

Interview with Tinh Bao

Trung: The following interview was conducted on the behalf of the oral history program of the Washington county museum and Century High School. The interviewee is Tinh Bao. The interviewer is Trung Tran. The interview took place at 16285 NE Schendel Ave, Wednesday, May 30th, 2001 at 4:30 PM.

Trung: So when did you decide to come to America?

Tinh: Uh...I came to America about September of 1970, at that time um..before I came to America, I was in my teens, living in Vietnam in Siagon, south Vietnam. I didn't know much about politics, but I knew that I don't like communism. South Vietnam had their own government who opposes communism and they were also supported by the United States because they wanted a democracy....uh..a democracy country too. There were a lot of American troops in Vietnam at that time, south Vietnam was pretty much living in a democracy society, things were fun, there were a lot of fun things during that time, but also there was the war at that time, a lot of people had to go to war. Kids were...as soon as you turn 15 or 16, think it was 16, you were drafted to go to the war and I was about 14 at that time and I didn't want to get drafted at that time, plus I didn't like the communism rule that led to Vietnam. Um....i fled Vietnam by boat, you had to pay a lot of money um...to fled Vietnam and you get on this little tiny boat where there was a lot of people on that same boat. There was so many that boat that it looks like the boat would sink, or the waves would flip the boat over or something because the boat was so small with so many people on it. Uh...yeah we were on the boat on the pacific ocean south of Vietnam for about 3 days, you know, we're just floating hoping for something to happen, somebody would come to the rescue because we had no idea where we were going and we had no sense of direction out there and we ran out of food for the second day so everybody had to pretty much hold you know their stomach for the whole entire day. On the third day, luckily, there was a bigger boat, that pulled us in to shore, and I think that was in Thailand and they pulled us in Thailand shore, and there was a refugee camp there in bankok, we were camping in bankok for about 8 months, yeah 8 months, um..and then were finally get to fly to America from there because I think that Thailand was under from democracy rule.

Trung: how did you feel when you first got to America?

Tinh: well, when I first came to America, I felt like this was the land of opportunity, and you can do something with your life here, you have the freedom, and that's pretty much how it is but things were a little bit harder than it seems uh..i had to..uh...when I came here I didn't speak any English, and jobs, was pretty hard to get jobs, but uh..i found a job in a gas station, it was easy and doesn't require a lot of English, and I did that for five years, during that I moved up another job looking for assembly companies, assembly things, but you know it's a lot, the living standards here are a lot better, you have electricity and water, you can pretty much do things here that you can't do in Vietnam.

Trung: What kind of activities were you engaged in during that time?

Tinh: Not much that I, I didn't really do much in or engaged in anything with the war, I was pretty much working to support myself, the only thing I did was really follow the news and watched news on tv to see what was happening with the war and read the newspaper because I'm rooting for...to see what's happening in Vietnam cause I had relatives there living in Vietnam.

Trung: How were your relatives involved in the war?

Tinh: Well uh..my father was in the war, he was a lieutenant for a unit in the south Vietnam army, think he commanded 15 to about 20 officers or soldierse defending south Saigon and my mom was with him at that time, and that's how I know so much about what is communism and what is democracy. In fact my father lived in Vietnam after the war until he died a few years ago but, I had my parents fighting for Vietnam.

Trung: How did things change after you got here?

Tinh: As far as life or people who fled to Vietnam which was me, its seems a lot, you know, away from communism country and you're living under democracy which was great which is what I came here for. You learn a new culture, new life style, new language, pretty much a new life, your whole life has changed. When I came here, I was pretty much by myself and had to learn English, get a job, support myself. I did this all in my teens and pretty much go with what society, go with what happens in society and hoping to get a better life.

Trung: Did you have..did your relatives do anything to, I guess involved support for the United Sates? Were they involved in any activities which was considered like outrageous at that time.

Tinh: Not really, my father was in the army and he pretty much do what he was ordered to do from his commander and as far as outrageous actions...I haven't seen one.

Trung: How were you treated when you got here? Were you welcomed or....?

Tinh: Well, it depends on the people. There were a lot of people who are very very nice and they treat colored people really well. But there are also others who didn't support the war and they were often discriminate colored people like us..like asian people. I don't know the reason, it could be that they had family members that was in the war that has died from the war and maybe they didn't support the war and maybe they had to blame on somebody or take it on somebody else, I can't say much about that but I was discriminated..or I felt discrimination against colored people. There were lots of incidents that happened to me when I first came to America. An example was you go wait in the doctors office, or you go into the emergency room and you're waiting for someone to help you and most of the ime it seems that you're that last time being helped, and that made me felt like I'm discriminated. But what can I do? What can I say? Or I

was at my job, and I get less of a raise than other people although ji had better performance, I worked harder, very good attendance, and everything, been there the longest but when it comes to a raise time you don't get as much as other people. And incidents like that happen everywhere like at your job or wherever. It depends who it is.

Trung: Did you notice you neighbors or any of your friends or anyone along your neighborhood that were actively involved in the war, or did they do anything radical...?

Tinh: Do you mean friends in the united states or friends in vietnam...

Trung: Yes, friends in the united states..

Tinh: I don't have much, I didn't have many friends in the united states. But I watch new all the time, there's always riots and protest people standing around city hall, lots of people holding lup signs and throwing rocks into shops, kinda like violent protest, it normally happens in the east, New York or Virginia, DC. But didn't really know any people that people that were involved in the protest.

Trung: Overall, what's your reaction to, I guess what's your reaction to decisions made by the president at that time, the president of the united states.

Tinh: Well if I were in the president's position, I would probably did the same thing he did. You know, withdraw the American troops from Vietnam because there was so many Americas were dying and because I'm a Vietnamese and rooting for democracy, I would definitely want as much help and support from America as south Vietnam can get so they can win the war, but at the same time to put myself into Americans position where they had their family members go into the war and dying in a different country where they shouldn't there be because they don't know the land, they are far away from home, and it's not really their war, its not, this was a war for Vietnam, if I were an American I would not support the war and let other country's deal with their problems and not for the united states but that's my view.

Trung: Overall, do you have anything to conclude or say anything else

Tinh: About the whole Vietnam war?

Trung: The whole incident, past, or maybe what you like.

Tinh: well I hope that the government learn from history make smart decision before they take any real actions and I think the war wasn't a good idea in the first place because it involved a lot of deaths and resulted in nothing and that's just history and you gotta learn from it. As far as myself, I'm glad things turned out ok for because I fled Vietnam and here I am still here today doing ok with life. And have a better life for my children and my children, giving them a better life and not having them to go through what happened in Vietnam.