nguyen: Oh, it's a lot of boats.

VanZandt: I heard about two hundred.

Nguyen: Yeah, because every boat out here, just come in there.

VanZandt: Every boat.

Nguyen: Yeah, every boat.

VanZandt: On the Back Bay.

Nguyen: So a lot of boats.

VanZandt: What about the boats from the front, the small craft harbor?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Those, too?

Nguyen: They all move back there. They all move back there because when the hurricane come, the government not let them, you know, have out there.

VanZandt: Right. You *had* to move your boat.

Nguyen: Yes, yes.

VanZandt: The government made you do that?

Nguyen: Yes, right, uh-huh, that's for the safety. Yeah.

VanZandt: So most all of those fishermen, too, stayed on their boats with their families?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: During the storm?

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: OK. And can you tell me—I know it must have been horrible being on that boat during the storm, but tell me if you could, what happened. Just describe when the storm came and what it was like.

Nguyen: Oh, yeah. Like during the Hurricane Katrina, you know, a lot of wind, a lot of rain, you know, and the boat (speaking Vietnamese 00:11:12).

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:11:14) Yeah, it shake.

Nguyen: It shake.

VanZandt: It was shaking and moving.

Nguyen: Yeah, and when we saw, we saw the boat, you know, (speaking Vietnamese 00:11:24).

Von Nguyen: Oh, the lines was broken and then it float everywhere.

VanZandt: Your boat floated away?

Nguyen: Not my boat.

Von Nguyen: No, the others.

Nguyen: Yeah, the other boat. You know, it's moving (speaking Vietnamese 00:11:42).

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: There was some other boats when they was on the lines they tied, it was broken and then it float, and then it hit to the bridge—

VanZandt: Hit the bridge.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, and then was sunk.

VanZandt: And they sunk?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

Von Nguyen: The boat had broken, some of the—

Nguyen: And we saw, we saw people *die*. But I can't, you know, and (crying)—

Von Nguyen: Can't help them. Couldn't help.

Nguyen: I'm sorry. (crying)

VanZandt: I'm sorry.

Nguyen: I'm sorry.

VanZandt: I know that was—(brief interruption)

Nguyen: You know, because a lot of Vietnamese people, they always bring their family to the boat.

VanZandt: Right.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So that's just what you do.

Nguyen: Because they want together.

VanZandt: Stay together.

Nguyen: Yeah, stay together. Yeah, that's why they bring.

VanZandt: Right, everyone. Instead of leaving some members at home, some in the boat, everyone stays together.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: And how was your wife, Vivian?

Nguyen: During hurricane she cried, you know, because she afraid, scared, yeah. She cried, and like my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law, they stay in boat, too.

VanZandt: Were they on a different boat? Were they on the boat with you?

Nguyen: Yeah, they on the boat with me. Yeah.

VanZandt: OK, um-hm. And did you have a phone that worked at the time or any kind of radio communications?

Nguyen: Yes, we had a radio; it's on, but all the cell phone is off. Cannot reach anybody, but I got the VHF radio, so.

VanZandt: Who could you talk to on the radio?

Nguyen: I talked to my friend, you know?

VanZandt: Other friends?

Nguyen: Yeah, another friend, uh-huh, because sometime the boat moving, and the rope is broke. (speaking Vietnamese 00:14:01)

Von Nguyen: Was broken.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah, the rope was broken; that's the ones, they tried to use that to contact with the others.

VanZandt: Yes, OK. And did your boat—it was shaking a lot.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Did it turn over?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: It was OK.

Nguyen: No, it's OK, but—

VanZandt: Was it damaged?

Nguyen: Yeah, it's damaged, but a little damage, not much.

VanZandt: Just a little bit.

Nguyen: Uh-huh. And during hurricane, you know, my boat and my brother boat, my brother-in-law boat is (speaking Vietnamese 00:14:54).

Von Nguyen: Yeah, the rope was broken, so his and his brother-in-law's were floating far away.

VanZandt: Far away from the other group.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: Oh. Could you control it? Did the engine work?

Nguyen: Yeah, the engine work, but we lucky. (speaking Vietnamese 00:15:20)

Von Nguyen: Oh, yeah. (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah, the rope, the boat, were broken where looked like the main one was broken, but the boat, between the boats, each other, two boats each other, they had the rope, the line, so they stick together.

VanZandt: They could stay together.

Von: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, good. So you were floating away from the group, but together, you and your brother-in-law's boat.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: And where did the boats end up when the storm stopped? Did they get pushed up on land, or still out in the water?

Nguyen: Still out in the water because we have engine, still got engine to run. Yeah, so that's why it's on the water. We lucky.

VanZandt: You're very lucky.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: And in the beginning when you moved all the boats back, did you all have your engines running at the same time? I heard that you would start up your engines and try to push everyone, help push everyone back.

Nguyen: Yeah, right. Uh-huh. Right.

VanZandt: OK. How long—the storm lasted a long time, seven or eight hours. How long were you on the boat?

Nguyen: I think it's almost ten hour because it start at six a.m. in the morning, yeah, and then—

Von Nguyen: (speaking in Vietnamese 00:17:02)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese) I stayed in less than a week.

VanZandt: A week?

Nguyen: (laughter) Yeah, because my house had no power in there.

VanZandt: Right.

Nguyen: That's why we stay in the boat because the boat got the generator.

VanZandt: Oh, you had a generator.

Nguyen: They got generator; they got air-condition.

VanZandt: Food.

Nguyen: Yeah, got everything. So that's why we stay on the boat for like a week. (laughter)

VanZandt: And I heard that some of the boats were trapped, though, for a week or two because the bridge was broken, and they couldn't come back here. Is that right? Were you trapped?

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah, right.

VanZandt: So when was the debris cleared away good enough that they could come back to the dock, the harbor?

Von Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese 00:17:54)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. He said that after the hurricane, for a while, people could move, come back into the harbor, but the boat, they didn't let the boat come back in. Had about two or three weeks later, the boats—

VanZandt: Could come back to the dock?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: OK. Well, Tung, after the storm was over, and the water went down, and things were calm, when did the Coast Guard first come to help you? How long was it before you got help? That day?

Nguyen: No. About three, four days, and Coast Guard, they came and help. And I told them, I told them, you know, like Coast Guard and Wildlife [Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks]. I told them I saw people dying there. And they searched, but I don't know. I don't know how many people die in there, you know. But I saw they die. Yeah.

VanZandt: And when you came back and got off the boat and went to your house, that must have been a good feeling to see your house in good shape.

Nguyen: Yes, yes.

VanZandt: Because there were some people in D'Iberville whose homes were flooded.

Nguyen: Yes, mostly flooded, but my house was lucky. My brother house lucky, too.

VanZandt: So everything inside the house was OK?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Still there?

Nguyen: It was damage from the wind, you know.

Von Nguyen: From outside.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: So you went back to your boat and stayed there for a week.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And how long was it before your house got electricity and water back? Do you remember?

Nguyen: Yeah, I remember, but not too long. It's like three or four days then they got back electric. But you know, for safety we cannot bring the kids back too early to the house because, so that's why we stay on the boat.

VanZandt: OK. For safety reasons.

Nguyen: Yeah, for safety, yeah.

VanZandt: Sure. And Tung, how were your children through the storm? I'm sure it was frightening. I'm curious about during the storm how they were, and then now, how are they? Do they talk about the storm at all? Do they have—

Nguyen: They scared.

VanZandt: —bad dreams about it?

Nguyen: You know my daughter that five years old? She's scared. She don't want to stay the boat on, no more. Yeah.

VanZandt: She doesn't want to probably go on the boat at all.

Nguyen: Even me. If this season the hurricane come, I never let my kid, my wife down to the boat, because very dangerous. I cannot take care myself, you know, so I cannot take care them. So if the hurricane come this year, I won't. I won't let my wife and my kid down to the boat.

VanZandt: Um-hm. But you were protecting your property, too.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: Your boat.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And in addition to just being all together and being in a place that you thought would be better than your home—and your children, your daughter is back in school?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Her school has started again?

Nguyen: Yeah, they back in school.

VanZandt: Where does she go to school?

Nguyen: Elementary in D'Iberville.

VanZandt: Gorenflo? Oh, in D'Iberville.

Nguyen: Yeah, in D'Iberville.

VanZandt: OK. And have they talked about it at school? Do they talk with the children about the storm? Try to help them?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Good. So that's helped. And her friends are back there with her? Are most of the people back in school together, or did some people move away and stay away?

Nguyen: Some people move, yeah.

VanZandt: Um-hm, OK. And it's a little different in D'Iberville than here around Point Cadet, but so many homes are gone from East Biloxi. Just from what you hear, do you think that most of the people who lived in Point Cadet will move back there and rebuild their houses?

Von Nguyen: (speaking in Vietnamese 00:22:49)

Nguyen: (speaking in Vietnamese)

Von: He said that is really hard; he doesn't think that many people move back to Point Cadet. Most of them move to the north, up North Biloxi because they are really afraid after the hurricane.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Sure. So that will change the community there that used to be mainly fishermen who lived there, but now sounds like it may be changing to be more casinos, condominiums, golf course. You hear things like that.

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:23:55)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: Tell me the names of your boat, Tung. You have three boats that your family owns?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: What are the names of the boats?

Nguyen: The name the boats the (Vietnamese 00:24:26) (unintelligible). They got three boats, like, one, two, three. (laughter)

VanZandt: OK, one, two and three.

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: OK.

Von Nguyen: So what's [docked there] right now is one or two or three?

Nguyen: One.

Von Nguyen: One.

Nguyen: Actually, we got four boats, yeah. One and four, and we sail, you know, my mother-in-law, she sold one. So now we got two, three and four, and one is gone.

Von Nguyen: So this is two.

Nguyen: Uh-huh, this one two.

VanZandt: OK. And do you plan on selling two, three or four?

Nguyen: (laughter)

VanZandt: Or do you plan on keeping them?

Nguyen: No, no. My mom won't sell it.

VanZandt: OK.

Von Nguyen: You still, you think, continue with the shrimping job or get another job?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh, I am continuing because that's my job.

VanZandt: That's your job. Is that what you've always done, Tung?

Nguyen: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: OK. When you were a little boy, did you fish and shrimp with your father?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: And so you learned very early—

Nguyen: Yeah, right, uh-huh.

VanZandt: —the trade.

Nguyen: When I'm fifteen years old in Vietnam, I go with my brother, shrimping. So I have a little experience in Vietnam.

VanZandt: A lot. (laughter) And how is it different here in Biloxi than shrimping in Vietnam?

Nguyen: Yeah, a lot of difference.

VanZandt: How is it different?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:25:54)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah, he said that's because in US there is more convenience, more supplies, and modern things and the boat is big enough for them to do their job. In Vietnam, if you go to the beach, you can see the very small, very small [boats]. And of course they get help from the government [here in the US]. If they are poor, you can, yeah.

VanZandt: Right. So here you've had help from the government—

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: —buying your boats.

Nguyen: Yes. It's convenient for, like with SBA [Small Business Administration] loan?

VanZandt: Yes.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Well, tell me about that. I have so many questions about that, but right now, with your three boats that you have left, were each of them insured? Did you have insurance for your boats?

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:27:13)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. Two boats, two big boats, they have insurance, but the smallest one, they don't have.

VanZandt: So that's why I saw your father-in-law working hard on the boat that doesn't have insurance. (laughter) Makes him work harder.

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:27:40)

VanZandt: And I'm sure other fishermen are doing the same thing. I see them out hammering and working hard.

Nguyen: Yes, you know, because we working hard and, you know, hard to get money. So that's why he don't want to hire anybody. You know, when you hire anybody, very expensive. So that's why he do it yourself.

VanZandt: He knows how to do it.

Nguyen: Yeah, I do it myself.

VanZandt: Right. That's great. The two bigger boats that had insurance, have you heard from the insurance company yet?

Nguyen: Yeah, they told me bring the boat to the shipyard and repair, and they will take care of it.

VanZandt: They did?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Good. All of the damage, they'll take care of.

Nguyen: Yeah, but we still, you know, pay the money because we had put ten thousand down for the deductible, and then you know like, anything the boat is not responsible for, the engine, I have to pay. Yeah. Like—

VanZandt: OK. Like what would that be?

Nguyen: Like the paint underwater, I have to pay, because that not covered.

VanZandt: Hm, underwater, paint?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:29:00)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. They said they just guarantee three years, you know, the boat and the outside the boat, the underwater, the paint underwater, yeah, they just cover that about three years. After that, yeah, we have to—

VanZandt: OK. Only for three years. OK. And what about things on the boat? Your equipment, supplies, does insurance cover that?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: They do?

Nguyen: Yeah, they cover everything.

VanZandt: Did you have a big freezer on the boat?

Nguyen: Yeah, I have a big freezer.

VanZandt: OK. Well, good; so that's very good news.

Nguyen: Yeah. You know, and like year 2000, the year 2000, we make a lot of money because, you know, the fuel is not going up, the price. And the shrimp going high.

VanZandt: The shrimp prices, um-hm.

Nguyen: Yeah. So that's why we make a lot of money.

VanZandt: And 2000 was a good year.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh, good year.

VanZandt: And now the fuel prices are going up.

Nguyen: Yeah, going up.

VanZandt: And the shrimp prices are down?

Nguyen: Yeah, right.

VanZandt: How much can you get for shrimp now?

Nguyen: You mean a pound?

VanZandt: Yes.

Nguyen: Like the big ones, size 16/20, we sell at only four [dollars] seventy [cents] a pound. You know, but—

Von Nguyen: Forty, seventy dollars?

Nguyen: No, four dollar and seventy cent a pound, but in year 2000, we sell at seven dollar and fifty cent a pound. You know, a lot of difference.

VanZandt: Almost twice as much.

Von Nguyen: That's the biggest size? You mean the biggest size.

Nguyen: Uh-huh, yeah, big size.

VanZandt: What are the different sizes?

Nguyen: Yeah, they got too many size. (laughter)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. (laughter)

Nguyen: When we stay out there, we have to pick it up.

VanZandt: Separate?

Nguyen: Yeah, separate the size.

Von Nguyen: So you, I think you, I bet that you are really good to pick [them].

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Yes, fast. (laughter) Like a casino card dealer. (laughter)

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughter)

Von Nguyen: And how is your wife? How about her job?

Nguyen: Her job?

Von Nguyen: Yeah.

Nguyen: Stay home, (laughter) watch the children.

VanZandt: The children. (laughter) OK. When you go out on the boat, Tung, how long do you stay out at sea? A few weeks?

Nguyen: Yes, it's usually we stay, like, four or five weeks. Yeah.

VanZandt: OK. And tell me where you go, how far out in the Sound, Mississippi Sound?

Nguyen: Yeah, Sound Mississippi, like, Louisiana, and at the Mississippi River, yeah, down there. But sometime we go farther than there, like go down to the, I forgot, the Mississippi Delta to (speaking Vietnamese 00:32: 26)

Von Nguyen: Oh, really far in the deep sea, about five—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:32:37)

Von Nguyen: Yeah, three hundred feet.

VanZandt: Down deep.

Nguyen: And get to, like, big shrimp.

VanZandt: Is that where the bigger shrimp are?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: The deeper water.

Nguyen: The shrimp like this.

Von Nguyen: Oh, lobster!

VanZandt: He's got his hand around his arm.

Nguyen: No, it's not lobster. It's called, like, Maine lobster.

VanZandt: Oh, like a Maine lobster?

Von Nguyen: It's smaller than lobster, but bigger than shrimp. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, so you catch those, too.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: What else do you get in your nets?

Von Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese 00:33:10)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Crab, fish, shark, too.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Dolphin?

Nguyen: No, no dolphin out there.

VanZandt: Good. (laughter) No dolphin out there? Oh, I hear there are some, but no.

Nguyen: When you go out there, it's like three hundred feet, you don't see—

VanZandt: You don't see dolphins.

Nguyen: Yeah, you don't see dolphins, but we see the tuna. A lot of tuna down there. (laughter)

VanZandt: OK. And do you catch the tuna?

Nguyen: Yeah.

Von Nguyen: Oh. Can you sell them?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:33:45)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. Tuna, we can't get them by the nets. We have to by the, how do you call? Rod and fish? Rod, by the fishing rod.

VanZandt: A fishing rod.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Oh, OK.

Von Nguyen: Fishing rod. Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese 00:34:16)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Because it's underwater, not—down deep.

VanZandt: Deep, deep. Right, right. OK. I see. Right. And what do you like about what you do? What is your favorite part about shrimping and being out on the water?

Nguyen: Like we fishing the shark.

VanZandt: You like to fish for shark?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: What kind do you get?

Nguyen: The white shark.

Von Nguyen: Yeah. Have you ever got the big shark?

Nguyen: Yeah.

Von Nguyen: How big it is?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:34:50)

Von Nguyen: Oh, sometimes he got the shark about a few hundred pounds.

VanZandt: A few hundred pounds. And can you sell them easily?

Nguyen: No, they don't buy it.

Von Nguyen: Oh, so what did you do with it?

Nguyen: Because shrimp only; we don't have license, you know, to take the shark.

Von Nguyen: So you just get what you [can sell]. (laughter)

Nguyen: Just for fun.

VanZandt: Just the thrill; just the fun of catching.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Sure. Oh, my goodness. Have you ever had any bad experiences out at sea with storms coming in while you were out, far out in the Sound?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:35:33)

Von Nguyen: How far?

VanZandt: Well, has he had any bad experiences with storms while he was out at sea before?

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:35:43)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. He say, yes, sometimes they had the storm about forty or thirty, forty miles an hour, and he already was on the boat and out, far from the bank of the sea. So he just stayed there and tried to hang out, just tried to hang out. If not, he tried just slow, slow—

VanZandt: Slowly to come in.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, come in.

VanZandt: Do you have radios with you?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So that you can talk to the Coast Guard if you need to?

Nguyen: Uh-huh, yeah.

VanZandt: Good.

Nguyen: Because that, when I told you before, the radio always turn on when we got the license(?).

VanZandt: So they work, they're dependable.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, back to what's happening now with your boats. When does the season start? In May is it, the beginning of shrimp season?

Nguyen: No, the shrimp season begin in April.

VanZandt: OK. In April. So this next month.

Nguyen: Yeah, next month.

VanZandt: Do you think your two big boats will be ready to go back out?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh. We ready to go.

VanZandt: You're ready to go.

Nguyen: Right now we ready at shipyard, and everything done. We go now.

VanZandt: And how many are on the boat with you as a crew? Three or four other people?

Nguyen: The most people who stay in the boat, four people in the boat, including captain.

VanZandt: And are you the captain?

Nguyen: Yeah, I'm the captain. (laughter)

VanZandt: Captain Tung, OK. (laughter)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:37:52)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

VanZandt: And it's going to be a difficult season because of the fuel prices, I know. How much do you need to catch a day, Tung, to make it, to make some money at it this season?

Nguyen: Yeah, but, like we go now, like a month, we have to catch like almost, like eighty thousand or up.

VanZandt: Eighty thousand pounds?

Nguyen: No, I mean eighty thousand dollars and up when you sell the shrimp.

VanZandt: In one month.

Nguyen: Uh-huh, in one month. That's enough for the crew, for the bill of the boat, because you know, if you got—like, say you go, like, a month, you see? And you have to pay the fuel; like, twenty thousand gallon how much it take. It's almost fifty thousand dollar.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Just to be out there for a month and pay your crew.

Nguyen: I pay my crew.

VanZandt: What are your other expenses every month? Do you have to pay a monthly slip fee to dock your boat?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: You don't?

Nguyen: No, because I stay at the Golden Gulf Coast [Packing] dock, right there. I don't have to pay.

VanZandt: Oh, good.

Nguyen: But I stay here, I have to pay. But the Golden Gulf Coast will take care of half. Like the monthly charge fifty dollar; I have to pay twenty-five dollar, like that.

VanZandt: Good. That's why your boat is over there. (laughter)

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Well, I had heard that some people, they didn't make you pay monthly fees, a month or two after the storm, people were losing their boats; the boats were being repossessed because they can't pay that. Do you know some people who have had their boats taken away, repossessed?

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:39:54)

VanZandt: The bank will take away their boats.

Von Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese 00:39:58)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. He said that, yes, some boats they can't look like pay for—it's OK. They still can make a living if the price of the shrimp, just like that, but the gas price is cheaper, it's going to be OK for them to continue. But if the cheap price goes higher for gas, some of them can't, yeah, they can't make living, then the bank can take over, and they lose all their boats.

VanZandt: And do some of the fisherman, have they gone into the casinos to find work? Is that their best option if they can't fish anymore, to work—what other kind of work can they find?

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:41:51)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Oh. Yeah. He said that, yeah, some of the shrimper after they lost the boats or they can come to casino to get a job there. That's for the boats and if they know some of English. If with some other person [who doesn't know English] they come to another boat. Yeah, they work for the other, yeah—

VanZandt: For other fishermen whose boats are in good shape.

Nguyen: Yeah, right.

VanZandt: So the language problem is a difficulty if they don't speak much English.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: Tung, can we talk a little bit about Vietnam—

Nguyen: Yeah, OK.

VanZandt: —for a few minutes before we need to stop? I would love to hear about your memories of growing up in Vietnam and what your memories are as a child. Do you have good memories?

Nguyen: (laughter) (speaking Vietnamese 00:43:11)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. He said that when he was there, he was too young. So the best memory, the good memory he just has right now is when he was in elementary school because just the fifth or the sixth grade at that time, so, yeah, he just remembers.

VanZandt: And what do you remember about fifth and sixth grade? What did you like to do?

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:44:05)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. He said he just think of study at that time whenever the teachers need help and he will going to help them.

VanZandt: So you were a serious student?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: You liked school.

Nguyen: I liked school, but I want to help the teacher, too. You know? Yeah.

Von Nguyen: So when will you finish study? Ninth grade or—

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:45:00) When I finish sixth grade, and then I left Vietnam.

VanZandt: That's when you left.

Nguyen: Yeah, I left in Vietnam [19]83. In 1983.

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:45:12) And when you came to US, you continued to study?

Nguyen: No, because I stay in the—that what I told you before; I stay in the island, Indonesia island.

Von Nguyen: Oh, in a camp?

Nguyen: Uh-huh, in the camp.

VanZandt: On which island?

Von Nguyen: Indonesia.

VanZandt: Indonesia, OK. That's where you were in camp for three years.

Nguyen: Indonesia, yeah, uh-huh. I live in there three years, and I learn a lot of English.

VanZandt: Did you? Sure.

Nguyen: And like, I learned—(speaking Vietnamese 00:45:41)

Von Nguyen: How long were you there, Indonesia?

Nguyen: Three years.

Von Nguyen: Ooh!

VanZandt: Three years. Can we go back to 1983?

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: When you left.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: Tell me about leaving.

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:46:00)

Nguyen: Can I speak Vietnamese? (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, yes, please.

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:46:06)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. He say, he talked about 1983 when he was on the Indonesia island, yeah, because he came *after* the other people [first wave of Vietnamese refugees]. So the food is enough for him to eat, but the clothes and everything, yeah, is—

VanZandt: Not enough.

Von Nguyen: Not enough.

VanZandt: And what was it like the day you left, Tung? Were you in a hurry to leave? And tell me about the boat. Did you leave on your family's boat?

Von Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese 00:47:13)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese)

Von Nguyen: Yeah. They left on the boat, by his uncle's boat, just he and his brother. But his sister was supposed to come with him, but she was delayed by school or something?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh. (speaking Vietnamese 00:48:12)

Von Nguyen: Yeah, because she work, she went to work too far away, so that's why just he and his [brother] left, and his sister still there with his parents.

VanZandt: Oh, so just you and your *brother* left.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, and left from Tra Vinh.

VanZandt: OK. And it was on your uncle's boat. So where was your uncle? He stayed?

Nguyen: Yeah, he stay near Canada right now because he not go, he cannot go to USA because— (speaking Vietnamese 00:48:47)

Von Nguyen: (chuckle) Yeah, he got the interview from US consulate, but they denied him because he has too many children.

VanZandt: Oh. How many children?

Nguyen: He got, like, thirteen children. (laughter)

VanZandt: Oh, thirteen. They said, "No, too many." (chuckle) So he's in Canada.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Not a bad place to be.

Nguyen: Yeah, but he live in Indonesia island, it's like *five* years.

VanZandt: Oh, my goodness, waiting to get somewhere else.

Nguyen: (chuckle) Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Well, when you left, Tung, did you have food and water?

Nguyen: Yeah, we got everything.

VanZandt: For a few days?

Nguyen: Before we left Vietnam, you know, we stocked everything on the boat. So like water, food, clothes, everything on the boat. Yeah.

VanZandt: Were you able to tell anyone you were leaving?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: No one.

Nguyen: Mm-mm. Can't tell anyone. Yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: Not even anyone in your family? Except your sister knew, and she was trying to make it in time.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, because if you going to tell, they, yeah, they find out and—

Nguyen: You go to jail. (laughter)

VanZandt: So your sister needed to be there at a certain time, and she was late, so you just had to leave.

Nguyen: Yeah, right.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, with his brother. So your parent want to come to US, and you want to sponsor them to come here to live with you?

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Do you think that will happen?

Nguyen: Yeah, it happen, but I think they don't want to go because they too old. Yeah, so they want—

VanZandt: How old are they?

Nguyen: They almost sixty years old.

VanZandt: OK. And they don't really want to come?

Nguyen: Yeah, they don't really want to come because they say they too old, you know; they want stay there.

Von Nguyen: They rather stay there.

VanZandt: Are they still shrimping?

Nguyen: Yeah, um-hm, because they said if they go in here, you know, like—

VanZandt: Hard to start over.

Nguyen: Yeah, and boring.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, right, no friends.

Nguyen: Uh-huh, no friends here.

Von Nguyen: Can't speak English.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: And you can understand.

Nguyen: Yeah. (laughter)

VanZandt: I know you miss them, but you can understand, yeah. When you left and were headed to Indonesia, were you picked up by a Navy ship, US Navy ship?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: You went all the way to Indonesia?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: On your boat.

Nguyen: Um-hm.

VanZandt: *My* goodness.

Nguyen: And some people—

VanZandt: How many days did that take?

Nguyen: Oh, when we left Vietnam, you know, like it's three or four days because we lost.

VanZandt: You got lost.

Nguyen: Uh-huh, we almost out of the fuel. And we lucky.

VanZandt: Did you have a compass with you?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: No radio, no compass, nothing.

Nguyen: No compass.

VanZandt: Just the stars.

Nguyen: Yeah, just star, that's why we lost. And then, you know, we lucky. We out of water; people on the boat almost died, you know, even I take the seawater, just drinking seawater.

VanZandt: Did it make you sick?

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: So you and your brother on the boat, did you see other boats out on the water on your way?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: Were you all alone?

Nguyen: Yeah, alone, yeah. You know, some boat, when we out of water, and we try to burn a fire, like SOS [save our ship signal], we saw the Japanese big ship.

VanZandt: Oh, you did? But they didn't see you.

Nguyen: Yeah, they see me. Yeah, they did.

VanZandt: So that's who picked you up?

Nguyen: Yeah, they throw a lot of box.

VanZandt: Boxes. They threw them out.

Nguyen: But you know what inside?

VanZandt: What?

Nguyen: The garbage. You know? It's garbage. We didn't have the water, but they put garbage.

VanZandt: Oh. So you thought maybe they were throwing water to you.

Nguyen: Yeah, because we burned the fire, and they know we need help. And they throw down, you know, they throw down a lot of box, and all the people on the boat, they very happy because they need the water, just water.

VanZandt: Yeah, just water, right.

Nguyen: But we found in there is a lot of garbage.

VanZandt: Did they pick you up?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: They didn't pick you up.

Nguyen: They ran away.

VanZandt: They didn't want to have anything to do with it.

Nguyen: No.

Von Nguyen: So at that time you fifteen years old?

Nguyen: Yeah.

Von Nguyen: How about your brother?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:53:36)

Von Nguyen: Oh, his brother was born 1962.

Nguyen: Nineteen sixty-two, yeah.

VanZandt: And so three or four days later, you finally saw land?

Nguyen: Yeah, we saw land.

VanZandt: Tell me about what that felt like.

Nguyen: Yeah.

VanZandt: Very happy?

Nguyen: Very early in the morning, we saw a fishing boat off Indonesia, they fishing. And they saw me; they saw the boat, and they come and they help. You know, they give everybody in the boat the water, and they take the boat to inland. And then—

VanZandt: They helped you to land.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh, right.

VanZandt: And how did you find your way to camp? How did you know where—

Nguyen: When we go inland, we stayed there like a week.

VanZandt: With a family there?

Nguyen: Yeah. (speaking Vietnamese 00:54:36)

Von Nguyen: At that time the Indonesian, yeah, right there they ask them to give the right amount of the gold. I don't know how you can count. Yeah, like that, enough.

VanZandt: They asked him for money?

Nguyen: Yeah.

Von Nguyen: Yeah, for money, the gold, yeah. So every—

VanZandt: Did you have some?

Von Nguyen: Yeah, every people in the boat had to collect the money and then give for them, and then they can take you from the camp for the refugees.

VanZandt: Yes, right. Did you have some money left over after you gave it to them?

Nguyen: Yeah, we collect everybody and give to them, and they take me to the camp. And after that, the first time we came they called it Coo-Coo(?), Coo-Coo Island. Yeah, they call it the Coo-Coo Island. Yeah. And we stayed there like a month.

VanZandt: What was it like? Did you sleep in tents? What was the camp like?

Nguyen: (speaking Vietnamese 00:56:12)

Von Nguyen: Said mostly tents, like the tents, and many tents, around there.

VanZandt: Big tent city.

Nguyen: Yeah, right.

Von Nguyen: Many kinds of peoples, or just Vietnamese?

Nguyen: Vietnamese. (speaking Vietnamese 00:56:30)

VanZandt: Only Vietnamese.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: Did you see anyone you knew?

Nguyen: No. And then we stayed like a month, and they take me to another island they call Gulung(?) Island. We stayed there when we go back to US.

VanZandt: And when you found out you were finally going to be able to go to the US, how did you feel?

Nguyen: Very happy because my father, he was a soldier in Vietnam before. So that's why I have, you know, enough to go to US.

Von Nguyen: What's the first place you came to US?

Nguyen: In Mississippi.

VanZandt: You came to Mississippi?

Nguyen: Yeah.

Von Nguyen: Biloxi?

Nguyen: Yeah, in Biloxi.

VanZandt: The first place?

Nguyen: Uh-huh.

VanZandt: Oh, that's unusual.

Nguyen: And so I came here in [19]86 and stay until now.

Von Nguyen: Oh, wow, because I talked to many people, they just come from another state—

Nguyen: You know, before I came here, you know, it's very boring. But now, until now, I like it.

VanZandt: You like it.

Nguyen: Uh-huh, and I never move anywhere because I am a fisherman and shrimper, so I like it.

VanZandt: You're with other fishermen and shrimpers.

Nguyen: Yeah, uh-huh.

VanZandt: So you would not go back to Vietnam?

Nguyen: No.

VanZandt: You like it here. Well, I know we probably need to stop today.

Nguyen: Yes.

VanZandt: You've been here so long, but I would like, if you wouldn't mind, talking some more another time.

Nguyen: OK.

VanZandt: About how it was coming to the United States and learning the language and everything that you had to go through to settle here, starting over. And I'd love to hear about your father, if that's OK, and his experience in the war.

Nguyen: OK.

VanZandt: So for today, I'll say thank you so much—

Nguyen: You're welcome.

VanZandt: —for taking the time and sharing with us when you have so much work to do, I know. Maybe it was a good rest for you, to take some rest. So we'll meet another time.

Nguyen: OK.

VanZandt: Thank you so much.

Nguyen: You're welcome.

(end of the interview)