



Oral History and Folklife Research, Inc.

AN INTERVIEW WITH HOA HOANG

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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KEITH LUDDEN: So I am going to take care of a little housekeeping first. It's March 23, and we are in Augusta and we are talking with Hoa Huang. Am I pronouncing that correctly?

HOA HOANG: Yes.

KL: Okay. From Vietnam, originally. So, I am going to go ahead, and do you mind if I ask what year you were born?

HH: Oh no, I was born in 1970.

KL: And you were born in Vietnam, is that right?

HH: Yes.

KL: And where in Vietnam?

HH: Saigon.

KL: Saigon, okay.

HH: Yes.

KL: So you spent the first five years of your life in Vietnam is that right?

HH: Yes.

KL: Okay what was Vietnam like then, in Saigon?

HH: You know I have no memory of anything before the age of five. I don't know why.

KL: Okay.

HH: We came over in 1975. I think that it might have been the whole trauma of leaving, but I don't remember anything. My husband tells me he remembers things from when he was a year and a half- two years old, and I don't have any memory of it whatsoever.

KL: Okay. Your husband is from Vietnam as well?

HH: No, he is from Manchester, Maine, so he is Caucasian.

KL: Okay, alright. How did you get to the U.S.?

HH: My understanding is that we, when the day that Saigon fell in 1975 we were lucky enough to get to a cargo boat that took us to Hong Kong and they had a refugee camp and we stayed in the refugee camp. Then we had had Charles Priest who is from Maine, Augusta Maine, he actually sponsored us and brought us over.

KL: What kind of a boat was it?

HH: I think it was a cargo boat.

KL: A cargo boat, okay. And the gentleman who sponsored you his name was Charles...

HH: Priest.

KL: So was your family with you?

HH: Yes. We were lucky enough to have everybody be able to get on. So my mother, my two brothers that were still living, I lost one brother in the war, my sisters, two sisters, and my oldest sister was able to bring her husband and her son. So it was quite rare for families to get out all of them as a whole group, get out, and so we were able to get on the boat.

KL: So you stopped first in Hong Kong.

HH: I believe it was Hong Kong that is where they were dropping off refugees.

KL: Okay and you went from there to the U.S., is that right?

HH: We went from there to Arkansas which had another refugee camp, and then from Arkansas people were being placed with church organizations or sponsors, like Mr. Priest. Charles Priest actually was in the Maine legislative branch for Brunswick. I believe that he was a senator as well as in the house of representatives, actually the legislature, (inaudible) congressman. So, he was actually the one that brought us over. He actually reached out to us, took us in and helped resettle us. Amazing. He and his wife Peggy. He was married to Peggy Priest at the time, and the two of them helped resettle us, which is..

KL: So you first came to Arkansas and that was a refugee facility?

HH: I believe so. All of this is kind of hazy because, you know my mom didn't speak fluent English. So it's not like we knew which town we were in in Arkansas. It's not like we knew the name of the refugee camp. It's not like we had a lot of information, and I think that when you're a mom, especially at that point she was a single mom and she had five of us six of us, so I think that her priority was making sure that we got fed and that we were safe, and so there wasn't a lot of information, so the information that I've gathered is from Charles Priest who said that, "Yes you were in this refugee camp in Arkansas, and we brought you to Maine." So that's all I know.

KL: So you don't remember the camp?

HH: No. I remember nothing.

KL: Okay.

HH: I don't know why but I don't.

KL: Not terribly surprising.

HH: I wish I did. I wish I remembered those things.

KL: Why would you have wanted to remember them?

HH: Well I think that it's important to know how we got over here, exactly how we got over here and to not know how is just a missing piece, that's all. I would rather have a puzzle that is not missing a piece and that's kind of how I feel, that my puzzle is missing a piece.

KL: How did you get from Arkansas to Maine?

HH: We actually flew up and landed in the Augusta airport.

KL: And it was Maine because it was Mr. Priest who sponsored you?

HH: Yes that is correct. He lived here so that's where we were going.

KL: And where did you stop first in Maine?

HH: Right in Augusta.

KL: He actually resettled us at a home on the Middle Road in Sydney. It was right next to the Cole dairy farm. There's a dairy farm, it's still a dairy farm to this day, and the Cole family owned it and so they had a little house next to the farm that they owned, and we rented that space from them, that house from them, and that's where we lived for the first year we were here.

KL: And you remember that house?

HH: I remember bits and pieces of it. I recently actually about a year ago, actually went back and knocked on the door and one of the sons lived there and he let me in and showed me around, and I don't have a lot of memories of that either.

KL: Okay, what was that like visiting that house?

HH: It was kind of neat only because they remembered me, and they remembered our family and they remembered that time period in our life. So it was neat that way, but he had already redone the entire house. So he had taken it to the studs and rebuilt it, so it wasn't the same house that I probably lived in the first year.

KL: So you grew up in the Augusta area?

HH: I did. I went to school, you know, grade school here and I went to the University of Maine in Augusta.

KL: What was school like?

HH: I don't really have good memories of school. The good memories of school for me are the English as a second language teachers. They were extremely helpful, very nice. There was one English as a second language teacher that I didn't think was very nice. But outside of that, my experiences with the teachers except for one teacher I had he wasn't very nice. Most of the teachers were great. I would say that there were probably three teachers, maybe four that I

thought weren't very nice people but I think that its because they probably had things that they were dealing with.

KL: Now when you say that you don't have very good memories of school, do you mean you don't have clear memories of school or you don't have pleasant memories of school.

HH: Oh yes, I don't have pleasant memories of school. Not at all.

KL: Why is that?

HH: I think that the kids that went to school with me, I don't remember them being very nice. And you know it's understandable, because were in an area where Maine has 1 percent two percent it might be two percent minorities now, but I think back in 1975 it was probably .01 percent, and I think the kids just, you know, there was an influx of Vietnamese refugees that were here for the first year. There was a lot, and then I would say I say two or three years later they all left and went to California. So, all I remember is being the only Asian kid. The only kid of co- you know, a different color in my entire grade-school. I mean from kindergarten, besides my sister. My sister was in school with me. She is three years ahead of me. But outside of it it was just me and my sister, that's it. We were the only ones that look different, we were the only ones who spoke a different language, ate different types of foods. Yeah It wasn't, I don't remember it being a good memory. I have pockets of times when like there was this one gal when I was in the fourth grade her name was Kristen, and she was lovely. She was very nice and just very welcoming and you know for a little while you just forgot that you looked different because she didn't treat you like you were different. But most of the time I knew I was different and I knew that people had issues with me being different

KL: I can remember back in the 70's and even later than that. Yeah there was some resentment towards Vietnamese culture.

HH: Oh yes, resentment is a nice word. There was outright hatred. We would walk to school, my sister and I, and there would be a puddle of water, you know, from rain, and cars would purposely drive in the puddle as we were walking by to soak us. It was just, we had people spitting on us. We had kids that were, who would call us every single name you could think of, and it just was hatred. They hated you, they didn't want you here. They didn't like you. They didn't understand that we weren't communists, we were actually from the southern part of the country which wanted democracy. But you can't identify that when you look at someone if they looked different they looked different. I hate to say it, but you know we're from an area in Maine where people aren't exactly welcoming of people who are different.

KL: So, how did you deal with that?

HH: My mom was really, you know she had a belief that you need to get an education, and get a job and you know, do well in school, and do well in life, so that you could not have to worry about people like that. That was her solution, was that you know just go to school, get a good

education. Get an education, get a job, make your own money and then these people will leave you alone, you know. For the most part its true, when you have a job, people, they still dislike you but, they dislike you less. [Laughter]

KL: You talked about the English as a second language course. Was the transition from Vietnamese to English difficult?

HH: Not when you're five, not for me. A lot of people say that they don't feel like I have an accent or that I speak with a certain stutter or anything, but when you're five, it's really true what they say, which is that kids learn languages easily, and for me it was watching PBS. I was watching *Sesame Street* and I was watching the news with, I can never say his last name, Walter Cronkite, yeah. So it was basically watching you know, those shows and learning how to speak English because my mom, my poor mom, didn't speak a lot of English and she was just busy making sure we were fed, and you know, what mothers do, they always put themselves on the back burner. That's basically what I was doing; was just learning English through those different programs and my teachers.

KL: It must have been frightening as a small child to come someplace where you couldn't communicate, you couldn't tell people what you needed, what you wanted.

HH: I didn't feel frightened to be honest with you. I started feeling frightened when I started going to school, because the kids you know, were not, some of them were not nice. I remember being in the first grade and the older kids were real nice to us, because they were different and they treated us like we were dolls. [Laughter] So they'd carry us around but I think after the first grade, second grade on, is when I started to realize that I am very different, and that people do not want me here, did not like me being here, had a problem with me being here. Yes so in the second grade is when I started to realize this really wasn't where I was supposed to be. [Laughter]

KL: So was there a point in which you have started working towards citizenship?

HH: In the United States in order to apply for citizenship you have to be 18. So as soon we turned eighteen, as soon as I turned eighteen, I put my application in. It takes about a year before you know the whole application process, it's about a year, so when I was nineteen, I became a U.S. citizen. So as soon as I could, I did.

KL: That requires a fair amount of study.

HH: Well for me it wasn't really that hard 'cause I learned that stuff in school. It's tough and challenging for the older folks because they didn't have the schooling, you know because they have to work or they would go to night school and that kind of stuff, so, for me it wasn't a problem.

KL: Tell me about the day you were naturalized.

HH: Oh. You know it was neat because my sister got naturalized as well and brother got naturalized. My mom was trying to do it but, we had company the week or two weeks before and she wasn't able to study. But I am very proud to say that my mom, when she was in her early seventies actually went and took the test. She could have waited I think it was another two or three years, if you are here for twenty years, let's see—oh let me back up. So we came in seventy-five, so she was forty-eight, no, was she forty? She was forty-eight, so yeah, she was almost sixty-eight when she took her test. If she waited until she was sixty-eight, if you are here twenty years as a permanent resident and you are over a certain age you would have gotten the citizenship automatically. I think you have to be twenty years and over the age of 70 and you get your citizenship automatically.

She didn't want to get it automatically, she said she wanted to take the test and she passed. And she got it. She got it a little after us, and it was really neat. That was more exiting to me than my own naturalization process because for me to have gone through school and to have lived here since I was five and to speak the language and not be able to get it would have been really disgraceful, but for her to learn English from an adult ed teacher, and to take care of all us and to feed all of us, and to clothe all of us, and all that, and to make sure that we were safe and then to get it when she was in her sixties. Like, try to learn a language in your mid early sixties, you know, and let me know how that goes, 'cause you know they say that English is the easiest language to learn how to speak, the most difficult language to learn how to write. So I was really impressed with my mom to be able to pass that test.

KL: Did you celebrate for her that day?

HH: Yes we did. We all got together and we all, you know took her out to dinner. It was quite an event, I remember that one even more so than the one that I went through because you know, it was like she was fighting for it. She was sort of the underdog and the reason why I also remember that situation too, is because the gentleman that gave her the test I remember because I was sitting outside the door with her—Colette, who was her adult literacy volunteer and Colette was a lovely person, but we were just sitting outside the door, and I hear the interviewer yelling at my mother. Yeah, I was shocked. They don't exactly welcome you. Through this process some of them are you know I'm sure they have resentment and they probably feel like you're coming into my country etc. anyways this guy was from the Lewiston area and he was yelling at my mother these questions, he was yelling at her and he came out and he said, "Your mother doesn't know any of these questions. She's not understanding anything I'm saying." and I said, "Okay would you mind if I came in and sat with you? Maybe she's nervous. You know it's natural to be nervous, and it's not like she took tests on a daily basis or weekly basis, and she's older," you know she would have been in her mid-sixties, or maybe even late sixties I can't remember exactly, I could probably figure it out if I did the math.

But anyways, so I went in and I sat with her. He's yelling at her and then she goes to answer and he cuts her off, and so I said to him, I said,— 'cause you know remember I'm Americanized at

this point so I'm as direct as the next gal, so I said to him, I said, "Would you mind not yelling at her number one, and number two, would you allow her to finish answering the questions before you ask her another question?" He looked at me and he said, "You know I could take your citizenship away." and I looked at him and I said, "No, you can't." [Laughter] So anyways, he did though. He finally asked her the question and then let her answer it, and by golly she passed.

And this is how graceful my mother is, at the day of the celebration, he was there and asked him for a picture. She actually put her arm around his waist and she actually thanked him. I was upset and I was like, "I don't know why you'd even do that mom. He didn't want you to get, he certainly didn't care for you to have this, and he is not a nice man." I wish I knew his name because I would write a letter to him right now and let him know that he shouldn't have been in that position. If he does not want people to become naturalized in a legal process in the way that we went through it then he shouldn't do that job because there was clear resentment if not hatred there, so...6 But my mom didn't see it she was so sweet, I was like, "This man is evil! Why do I have to take a picture of you with him?" We do have a picture of him, so I'm sure I could find it, but anyways he's probably retired now.

KL: Did you keep your Vietnamese language?

HH: Oh, yes, I'm fluent. My mom made sure of that. You did not step into our house as a child and speak to her in English. Yeah. You didn't, you just didn't do that. You could speak to each other in English and my sister and I, who is closest to me, we would do that but we would do it in our room or do it with each other. Sometimes what happens, for me anyways, when you speak a second language, certain words would pop out that were English, and certain words would pop out. Like you would start the sentence maybe with Vietnamese and the you would switch over to English and you wouldn't realize that you're doing it. But someone else who doesn't speak the language might be like did you know that you were doing that? But yeah, when we were in the house whenever we spoke with our mom, you only spoke Vietnamese. Which was I think great, cause I hear a lot of, were in the Franco America area and I hear a lot people say, "I that wish my parents taught me French," and a lot of parents probably tried, but it was probably too difficult, to maintain but my mom made sure we all spoke Vietnamese which I am very happy about.

KL: So the school you went to was that a public school ?

HH: Yes. All public schools. I went to Farrington for a year when we lived over that side of the river. Actually I went to Farrington more than a year it was three years, and then we moved over to the west side neighborhood, so I started going to Lincoln. The old Lincoln not the new Lincoln and then I went to Buker which is now a community center and not Buker anymore. Then I went to Cony, the old Cony. Where the grocery store is at now. Then I went to University here in Augusta.



KL: So tell me a little bit about what your family is like. You described your mother a little bit.

Yeah my mom is very strong willed lady and she's tiny. She's like four-eight. She actually broke her back in half during childbirth and it healed, you know with it fused together on its own, or actually I'm sure actually during childbirth they helped her along with that. And then I have an older sister who actually lives in Canada, she owns a restaurant in Canada. My brother-in-law lives there. I have a niece and two nephews up there I have a third nephew that passed away when he was sixteen. Then I have a brother that lives in California with my mom and dad now and he has a daughter and a son that live right next to me here in Augusta and then I have another brother who owns a restaurant in Topsham. Well he owns a restaurant in Brunswick but he lives in Topsham with his wife and his daughter and then my sister has three girls and they actually live in Illinois. Then there's me.

KL: Your brother owns a restaurant you said. So has the family kept some of the foodways?

HH: Yes my mom is an amazing cook and my sister went to culinary school she is an amazing cook as well. She can cook anything, I mean whether its French American, Italian, she does a great job with Vietnamese food as well but yes, we definitely enjoy Vietnamese food.

KL: Now you said your classmates in school were a little resentful. Did that fade by high-school or was it still the same.

Oh gosh no. my senior year, this was this kid his name was Sam. He asked me why people eat dogs and cats in my country and I was shocked. 'Cause you know at that age you're eighteen, seventeen, eighteen. I thought, "Why would you ask me this question?" And secondly I wouldn't eat my dog. I love dogs I was born in the year of the dog, and I was allergic to cats so we didn't have any cats, I mean I have a cat now that I kind of borrow from my neighbor, you know she comes and stays with us for a couple of weeks at a time, but no I wouldn't imagine doing that, but I know that in those countries you know the Asian countries people do eat dogs and cats and you know I think what Americans or foreigners don't realize is when they go visit that country is that these people don't have food so they are going to eat whatever is protein that's moving, you know. They eat snakes; they eat lizards, they eat birds, they eat— you know what I mean? And that what people I think from first world countries don't understand is that you know people here walk into a grocery store and they get their chicken packaged you know there's no walking into a grocery store in a third world country its going and finding your food and getting it and if that means if it's a dog or a cat that's what they eat, and I don't fault them for it, but I find it hard because I couldn't imagine someone eating the cat that visits us. Her name is Midnight, and she's lovely and the thought of someone eating her is horrifying to me. But the same things with dogs, I mean I love dogs. They're smart and they truly are your friend. But you got to understand in a third world country people aren't thinking that. They're thinking its either that animal or me, and who is going to survive? Its going to be me.

KL: So did your mother encourage you to assimilate or did she try to separate you from the rest of the world?

HH: Well, I think she encouraged us to assimilate in certain ways. For example, she wanted us to with assimilate education. She wanted to make sure that we took all of the advantages, that we went after opportunities that this country provided. You know, going to school, and making sure that we went to school every day. And making sure that—she really couldn't help us with our homework but she wanted us to do well. That was really important to her and I think that the things she that she didn't want us to assimilate with is, you got to understand in our country, well, it's not my country, but, where I was born, there were pre-arranged marriages so there was no such thing as dating so she didn't want us to assimilate in that way because it was foreign to her. She didn't want us to assimilate with booze or alcohol. She didn't want us to assimilate with cigarettes she didn't want us pregnant and unwed so she wanted to pick and choose what we assimilated with. But she definitely wanted us to be educated and to have great jobs and to be financially independent so that was very important.

KL: So how did she deal with dating and things like that?

HH: Not well. No it was not a good scene. It was a very bad scene because she was very worried about us losing our virtue as females, and men, the males could do whatever they wanted. My brothers could go out and they could date, you know, and the thing that was tough too was that she really wanted us to marry people that were Vietnamese. So you know from my perspective I felt that was reverse discrimination. You know you people talk about us being discriminated against, yes, we had that happen but I felt like "Okay mom, you're doing reverse discrimination now." But that's only because that's all she knew. She didn't understand the customs of you know the Caucasian people and the Americans. Her thing was, "I want to be able to speak to my grandchildren. I want to be able to cook for them. I want to be able to understand their customs." So she was worried that if we married Caucasian or American folks that she would be left behind, I think that was her real big fear. But now, you know being eighty-nine years old, she would tell people, "If I had twenty girls I would have them all marry Americans," because she thinks that American men are just fabulous. So you know she's come around. But when you're sixteen, she wasn't coming around to anything except her way. I think it was hard for her, I think.

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KL: You met your husband here in Augusta?

HH: Yes. I have known my husband since we were twelve. We went to school together at Buker, but we started dating when I was around twenty-nine.

KL: Twenty-nine?

HH: Yes, so we knew each other you know in grade school and high-school, but there, I think there was interest from him when we were little, but my mom made sure that he understood that there was going to be no interest, yes. She just wanted to make sure, again, we were educated, that we didn't get pregnant and we weren't on drugs and smoking and drinking, all that stuff.

KL: How did you know that he was the one?

HH: Well you know it's kind of funny, I'm not really good at knowing if someone is "The One." I just know that Keith is very kind, and he is very considerate, and he is very thoughtful and he is very loving. You know, I didn't get a chance to really date so I don't have the same kind of social skills that I think that people who date have. But I do know that if the definition of, "The One" is someone who takes care of you when you are down, or if they're the person that looks out for you and makes sure that you are safe and that you are healthy and loved then Keith is "The One" because he does all those things, and he's really, he's quite lovely.

KL: Now you lived for a while in Northport, is that right?

HH: Yes I lived in Northport Maine for a little while. I lived in Belfast Maine for a little while.

KL: Okay tell me about that.

HH: It was really nice actually. I liked being right on the ocean. There wasn't much to do, and that's really tough for me. I like to be able to get to the grocery store. You know, get to a big box store within a couple of minutes so I can get my supplies and living down there you had to drive everywhere, at least a half an hour, an hour to get to a box store and that wasn't a good thing for me so.

KL: What took you to Northport?

HH: Well I worked at MBNA, the credit card bank. It was probably one of my best working experiences ever. There were a couple of experiences there that I really didn't care for, but overall it was probably the best working experience that I ever had. I'm glad I did it.

KL: So you decided to set up a reality business?

HH: Yes.

KL: What made you decide on real estate?

HH: Good question. So when I was working at MBNA there was a lot of office work, desk work and it was a lot of using the computer and mouse and my arms and my wrist were starting to feel the impact of repetitive work and so I realized that I had to find another avenue because I didn't want to be disabled. I didn't want to you know, live on disability and I didn't— I wanted

to be able to do something. A career that I would be able to enjoy and be able to make a decent wage from and you know, have a good life, so I decided to take my real estate class and it was shortly after that where I purchased a rental property, and I found was that the agents that I was working with, they weren't doing anything special, I mean all the stuff that they were doing I could do. So I decided to get my real estate license and I am really glad I did.

KL: Tell me about selling your first house.

HH: Oh wow. My first house was sold to Matt and Anne, they were very very very nice couple. Super nice couple and it was in Pittston. It was a big house and actually, that was my first house here coming back to the Augusta area. My very very first house that I sold was actually a house in Belfast. It was a for sale by owner and I knocked on their door and asked them if I would be able to sell their property for them. They were very leery of realtors, they didn't want to and nor did they enjoy working with realtors and they let me sell it. So we moved back to the Augusta area and started selling real estate in Central Maine.

KL: Now is the business on Western Ave, is that your first business that you have owned?

HH: Yes. 31 Western Ave. The building itself as well as the business, was my very first commercial venture.

KL: Tell me about opening the doors the first day.

HH: Well you know, it's kind of interesting because I wasn't sure what to expect because I kept my name and my husband's last name was Brown and I asked him if he wanted me to change my name and he said, "Oh no your name is your identity and people in this area know you by that name," and so I said "Okay." I thought that was very generous and, really just very — from an intellectual point of view I felt he was confident in who he is and that wasn't necessary for him. I was worried because again you know my name is different and I wasn't sure how this community would accept it. Even though I had been selling real estate for at least eleven years before, ten years before, I opened—no eleven years before I opened up my own office. It's not like I was doing something new. I had been doing it for a while and so I was worried because I thought some people may want to work with someone who has a foreign name, and some people may not, and I was pleasantly surprised that most of the people here don't have a problem with it. So our first year was very successful in my opinion, and our second year was double successful, I guess. Nearly twice the success that we had the first year, so I feel like we're on the right path and we're moving towards being more established in the community. But I did have a client that I listed a property for, and his friend said to him, "Why are you listing with a foreigner?" I thought to myself, "I need to get a tattoo on my head that says U.S. citizen and the date and time," I mean the date when I was nationalized, you know so, it's quite interesting.

KL: That must have been a really great feeling, that coming to the office that first day turning the key and opening the door.

HH: It really was it really was, I, you know it's funny because I don't really think of those things. Like, to me what is exciting is today, when a new agent came up to me and said, "Remember when you suggested that I write the letter and drop it off all those condo owners because I have a buyer? Well I had a second call!" That is exciting, like things like that are exciting to me because it sort of nice to see someone else you know, you plant the seed, you water it, you hope you put it in the sun and you hope that it sprouts. So it's kind of neat because you see these people, their talents are starting to sprout and that's really what is cool for me.

KL: So you worked for other realtors before you opened your own office?

HH: I did. I worked for Coldwell Banker right here in Augusta for about five and a half years and then I worked for Keller Williams Realty at Portland for about three years and then I went off on my own. Yes.

KL: So have you ever been back to Vietnam?

HH: No. I have never been back. I have no interest in going back.

KL: Why is that?

HH: You know, whenever documentaries come up about the Vietnam war and the Vietnam era, I can't watch. I just can't watch it. I can't sit like, there's something that prevents me from sitting and watching it, and I can't explain it. I just can't watch it. So I don't want to go back there because I am going to see a lot of poverty and lot of people in distress and a lot of sadness and for me it's not worth it, you know I, there are parts of this country I haven't seen yet so I think to myself, "Why do I want to go there when I haven't seen everything here," and also, too, is that I have a fear in me. I look—I'm Vietnamese, so I look like Vietnamese people, so if there was ever a problem and I got thrown into a jail and I said, "I'm a U.S. citizen," they would say, "No you are not. You don't look like a U.S. citizen," and I just, I don't know why I don't. I don't look forward to leaving. I tell people, "It was so hard for us to get here that I have no desire to leave." What is the point? I just don't. I don't have an interest. If I want to eat the food I just go to my sister and she makes the food. I want to see the country side I can YouTube it, you know, and I if I want to meet the people there are plenty of people here that have just come over that I can intermingle with. I think the one things that I kind of dream of is if I did go back there I would want to go back with a lot of money, so that I could help the orphans in Vietnam and help the people who are truly in distress. That's really—you know you hear those Megabucks and those you know jackpots that are hundreds of millions of dollars, and I think to myself, "If I won that, I would want to take a third of that, and put it away for savings, and take the other third and help my family, and then I'd take the last third and I would go back to

Vietnam and I would help the orphan kids, and also the kids here too, you know help the kids too, or the elderly.” That’s kind of my two pockets of society that I want to help.

KL: You talked about your mom quite a bit but you didn’t mention your father.

HH: Oh you know my dad, when we came over in 1975 my dad stayed with us for a year, and then he decided to go to California to get a job because that is where everybody was going. The weather was better, opportunities were there and he had called my mom, and said, “You know let’s bring the family over here to California and let’s help them, you know let’s have them grow up here.” But my mom had just—we had just been, you know transplanted so many times, according to her. We had gone from Vietnam to Hong Kong to Arkansas. There were so many changes that she really wanted us to have some stability. So she decided to keep us here and of course my dad wasn’t around, so we grew up without my dad. I didn’t realize it at the time but he wanted us to go with him but my mom was worried, because my dad [was] a heavy drinker and also a heavy smoker and she didn’t want us around those things.

I think the reason why my dad drank so heavily, because he was military police and I’m sure that he’s done things or had to do things that we never would even want to fathom having to do. I do know that when my oldest brother died on the battlefield nobody would retrieve his body and my dad had to go. I guess his body had been out there for several days or weeks. I’m sure that was really tough for him, and I’m sure he drowned a lot of his sorrows in alcohol. When he drank he got very abusive and very violent and so she had good intentions to keep us here, and I think that he wanted us to have better opportunities in California, so I think it was tough for them. But my dad is a good person you know. I have reconnected with him and I feel like I understand him a bit more. But I don’t talk about him a lot because I didn’t grow up with him. But I do respect my dad and he’s eighty-eight and he lives in California too. So, my mom and dad reunited after I graduated college. Yes. My mom said it was time for her to go she was okay with leaving that’s the kind of commitment she had. I mean you see these people in this area not take care of their kids you know, but my mom never dated, never. We were everything. She took care of us and that was it. She didn’t feel the need to need anybody. She didn’t feel the need to—it was pretty amazing. So...

KL: Did your mom tell you stories about Vietnam?

HH: No, no. She really didn’t. No she didn’t. I think that it was, you know, scary times for her and I don’t think that she had good memories of the war, and so you know she lost her oldest son who happened to be the smartest person in our family. He was Salutatorian so I think it was a really bad time for her so I don’t think that she wanted to relive it.

KL: Okay. Well is there anything that I have overlooked that you want to tell me about?

HH: No, no. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you and I thank you for the invite.

KL: I appreciate you being so generous with your time.

HH: Oh not a problem. No it's nice to get a little bit of history recorded.

KL: I will get you a copy of this.

HH: Oh sure not a problem.

KL: It may not happen immediately but it will happen.

HH: No worries, no worries. I would love you to speak with Charles Priest. He's our sponsor and maybe get the angle form him. He's lovely.

KL: Okay.

HH: He is.

KL: Well thanks again.

KL: Thank you.

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