

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Southeast Asian Immigrants Project

Immigrant Experience

O. H. 689

MAI STOREY

Interviewed

by

Porncharas Arirachakaran

on

April 30, 1981

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: MAI STOREY

INTERVIEWER: Porncharas Arirachakaran

SUBJECT: Saigon, family life, intermarriages, Communists,  
bombs, life in Vietnam

DATE: April 30, 1981

A: This is an interview with Mrs. Mai Storey for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Southeast Asian Immigrants, by Porncharas Arirachakaran, at 2136 Palmyra Road, Warren, Ohio, on April 30, 1981, at 1:20 p.m.

Good afternoon. Where did you come from?

S: I came from Saigon, south of Vietnam. That is where I was born.

A: Do you remember anything about your parents and your family?

S: My parents are still living and we have six children in the family, three girls and three boys. I am the second to the first. There is my oldest brother and then me. Then I have another brother and then another sister and another brother and another sister.

A: What about school?

S: I finished grade school and then I went to high school.

A: Where is the school that you went to?

S: In Saigon.

A: What did you do at that time before you came here, after you quit school?

S: I worked as a cashier at a restaurant in Saigon. That is

where I met my husband.

A: Who is he?

S: He is in the Army.

A: When did you marry him?

S: We got married over there on my birthday. Then we came back here and married again because the marriage license over there people don't understand over here. It was not valuable over here, so we had to remarry again. I was only eighteen.

A: Can you tell us about the significant events during that period that you remember in your life, the things that happened to you?

S: I was raised being close to my family. When the war broke out heavily close to Saigon it was 1968. I quit school then and I desired to go to work to help my family. I was the breadwinner.

A: How old were you when you worked there?

S: I was sixteen.

A: Do you remember how much money you got?

S: Not much for a cashier. There was a lot of pressure, but it was help as a job. I would be around a lot of American people. I got to like them. I was closer to them more than my own people.

A: Can you describe Saigon at that time?

S: It was like any other city. The war didn't ruin anything, because that was our capital city. It had to be the last one to fall. It is nice.

A: Do people have the same life style as over here?

S: Yes, they live normally and eat and drink.

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

S: As a woman, if you get married you have to go where your husband goes. I wanted to come to the United States anyway; that was my dream when I was twelve years old.

A: When did you come to the States?

S: July 6, 1971. We came on the day he was discharged.

A: Do you recall your journey?

S: I was so excited I was crying. I was limited in speaking English too, so that scared me.

A: What were your first impressions?

S: When I came to san Francisco the weather was so cold. It was only 45 degrees. It was terribly cold. My husband took me to the store and bought me a coat and it didn't even keep me warm at all. I told myself--What am I getting into? I didn't think I could live in this cold weather. When I came to Ohio it was July and it was beautiful. Gradually the weather got cold and I got to see my first snow. I had never seen snow before.

A: How did you feel?

S: It was really beautiful. Now I hate it. I like this country because it has all four seasons. I learned to adjust.

A: What about your first night?

S: My first night I couldn't sleep because I didn't get used to it. It was too quiet. Over there you kept hearing bombs.

A: Was your first house in Warren?

S: No, I lived with my father-in-law and mother-in-law a couple of doors from my house. That was the first house I lived in eight years ago. When my husband found a job he bought this house. I have lived around here ten years now. In Vietnam there was a limit when all the cars had to stay off the road. Over here everybody drives a car all day and all night. I kept thinking there was a bomb. It was just my imagination; it was too quiet. I was raised with bombs and guns, and you would see flares at night.

A: What did people do when they heard bombs?

S: The year after I came here it was the Fourth of July. People shot firecrackers and I was just terrified. We didn't have a washing machine there or dryer. Those were just for very rich people. Anyway, my mother-in-law had an automatic dryer. Everybody went away and left me home by myself. They didn't tell me the dryer was working. I went downstairs and the dryer kept going around and around. It was automatic and all of a sudden it sent out a warning that the clothes were done. It sounded terrible and I was terrified. I just laid flat on the floor. My mother-in-law ran in the house and tried to turn that thing off. I liked how the sweeper worked; I learned to work that

and the washing machine and so forth.

A: How about your English?

S: I had difficulties in speaking with everyone. Only my husband understood me. I have a desire to learn English because I know that is the language of my husband and I have to learn it where I like it or not. My husband told everyone in the family not to speak slang with me.

A: Do you just stay at home or have you ever gone to work?

S: I worked before, ever since I was twelve years old. My husband says I shouldn't have to work here.

A: Do you enjoy being a housewife?

S: Yes. I figure I have two children and somebody has to raise them. I don't want to depend on somebody else to raise my children except me. Then I can form them the way I want them to be formed. Maybe after they grow up I will find a job, because I like work too.

A: Would you like to continue your studies?

S: Right now I would like to finish high school.

A: How about your religion?

S: Being a Jehovah Witness is very much involved.

A: Were you Christian before?

S: No, Buddhist. The way things looked over there I tended to believe in nothing. I didn't believe in God or anything. From Buddhist I turned into an atheist. Until I came here Jehovah Witnesses helped with the Bible and showed that there is hope and there is a God who cares. My religion is a very big part of my life now.

A: What do you do for them?

S: I dedicate myself by baptism. I voluntarily do that. I talk to people about the Bible and try to transform their life into harmony with the Bible.

A: How about your children, how do you plan to raise them?

S: I take them to the Bible meetings with me every week. We meet three days a week and I take my children with me. My husband does not push me. He knows about God, but he says some of the requirements that I'm living right now are too hard for him. He knows the Bible enough to know that there

is a God. It is not the right time for him to transform his life and be serious with it. I let him be free; I don't force him. I don't preach all the time.

A: Do you plan to teach your children the Vietnamese culture?

S: I try to teach them the Vietnamese language, but they say it is too hard. I'm going to try a little bit.

A: How about here, do you like your new life?

S: I like it; I think people are friendly. There are a lot of people I love.

A: Can you tell us about your own efforts or desire to adjust to a new life?

S: It was hard at first. I had to adjust to food and so forth. I also had to adjust myself with the family over here, like relatives and so forth.

A: What do you plan to do in the future?

S: I just want to help more people be interested in the Bible. I want to raise my children right and be a good wife and mother.

A: Do you plan to bring your family over?

S: Yes, just my brother and sister. That has been bothering me lately. I don't know whether they can make it, but that is my dream. I would like to see it come true.

A: Do you have contact with them?

S: Yes, through letters. Not by phone.

A: You haven't seen them in how many years?

S: Ten years.

A: Did you get your citizenship?

S: Yes, I did.

A: How did you get it?

S: I've been here more than five years and it requires five years to be a citizen. I've been here ten years.

A: Did you do anything to get it?

S: Yes, we had to study a lot, study the constitution and

American history. We had to study the American political system.

A: How did you feel when you recieved your paper?

S: It felt good. I didn't feel superior. I was glad.

A: Did you feel that you belonged to the society?

S: Yes. I never felt lost or alone anyway. It seems just like I was born here.

A: How about American soldiers in the war, what did you think about them? What did you think about the war?

S: I don't like war. There isn't anything good to talk about with war. I feel war is an injustice and unnecessary. To me, they fight for what they think is right as a soldier. They don't fight for nothing. Some people say the soldiers die for nothing. They die for what they believe is right. Being a Jehovah Witness we don't believe in any political ideas of anything; we stay neutral. Some people don't like us because they say we don't join the Army and so forth. People have to live over there to know what war is about.

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

S: I would like there to be peace on all the earth. I would like for me to be able to go back home. I would like for everybody to get along. What I like only God can fulfill; no man could fulfill that.

A: How do you plan on helping your family to come here?

S: I have to send papers to the immigration officer to get them approved. Then I might have to have \$2000 per person for the government. That doesn't even guarantee that they will make it.

A: Do you think it was the right decision for you to come here?

S: Yes. I am so glad. That was the best decision I ever made.

A: Is there anything else that you think is important that you want to add?

S: I worry about the economy over here a lot too.

A: Thank you.