

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Southeast Asian Immigrant Project

Life Experience

O. H. 642

DAN NGUYEN

Interviewed

by

Poncharas Arirachakaran

on

April 29, 1981

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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Southeast Asian Immigrant Project

INTERVIEWEE: DAN NGUYEN

INTERVIEWER: Poncharas Arirachakaran

SUBJECT: Saigon, Navy officer, Vietnam War, escape from
Vietnam

DATE: April 29, 1981

A: This is an interview with Mr. Dan Nguyen for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Southeast Asian Immigrant Experiences, by Poncharas Arirachakaran, at 2230 Raccoon Road, Apt. 70, Youngstown, Ohio, on April 29, 1981, at 8:30 p.m.

Where did you come from?

N: South Vietnam, Saigon.

A: Where is your birthplace?

N: Saigon.

A: Is that the capital?

N: Yes.

A: Can you tell us about your family?

N: I have parents and twelve brothers and sisters.

A: What did they do?

N: Go to school.

A: What about your parents?

N: My father was in the police office.

A: What did you do during the war? Can you tell us about your education or about what your school looked like? Can you

remember anything?

N: That was a long time ago.

A: Did you finish your education?

N: Yes.

A: Did you go to high school?

N: Yes.

A: What is the name of it and what year did you graduate?

N: I don't remember the name now. I graduated in 1968.

A: After you finished school what did you do?

N: I served with the Navy.

A: What did you do in the Navy?

N: I worked in supplies and was a repairman.

A: Where did you work?

N: Da Nang.

A: Where is it?

N: It is the name of the city.

A: Is it close to Saigon?

N: No, it is very far away, about 600 or 800 miles.

A: How long did you work in the Navy?

N: Six years.

A: Can you tell us about the significant events during that period, the things that you remember the most?

N: I don't remember. I was in the Navy and worked in supplies and did repair work on small ships. We fought the Communists and got shot and engines blew up and they would bring it to me in the shop.

A: Do you remember anything about the war?

N: I'm so lucky I didn't go to fight. I was in the Navy six years and I never used a gun.

A: You just repaired engines?

N: Yes.

A: Why did you decide to come to the United States?

N: It happened in 1975. The Communists took over my country in 1975. I was on the ship and my commandant said the Communists were taking over and we could not stay there. He said if they caught us we would be killed. We had to leave and hide. I didn't know we would come over here. We took a ship overseas and it came to the United States.

A: What country did you stop in?

N: The first country I stopped in was the Philippines.

A: You came by ship?

N: From Vietnam I came to the Philippines by a big boat, a Navy ship.

A: How many passengers were on the ship?

N: A lot.

A: Can you approximate how many?

N: I would say about 4,000 or 5,000 people.

A: What size was the ship?

N: I don't remember. It was very big.

A: After you came what happened?

N: We stopped in a Philippine port and from there the United States Army sent a boat that took us from the Philippines to Guam. From there I went to California.

A: From that boat?

N: No, I flew.

A: How were you contacted to come here?

N: I was staying in a camp in California.

A: How long?

N: About three months. I had a sponsor from a church.

A: What church?

N: Hungarian Presbyterian Church.

A: Did they pay for you?

N: Yes.

A: The first place you came to was California?

N: Yes.

A: How did you learn about the United States? Why did you decide to come here instead of staying in the Philippines?

N: I didn't think I was coming over here. I just wanted to leave the country.

A: When the Communists came you left suddenly?

N: Yes. I had to take off. If I stayed I would have had to fight and maybe gotten killed.

A: Do you remember the passengers in the boat? Were they officials? Were the people mixed together?

N: There were a lot of people from the Navy.

A: Did they have families with them?

N: No.

A: Did you learn anything about the United States before? Did you know anything about the U. S. Army or Navy before?

N: I worked with the Navy.

A: How much did you get paid?

N: A lot.

A: What was your first impression in America?

N: I went to California first and from California I came to Ohio.

A: Youngstown?

N: Yes.

A: When?

N: 1975.

A: How long did your journey take you to come from Vietnam

to California?

N: From Vietnam to the Philippines took about four or five days. From the Philippines to Guam took about four days. I came to California in about one month.

A: You didn't tell me your first impression yet.

N: I was nervous when I came over because everything was new. I was worried.

A: About what, your family?

N: Everything.

A: At that time did you learn to speak English before coming?

N: I had some grammar at school, but not very much.

A: How about when you came here?

N: I came here and studied some more.

A: Where?

N: At home.

A: You studied by yourself?

N: Yes.

A: How did you do it?

N: With an English book.

A: Do you still study?

N: Nobody teaches me; I learn by myself. Before I was taught in school, but when I came here I bought a book and taught myself.

A: Do you have any difficulties, language difficulties?

N: It's hard to talk.

A: Is that the only kind of trouble you have here? Do you have any difficulties here?

N: I can understand, but sometimes I have trouble speaking.

A: When you first came here was it hard for you to find a job?

N: I was here about two days and I had my first job.

A: Where did you find work?

N: I worked for a mushroom farm.

A: What did you do?

N: Cut mushrooms. After that I found another job in repairing. I went to mechanical high school to learn about mechanics. It taught you how things worked.

A: After you finished secondary school you started mechanical high school?

N: I started from seventh grade.

A: What did you do next?

N: Then I worked for Outdoor Power Equipment. My sponsor looked for a repair job for me. People liked me because I knew how to fix a lot of things.

A: Do you like your job?

N: Yes.

A: What do you fix at that company?

N: I repair any engines.

A: What do you think about the living conditions here? How do you feel about living here alone? Where are your friends who were in the same boat?

N: I don't know. After we got to California we separated.

A: Do you enjoy living here?

N: Yes.

A: How about your religion, what church do you attend?

N: I used to be a Buddhist.

A: Why did you change?

N: I changed to Christian when I came here because I believed that way. I changed when I came to Youngstown.

A: What entertainment do you like here?

N: I like music. I like listening to it and playing it.

A: Do you like American style?

N: Any kind.

A: What about food?

N: I like everything.

A: Do you cook?

N: Sometimes.

A: Do you cook Vietnamese food?

N: Yes.

A: Can you tell us about your desire to adjust your life here?
How do you feel after staying here five years?

N: I feel all right.

A: What do you plan to do in the future? Do you have any plans?

N: Not right now.

A: Do you plan to bring your family here?

N: Yes. I tried already, but I got no answer.

A: Looking back, what changes would you like to see in your
old country?

N: The first thing I would like is no more Communism.

A: How do you feel about Communists?

N: They are no good. When you live with Communists you can't
do anything you want to do. You work for nothing.

A: What do you think about your life here? What is the
difference? Do you see any difference?

N: It's a lot different. You can do more things here. It
gets a lot colder here. Here people are more busy. There
is less time to play here.

A: Is there anything else important that you would like to add?

N: No.

A: Thank you.