

Stephen H. Le
Dartmouth College Oral History Program
The Dartmouth Vietnam Project
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Transcribed by Nicole Tiao '20

NICOLE TIAO: Hi, my name is Nicole Tiao and I'm with the Dartmouth Vietnam Project. Today is February 20th, 2020 and I'm in the Baker Barry Library on the campus of Dartmouth college in Hanover, New Hampshire. I'm here today with Stephen [H.] Le. Hi, Stephen. Thank you so much for being here today.

STEPHEN LE: Uh, hi.

TIAO: When and where were you born?

LE: In Vietnam. Nha Trang, Vietnam.

TIAO: What year?

LE: 1974.

TIAO: What is your given name? Is it Stephen or do you have a Vietnamese name?

LE: Hoang, Hoang. Stephen Hoang Le.

TIAO: Okay, thank you. What was growing up Nha Trang like?

LE: Hm?

TIAO: What was growing up in Nha Trang like?

LE: Nha Trang? What do you mean?

TIAO: Like what was it—can you tell me a little bit about like—did you go to the beach a lot or like the geography?

LE: Yeah. Yeah. Nha Trang, they have a lot of ocean spot. A lot of island. Yeah. I go to beach a lot, every morning when I'm young.

TIAO: Oh, really? So you went to the beach a lot? What did you do on the beach? Like what did a day in your life look like?

LE: Yeah. Joke, screaming and you know, and hang around, yeah, fun.

TIAO: Did you go to school?

LE: Yes, I do.

TIAO: All the way through?

LE: Like 11th grade. Yeah. And I stopped. Yeah.

TIAO: What was school like?

LE: For Vietnamese school, you know? Yeah.

TIAO: [pause] Uh, did you notice the presence of outsiders like tourists or people from the Cam Ranh Bay or anything like that?

LE: No.

TIAO: Can you tell me a little bit about your friends and your family and who you spent time with while you were still in Vietnam?

LE: Oh, I have a lot of friends from Vietnam when I young. Yeah. I spent with my friends, you know, soccer and all kinds of exercise when I young.

TIAO: I don't know if you remember a difference, but I know when you grew up, the Vietnam war just ended when you were about one year old. Do you remember hearing a lot about it or...

LE: No, actually I don't remember. Yeah, I too young for that. Yeah.

TIAO: Do you remember anything from like the invasion of Cambodia or anything?

LE: No.

TIAO: Did you—so I learned about this in my own class—but there was a subsidy period until like the 1980s. Do you remember a difference between that and the renovation era?

LE: No, actually I don't.

TIAO: Okay. Did you think that Nha Trang changed at all while you were there?

- LE: Yes. Yeah. There a lot of change right now, a lot of building with a lot of hotel, like big building. They build it up now mostly. Yeah. They look beautiful now. Yeah.
- TIAO: What did it look like when you were a kid then?
- LE: Oh, big difference. Big difference. I leave in Vietnam 1992 when I young, and you know, they didn't have a high building like right now. These beautiful now.
- TIAO: What does your house look like?
- LE: My mom's house normal: three bedrooms, small, small home in Vietnam, you know.
- TIAO: Can you tell me a little bit about your family?
- LE: My family have my mom and five brothers. I have an older brother and a second one and third one. I have a—they all live in America right now. They all live here now.
- TIAO: Did you wait—you had—can you name your siblings really quick for me?
- LE: Oh, siblings?
- TIAO: Oh yeah. Like your brothers and your sisters...
- LE: This is Quy Le is my older one. Vinh Le, yeah. And my name is uh, Hoang Le. Yeah. And Chau Le and Sang. Sang Ou. He's uh, my mom, she got remarried and she have a baby. I have a younger one. Yeah.
- TIAO: How old are your different siblings?
- LE: I think it's my older one. It'd be 58. And my next one is 52. I am 46 and younger one is a 37 and 33 I think.
- TIAO: When did your mom remarry?
- LE: Maybe like, sure. Maybe. Let me see. I think maybe 30, 30? Yeah, around 30 years ago. I think.
- TIAO: So is that right before you came to America then?
- LE: Yeah, before. She got married in Vietnam, not here.

- TIAO: So when you were a kid, was your mom still married or is she single like before she remarried?
- LE: Oh, she divorced. She single.
- TIAO: Oh, okay. [pause] Can you tell me a little bit about like the history of your family? Like why your mom was living in Nha Trang, who your father was, if you know?
- LE: Oh actually my grandmother, she live in Nha Trang and that's why my mom, she live in Nha Trang, she live there her whole life. And we come here 1992.
- TIAO: Does your grandma come with you in 1992?
- LE: No. My grandma, she in Vietnam.
- TIAO: You have a Amerasian sister, right?
- LE: Yes. Yep. Me sister. My sister, yeah, that's why we go, with my sister to come to America. She live in Boston [MA] right now.
- TIAO: How much older is she than you?
- LE: She like around 50?
- TIAO: Oh, so she's younger than you? Oh wait, no, I misread that. Okay. Do you know who her father was or anything?
- LE: No. Her father American, yeah. She, yeah [pause], she don't remember. You know, that's why we, yeah, we don't remember.
- TIAO: What was it like to have a mixed race family? Like to have your sister be an Amerasian?
- LE: What you mean for that?
- TIAO: Like, well cause are you full Vietnamese? Or what is your family's ethnic background?
- LE: I'm full Vietnamese, yeah.
- TIAO: And your brothers are as well?
- LE: Yeah.

- TIAO: Okay, so did you ever notice that like people treated your sister differently or anything like that?
- LE: Yeah, they do. Yeah. You know, it's because, yeah, that time before, after the war, and my sister. My sister is the single, you know, like rule and you know, they say American peoples, you know, the war, you know, they didn't like them much, like my sister much.
- TIAO: Can you, if you remember at least, can you tell me a little bit about that or what you thought about that treatment or anything like that?
- LE: Yeah, actually, yeah, we go to school and she goes to school and they say, you know, something in the, in behind, you know, in the back. I don't remember, yeah.
- TIAO: Did you ever receive—did you ever have kids make fun of you because of your sister or anything?
- LE: Yeah, they do. Yeah, they do. Yeah.
- TIAO: Can you tell me a little bit more about your early life and your school life? I just don't really know a ton about that era and I think most of our listeners won't either.
- LE: Talk about what?
- TIAO: About like your own childhood, what school, like what social interactions looked like with your peers and stuff like that?
- LE: For my school in Vietnam?
- TIAO: Yeah.
- LE: Yeah. I, yeah. Took go normal school and go home, you know, that's all. I don't remember, sorry.
- TIAO: Yeah. I guess it's a while ago.
- LE: Sorry.
- TIAO: No, no, no, don't be sorry. Was your family religious at all in any religion?
- LE: Buddha. Yeah. Yeah.

- TIAO: Did you go to, there's the big white Buddha right in the, the big statue in Nha Trang, did you go there a lot?
- LE: Mm. Sometimes. Sometime we go, we always go in the temple. They have a big Buddha in Nha Trang that we, sometime, we go there but not that way. We all, we go in the temple.
- TIAO: Can you tell me a little bit about some family stories that you remember hearing if anyone, I know I asked earlier about the Vietnam War, but like if anybody was involved in it or any opinions on the Vietnam War?
- LE: I think my, my uncle, they involved in the war. Yeah. I have a family, like they both sides. One side, they go in South Vietnam and one side in North Vietnam. Yeah. Yeah. This my uncle and my cousin and my mom, you know, sister, brother, not not, yeah.
- TIAO: What side did your mom pick?
- LE: Oh, my mom pick the American side. Yeah. From, yeah.
- TIAO: Um, like what were family reunions like then?
- LE: Yeah. That's funny. A lot of family like that because you know, in North Vietnamese, I don't know what they say. In some family, they go north, some family go South, you know?
- TIAO: Did that lead to any tensions in your family? Like in your extended family I guess.
- LE: I took my mom told me that I took note of that then. Yeah.
- TIAO: Oh, so did you not see your extended family very much?
- LE: Not very much, no.
- TIAO: Did you ever see your dad when you grew up?
- LE: Uh, my dad, he, they not really much. He—they divorced when I a little baby. Maybe two or three. Don't remember. And he passed away long time.
- TIAO: When did your family start thinking about coming to the US?

LE: Yeah, 1990 90. My mom she—she thinking about to my sister and that's why she tried to do application. My sister she... That's why we wait two years and we come America in 1992.

TIAO: Did your family immigrate together?

LE: Yeah.

TIAO: All, all of you?

LE: Uh, no. I think it's when I leaving my two brothers, the older one, they in Vietnam. We have my sister and three, two younger brother and me and my mom. Yeah. Five people come here first. My brother, they two come here like 10 years ago.

TIAO: Did your mom's new husband also come?

LE: Hmm?

TIAO: Did your mom's well then new husband come with you, your sister and your younger brother? Like when you immigrated in 1992, he didn't come?

LE: Yeah. Because he, yeah. He didn't come because he over 21 when they over 21 they stay. I'm under 21. Yeah. Because that time, my brother get married and he over 21 and he cannot go. By law for the U S law. We were single under 21. They can go with my mom and my sister.

TIAO: Where did you come when you immigrated here?

LE: I come to Burlington, Vermont. I lived there like six months and I moved to Boston. And live like 15 years and I moved here for 10 years. Yeah, New Hampshire for 10 years.

TIAO: Can you tell me your first impressions of America?

LE: What do you mean for that?

TIAO: Like when you first got to the U S what were your first thoughts or smells or sounds that you remember? Anything that was memorable when you first came here?

LE: Oh, we really surprise and we scary and cold and we don't speak English, you know? Yeah. Uh, nervous and after that few years, yeah, yeah, we happy in America.

- TIAO: Why did you move to Burlington?
- LE: Because government, they want us go there. We have no choice. Like you go and the government, they told, we don't have family here. The government, they told us first they have to come in Vermont. I think in Vermont, not too Vietnamese live out there, not too people. That's why they try to a lot of Vietnamese move in Burlington. Yeah. Burlington, Vermont.
- TIAO: Did you like it there?
- LE: Not really. Cold. And I, that's why I moved in Boston. Got a job over there and go.
- TIAO: Where did you work in Boston? Or what did you do, I guess?
- LE: I do nails. Yeah, long time. I go there, I go two year in school, learn English, took learn English for two years. And after that I, I learned for, got licensed for nail and that's why I'm stuck right now. I have to do nail. [Nicole and Stephen laugh] I have nothing to do.
- TIAO: So you went first to school for English. Where, where was that?
- LE: In Boston. For only two year.
- TIAO: And then you got certified in the nail business?
- LE: Yeah. And after that I do nail business. I work for somebody and, and then after few year, I opened my own business in Boston.
- TIAO: Why did you choose? Sorry, you go.
- LE: Go ahead.
- TIAO: Why did you choose the nail business I guess? Or did it choose you?
- LE: Uh, because I am not going to college. If I don't, nails is, uh... Look, that time I have my friends who do nails, they earn good money. That's why he told me, "Yeah. Try it." And before I remember, I say, "oh, I man, yeah, I don't do nails. Funny." And after that he say try it and I tried for a couple months and I don't like it. I quit. And he told me that I try again. And after that I do nails, I like it.
- TIAO: So is that at the first salon that you worked at? You quit and then did you go to a different one or did you...

- LE: Oh yeah, I do. First I took learning, and I don't feel, you know, like it. I quit and after that I go different salon. I learn again.
- TIAO: I guess, I don't know if this makes any sense, but how did you find the different jobs that you found? Was it like through the Vietnamese community or did you just like apply?
- LE: Oh no, that time is in Boston. It's uh, they put in the paper. Yeah. Like they advertising and say who want to do it, they need technician for nail and you just call them. That's all.
- TIAO: Can you tell me a little bit about the differences that you felt between Burlington and Boston?
- LE: Burlington is uh, yeah, they really quiet. They don't have much Vietnamese live out there. Like Boston, my mom, she like Boston, a lot of Vietnamese. They live in Boston. They have supermarket, Vietnamese. And lots of job, that's why we like it.
- TIAO: So when you first came to Burlington, was it really hard to... What did it feel like? I guess to be in such a drastically different place than Nha Trang?
- LE: Yeah, they be different. Yeah, because they very cold and I don't speak English that time. I remember a few week later and I go to work and I earn like maybe \$4 an hour. Yeah, I do. For the company candy, chocolates and yeah, they big different.
- TIAO: In Boston, you said, did your whole family move with you from Burlington to Boston?
- LE: First I come Boston by myself first because I have my friend, he live in Boston. I call him and say, how are you doing down there? He said, "okay." Yeah, they have a lot of job and I go in Boston for, for a couple of months I worked out there, I earned money and I rent all the apartment and after that my mom come in from Burlington. I go by myself first.
- TIAO: Did your sister and brothers also come?
- LE: Mmm, not yet. They still live in Burlington when I working, I earn money and I rent their apartment and they have like to my mom live and that's why she come five, six month later.
- TIAO: What did your siblings actually do when they came to the US? The sister and the two brothers when they immigrated with you?

- LE: Oh, my brother, he go to school and my sister, when she come in, she working. My brother, that time, he young, he go to school.
- TIAO: What jobs did your sister and mom do?
- LE: She work to get her license, she working. My mom, she doesn't work. My sister, she working like part time and after that she get license for the daycare. She stay home. She take care for the baby. She get a license for the daycare and she watch baby in Boston.
- TIAO: Does your mom work in Vietnam?
- LE: Mm, yes. Yeah, my mother, she work, she worked in Vietnam.
- TIAO: What did she do there?
- LE: Like she own her business, she buys and she sell them. Like she buy look like sale business, sale, you know, sale [loi?]. Yeah. She sell like everything, like rice, you know, look like the, the, the gift shop, something like that.
- TIAO: Do you remember her struggling then when she had to go from having a shop to not working at all in the U S?
- LE: Can you say again?
- TIAO: I was just wondering if like your parents, like how your other family members experienced either culture shock or for your mom, going from owning a shop to having no work in the US. I don't know if you remember any of that, but do you?
- LE: Mmm, actually, I don't remember. Yeah.
- TIAO: Did you, well, what were your thoughts on, I guess the US? Like did you feel welcomed?
- LE: Yeah. Yeah.
- TIAO: What was it like to re-find Vietnamese people when you went to Boston?
- LE: Can you say it again?
- TIAO: Um, what was it like? So I know you said that in Burlington there wasn't much Vietnamese community, so what was it like to go to

Boston where there actually were people that spoke your language and such?

LE: Yeah. And Boston, my mom, she like it because she, they have a supermarket the other day and you know, can say she had fun down there because she don't speak English. And that's why she like it there.

TIAO: What kind of food did you eat?

LE: We eat, we eat Vietnamese food.

TIAO: Was that hard then when you were in Burlington where there's like no Vietnamese people to find ingredients for Vietnamese food?

LE: Yeah, very hard. I remember I lived a six month. Every month we have to go in Boston. Go to the supermarket. We go down there to buy some food. Maybe like six weeks, maybe four weeks.

TIAO: I'm trying to think of how best to phrase this, but can you just tell me a little bit about the Vietnamese community in Boston? Like where was it? Was it centrally located somewhere or anything like that?

LE: Yeah, they have Vietnamese in Dorchester. Yeah. In Dorchester. They have a lot of Vietnamese food and community in Dorchester. They call it Dorchester, Boston. A lot.

TIAO: When did you move to Hanover?

LE: Like 10 years.

TIAO: Why did you move?

LE: Because I have that nail salon we got. We like it in Hanover. Uh, raise my kids here, better, and I got a good job over there. My nails is busy. That's why I like it. Live here for now.

TIAO: Did you work in any other, so I know you moved between salons at least once in Boston, but did you move more than once before you came to here?

LE: No, after that I opened my own business in Boston. For 15 to 17 years. For nail.

TIAO: Did you sell it to someone that you knew or anything after?

- LE: Yeah, I sell somebody.
- TIAO: Did you buy Nefertiti Nails then? Cause that's your salon, right?
- LE: Yup. Yeah, we took over, we buy from someone they own in Manchester. The family, they own from Manchester, that's why I took over from them.
- TIAO: When and where did you meet your wife?
- LE: I meet my wife in Vietnam. Yeah. I'm second marry. Yeah. I am divorced my wife here, I married my wife here and I am divorced. Yeah. And I go to Vietnam and I see my wife twelve years ago. And I remarried. She just come here like seven years.
- TIAO: Who was your first wife? Can you tell me a little bit about her?
- LE: My first wife, she live in Virginia right now. I have total, I have five daughter. I have three daughters. Two in college. One, she older one, she in Tampa, Florida. This year, her last, last year she studied nurse. And my younger one this year, first year, she in for, she goes to school in Virginia. For business.
- TIAO: How did you meet your first wife?
- LE: In Boston. We to school together.
- TIAO: Oh, so your, so your nails school?
- LE: Uh, no. When I learned, uh, for English, yes. And that's why see her there and I...
- TIAO: Oh, what year did you marry?
- LE: It's been a long time. I don't remember.
- TIAO: Was it while you were still in school? Was it while you were still in school for English that you married or after?
- LE: When I see her, I, I see her in school then after a few year I marry her. I'm at that time, I twenty, twenty-one. I get married too early, too early, twenty-one I think. [Nicole and Stephen laugh]
- TIAO: Can you elaborate on that a little bit more, I guess? Like how long were you married to her?

- LE: Mm, I don't know. 15 years at least.
- TIAO: Did you work together or after?
- LE: Yeah, we, we, we, we, we work together for nails. We open business.
- TIAO: When did you open that business?
- LE: 1995 I think. '94, '95. Yeah. '92, I work maybe two years and I earned money and I open a business. Yeah, be '95, I think
- TIAO: That was quick. That was really quick to go from just working to owning a business.
- LE: Yes, because I earn money and I save the money because I, yeah...
- TIAO: I guess like, how did you save that much money? That's crazy.
- LE: I think I remember first time I buy this business because my mom help me and my mother in law. You have, I remember that time I buy, the business only \$20,000. I got a good deal because they need to sell. In my business in West Roxbury in Boston, you buy a new nearby, uh, West Roxbury. Yeah, I owned that for 15, 17 years. And we didn't, after that we didn't work out and we divorced. We divorced and I stayed for a couple of years. Then after that I Vietnam and meet Mary. That's why.
- TIAO: Mmm. How did you meet Mary?
- LE: Mm, I meet her like when I go to a coffee shop, you know, and I drink coffee and she sit next table and I, I just say hello and I, we stay together, and I got her phone number and, and after that few years, we, I go back to America and sometime I call her and she pick up the phone. Few years. I get married her. We fall in love.
- TIAO: Can you give me the full names of both your first wife and Mary, just for record keeping?
- LE: Yup, mm. First name of my first wife is Hien Tran. Yeah. And my second one is Thuy Hong.
- TIAO: Can you spell both of those also?

- LE: H like Henry, I E N. Tran is T R A N. And my second one is Thuy, Thuy, they call Thuy. T H U Y and Hong is H O N G.
- TIAO: Thank you. Wow. That's, so you were talking to Mary over phone for how many years before she joined you?
- LE: How many year what?
- TIAO: I guess like how long did you do long distance pretty much?
- LE: Oh, we few year, yeah. Two year I think.
- TIAO: Did you, um, did she come to America to marry you or did you like go back and meet her there or anything?
- LE: Oh, I go back there when I see her there and I go back America, and we talked the phone like two years. After two years, we, we then, and I go back and get engaged, and after that a year later, I get married, and have a baby, two baby, she live in Vietnam. They born in Vietnam, not here. Right now she 11, my older one 11. My younger one seven.
- TIAO: What are their names?
- LE: Mai Le and Ngoc Le.
- TIAO: Where were they born?
- LE: Vietnam, in Ho Chi Minh city. Yeah. In Saigon.
- TIAO: So when you visited Vietnam and met Mary for the first time, did you meet her in Saigon?
- LE: Yes, I met her in Saigon.
- TIAO: Why did you visit? Did you visit? Like why did you visit Saigon instead of Nha Trang?
- LE: Before we have to go—when I get home, like from Boston, have to arrive to Ho Chi Minh City first, Saigon first, and after that, I go in Nha Trang because they don't have the airport. The international airport in Saigon. I have to land in Saigon first.
- TIAO: That's a real chance meeting then.

- LE: Yeah. And after that we took the, we rent out a car. We go to Nha Trang, about eight hours for driving. We rent or somebody... And that's why we are, I always, when I back home, I have to stay in Saigon couple day for you know, first. And after that I go to Nha Trang. It's kind of my hometown. When I back to America, I have to back to Saigon and go back to Boston.
- TIAO: How often do you go back?
- LE: Mm, right, every two year. When I see Mary in... And maybe, maybe right now she come here, we don't go much. Even maybe a year, maybe two years. Sometime a year.
- TIAO: Before meeting Mary, why were you going back to Vietnam?
- LE: I just want go on vacation, go see my family, my, I have my uncle and my auntie and yeah. And my cousin, they still live there, and my mom still have a house over there. That's why we sometimes we, we like go vacation and I like go back home.
- TIAO: Which uncle and aunt and cousin were these? Cause I know you had mentioned like, before, that your family was like split along political lines. Like can you just tell me a little about that? Those family members?
- LE: Mm, this part of my mom's side, you know. They still live there now. Yeah. Right now they like American already. They like America, they learn, they learn. They, they know who good already, you know,
- TIAO: [pause] I'm sorry, I forgot my train of thought. Were they the only people that you saw when you would go back?
- LE: Yeah, and my friend, I have my friend. They still, somebody, some my friend, they got married, they students and some, they go, I see my friends and my family.
- TIAO: What did Nha Trang start to look like? Like how did it transform each time you went back? Because I know it was kind of like a, the tourist industry was taking off in the 90s, in Vietnam, so did you notice like every time you went back, did it look different than you remembered or anything?
- LE: Yeah, I remember this, uh, yeah. Uh, yeah. Nha Trang generally a lot of change now, a lot of tourists they come in. They build it up, some islands. Beautiful. White sand.

- TIAO: Did you say your mom owned a house still in Vietnam?
- LE: Yes. Yeah. She still have a home in Vietnam. Sometimes she back and forth.
- TIAO: So when you moved to America, your mom had kept her, your guys like your, your family's house?
- LE: Yup. Still there. She didn't sell it because she wanted to leave it there for when she want to go home and vacation, me and my brother, they have a home to stay. That's why she wanted to keep it.
- TIAO: So I guess why did your mom want to come to the US if she wanted to still be able to go back all the time?
- LE: Because for us. You know, she want to come to America. See. Right now, she sometime two or three year, she go back like a couple week. Because that happened before my brother, he lived, he lived there, two brothers. When we, when me and my mom and my brother and my sister come here, my brother still there. That's why, and she keep it for my brother to live there. And right now my brother they just come here only 10 year. Right. That's why they still, yeah. And my mom still keep it because my brother back and forth.
- TIAO: How did it feel then to come to America as like a, I guess in my mind I had always thought of it as like, this is that time period, a lot of people coming from Vietnam, Vietnamese people were refugees. Did you feel like you fit like a refugee narrative or anything? Like were you, did you feel like you had to leave Vietnam or was it more like this is a good opportunity to come to the US?
- LE: I think we happy to leave in Vietnam. You know, we're not, you know, that they not freedom. No, they're not freedom speaking. They say yeah, and they don't, you know... You say something. And every time I go back to Vietnam, I don't say nothing for the government. Better not because they don't like it, you know, we're not involved in, you know how to, for that. That's why, I think, that's why we like America better.
- TIAO: You don't have to answer this because I know it's a pretty political question, but, um, so did your family not like the, um, socialists, uh the communist party, I guess in charge?
- LE: Can you say again?

- TIAO: So did your family, like your immediate family, your mother and your siblings and you, were you, uh, not supporters of the communist party then?
- LE: No. My, my family, some, they spoke for the communists. They half and half, yeah, my grandfather. Yeah. He spoke for the communists. For the cabinet, yeah. You know, he do some, he paid, you know? My mom's, she don't, yeah.
- TIAO: Do you ever remember hearing, then, criticisms from your mom of the cabinet or anything? Or was she just kind of like, it was something that you just didn't talk about but everyone knew?
- LE: What? Can you say again?
- TIAO: I guess like, so if you're, it sounds like your mom was not exactly pro, she was not pro-government while you were in Vietnam, but did she, was she ever able to speak that out loud or like how did, how did you, your entire immediate family like kind of come to that opinion? Like was it very like, does that make any sense?
- LE: Yeah, if you're in Vietnam, whatever, you cannot speak. My mom, she don't say nothing.
- TIAO: How did your brothers immigrate to the US?
- LE: My mom. She do paperwork. My mom, she, she for the US citizen and she sponsor all my brother come here.
- TIAO: Yeah. Wow. Where does your mom live now?
- LE: She live in Boston.
- TIAO: When, how did, so Mary came here two years after you had already been married, is that correct?
- LE: What you say?
- TIAO: Your wife Mary, she came here two years after you were married already? Or was it more than that?
- LE: That wasn't, I'm confused.
- TIAO: Oh, sorry. I guess like what was the timeline of Mary's immigration to the US? Like how did she immigrate here with your kids? Was just cause she was married to you?

- LE: Yeah, because I am US citizen, and that's why she married me and I do paperwork only one year. And she come here.
- TIAO: And both of your children, you said are Vietnamese citizens actually or—
- LE: They both. They have a Vietnamese citizen and, see, they have the US citizen too. Because they under 18 when I US citizen, even she had both passports, Vietnam passport and US passport.
- TIAO: I guess they were both born in Vietnam and then they came and joined you here. Okay. Sorry, I'm just trying to get the timeline right. Had you already moved to Hanover by that point or did they join you in Boston?
- LE: When I do paperwork, in Boston and after that she come here and to Hanover here. When I do paperwork, before, I still live in Boston and after I move here. I marry my wife, she live in Vietnam. She had a baby there. She wait for me five year. She wait for me five year and I bring her here. Second half year. Something. Seven years. That's why my baby 11 now. She just come here only seven, yeah, because she wait for me for five years.
- TIAO: Did they live with Mary's family while they were still in Vietnam?
- LE: Yup. My mother in law, they live with, they live with my mother in law,
- TIAO: Where do you consider your home then? Like Vietnam, Nha Trang, Boston, Hanover. Which of those places, or anywhere, do you consider your home?
- LE: I think here is my home better. Yeah. Yeah.
- TIAO: Where do you feel the most comfortable?
- LE: In US. In US more comfortable. Vietnam only vacation. I don't like it live there. US the best. Like to live. Anywhere, Boston, anywhere, New Hampshire. Yeah, I like it here now.
- TIAO: Why do you think that the US is the best?
- LE: I think the best here because great for my kids in college and we, in here, you have change. You can make money and can invest in something. In Vietnam, not easy to earn that money. Not easy. And people in Vietnam they earn right now or maybe 300 a month.

Around that, around that \$250-300 a month. I think being here is good for my daughter.

TIAO: Is there much of a Vietnamese community in the area?

LE: Where?

TIAO: Here in Hanover?

LE: No. No. Too small. Yes. Maybe 10. 10 houses or something like that. Small.

TIAO: Is that hard?

LE: Mm. No, I think so. I, I think it's okay. We busy working all the time.

TIAO: Do you practice any traditions from home though? In America?

LE: What do you mean better?

TIAO: I mean, like, are you still religious? Do you celebrate Tet or anything like that?

LE: Yeah, sometime I celebrate my new year, you know? Vietnamese New Year. We, yeah...

TIAO: How do you celebrate that in America?

LE: Stay home, cooking, and invite friend. You know, coming.

TIAO: What kind of food do you cook?

LE: Yeah, we have special food. My mom, she cook, you know, meat, fried rice, something like that.

TIAO: That sounds delicious. I know Hanover doesn't really, I mean we have Yi Ping's, but where do you get ingredients for Vietnamese food?

LE: We always cook at home. Cook at home. We go to Boston every, every week. Because my mom, she's still there. That's why I try go, try go every week, I see her and I go supermarket too. Sometime two week.

TIAO: Does your whole family go to Boston together?

- LE: No. Sometimes they go together. Sometimes they, my daughter, she don't want to go. She stay here with my mother in law.
- TIAO: Oh, your mother-in-law's here?
- LE: Yeah, she just come here one year. She live here now. She just come here only one year. My wife, she do paperwork. She sponsor. She come here to leave. Only one year.
- TIAO: Is your father-in-law here as well?
- LE: No, he, he passed away long time.
- TIAO: Speaking of legal, have you noticed like any, like the borders have gotten stricter in the US. Have you noticed any difference in treatment?
- LE: No.
- TIAO: Okay. I was just curious. I had heard that ICE was in the area recently, so I was just wondering if that had affected you at all.
- LE: No.
- TIAO: Oh ok, That's good.
- LE: No, they don't really affect us because we all have green card and passport, you know, listen, yeah.
- TIAO: Did you ever face like a lot of, or any, discrimination in the US for being Vietnamese?
- LE: Can you say again?
- TIAO: Did you ever face any discrimination for being Vietnamese in the US, like when you first moved here or any instances that you remember?
- LE: No, I don't remember.
- TIAO: Where do your siblings live now? Where do your siblings live now?
- LE: Where I live now?
- TIAO: Where do your siblings live and where do you live? Actually like...

LE: In, in Lebanon.

TIAO: Do your sisters and brothers also live near here?

LE: I have my younger brother. He live with me.

TIAO: And your other siblings?

LE: My mother in law. My wife. They all live here.

TIAO: What does your younger brother do?

LE: He worked nails same in, in my nail salon.

TIAO: So he went to school here too, right?

LE: Yeah, to the high school. And after that he quit. He didn't go college.

TIAO: Wow, a family business.

LE: Yeah.

TIAO: Is he married?

LE: Yeah. Yeah, he married.

TIAO: Is it nice to see someone from home a lot? Like someone like someone you grew up with a lot?

LE: Yeah.

TIAO: Where did your other siblings end up? Like your sister and your older brothers?

LE: Yeah. They live in Boston. They live in Boston right now. And my sisters, they live there.

TIAO: Do they also have families?

LE: Yeah, they all have families. They got married.

TIAO: When you go to Boston, then, do you just see your mom or do you see all of your siblings as well?

LE: Actually is my mom nearby and sometimes my sister, you know, not the same day. Sometime we do for the different week.

TIAO: Do you see your other daughters very much?

LE: My daughter, she come here every holiday. She come back here for Christmas. She live with me for a few weeks.

TIAO: All three of them?

LE: Yup, all three.

TIAO: That's great.

LE: My daughter, she 22, and 22, and one 18.

TIAO: [pause] Sorry, I'm just thinking. Your older daughters, are they closer to their mom or you? Do you know really? Do they spend most of their time with—

LE: They close with me. Yeah.

TIAO: Do you want to take a quick break or anything?

LE: I be fine.

TIAO: Do you need more water or anything?

LE: I okay.

TIAO: Okay. Just wondering. Sure. So I know you own Nefertiti nails, but um, like is there anything else do you think in Hanover that especially keeps you here? Like why would you not move to back to Boston or like somewhere warmer?

LE: The thing is when my daughter finished high school, and we think we move back to Boston. That would be seven more years that we thinking about.

TIAO: So that would be before the younger one finishes?

LE: Mm, no, this my daughter 11, fifth grade now and maybe seven more years, she go to college and after that we think has been, maybe we go back to Boston, is nearby my mom. She got a home, we wanted close for her if she need help.

- TIAO: Has your family ever considered going somewhere warmer?
- LE: Warmer this warmer, we thinking, yeah, I thinking it's Dallas. I like my number one choice, I like California. And I know expensive for living down there. Eh, maybe Atlanta. Outside Atlanta. I am not a city man. I like countryside. Maybe Dallas, I like Dallas. Warmer than Hanover. Cheaper. Tax cheaper.
- TIAO: Why Dallas? Like have you been there before?
- LE: Uh, no, but I have my friend live down there. He say good. The temperature not too warm. In Houston, hot and humid. In Dallas, okay. In Dallas, have high achiever, the tax not really high. We like four season, maybe Atlanta I be thinking.
- TIAO: Did you have four seasons in Nha Trang?
- LE: No. Only two season. Only raining and hot. In Vietnam, only two seasons.
- TIAO: So what'd you think of having four seasons then when you came to America?
- LE: Oh, big different. I would say. Oh yeah. Cold. I don't like it. They have to, you know, so, yeah. I thinking about for long time ago I'd say, oh, I have to move south, warmer. And I came, I stuck in here, stuck in here right now. Like own my business, I have to stay here. And later my wife, she like it and my daughter, I think good rate, focus in in school.
- TIAO: Do you remember seeing snow for the first time?
- LE: Oh no. First time we come to Vermont, we see snow, we very happy. Yeah, we say, "oh my God, where that come from?" And after that, right now we scary, cold and cold and cold and icy. I just say, I told my wife, "I surrender." Too cold. New Hampshire. Very cold.
- TIAO: Very snowy.
- LE: Very snow, yeah. Boston is better. Boston is... okay. Couple of storm here, in Boston, they don't have them. In here, they have more.

- TIAO: Have you learned anything like recreational that you do different between here and Vietnam? Like did you learn to ski or anything like wintery?
- LE: Oh no, I am so busy. I like to, you know, and yeah. I don't have time to learn to ski. Yeah, maybe someday.
- TIAO: Uh, who else works at Nefertiti Nails with you?
- LE: I have some couple technician. They live in, in town. My friend, you know. We hang around on weekend.
- TIAO: What do you do on the weekends?
- LE: Karaoke. And little bit cup of beer.
- TIAO: Wait, where do you do karaoke? Where do you do karaoke?
- LE: My house. I have a good, good, good speaker.
- TIAO: That's awesome. Did you do karaoke a lot in Vietnam or was that in Boston mostly?
- LE: Yeah, in Boston. We do have a lot in... Yeah. Yeah. I love karaoke.
- TIAO: Me too. Was there a lot of karaoke in Vietnam?
- LE: Yeah, they do a lot of karaoke in Vietnam.
- TIAO: There's just not enough karaoke in America. That's so fun. How many friends, like you don't have to like quantify, but do you have a lot of good friends that you met in Vietnam with you now? Like in America? Or did most of your friends that you have now, did you meet them in the US?
- LE: Oh, I have some friend in Vietnam, and I have friend in Boston more. My best friend live in Boston. And he have one in, one guy, he good, my best friend, he always come my house on weekend.
- TIAO: From Boston?
- LE: No, he live here. Yeah, he live here.
- TIAO: How did you meet your different friends?
- LE: Because his wife work for me. That's why... I invite and he come.

- TIAO: How did you find your current nail technicians? Cause there's not a huge like Vietnamese community or anything, but...
- LE: Yeah. Actually all my family, and they put in advertise for new paper. In Boston and sometime they call. Not easy to find a technician now. That's why only five, six people working.
- TIAO: Is it not easy cause we're in the middle of nowhere or is it cause it's like even in Boston you had trouble?
- LE: I think in here they get more. People in Boston, they don't like to come here much because really cold, they don't like it.
- TIAO: What's your clientele at like Nefertiti? Like who comes to Nefertiti Nails to get their nails done?
- LE: What, can you say again?
- TIAO: I guess like who are your customers that come a lot to Nefertiti Nails?
- LE: Oh, I have local and Dartmouth, Dartmouth students a lot. And some teacher and nurse and doctor. Yeah, they're coming.
- TIAO: What's it like to interact with these different people? Like the Dartmouth students versus say like a nurse or something like that? Like do you feel like you have different relationships with these different people from different institutions and things?
- LE: What do you mean for that?
- TIAO: I guess like do you feel like your interactions with like Dartmouth students differs from your interactions with like community members or anything?
- LE: Hard to say.
- TIAO: That's true. Why is it called Nefertiti Nails?
- LE: Oh, that's the name before. We took over and they already had that name already. We didn't join that name. Because when I come in, it's already busy. I keep the name. Business, they are good. And we do business. We don't change the name when business good. If the business dead, then we have to change for the new owner, change the name. Make the customer. If they do, I keep them.

- TIAO: What was the name of your old business?
- LE: What the name?
- TIAO: Of your, of the one that you sold in Boston?
- LE: Hollywood Nail.
- TIAO: Oh, Hollywood Nails, you say?
- LE: Yeah, yeah. We buy from somebody too, say Hollywood Nail in West Roxbury.
- TIAO: I was like, "hm, that's an interesting name." Do you feel like you were like, I don't know personally very much about the nail business, so can you talk about like what a daily life looks like as a nail business owner and like if you changed techniques or anything when you moved places or when you took over the business?
- LE: Can you say again?
- TIAO: Oh yeah. So, um, can you tell me a little bit about like what your daily work day looks like now?
- LE: Yes. Yeah. For the, usually they come in. For customer, they do for the different kinds of stuff, and we have to do. And business not, yeah, we do all kind, you know, we have to. Everything new, we have to learn and we have to go to show. They have some show in Boston, and they call me, "oh, this week they have a OPI [*Transcriber's note*: a brand of cosmetics] show." We have to go learn for, we upgrade everything new. We have to upgrade.
- TIAO: What does OPI mean?
- LE: The OPI, the color. Sometimes they have a show. Like everything come new, and they teach us how to do.
- TIAO: Are you happy that you're a nail salon owner? Like do you wish that there was like another job you could have done?
- LE: I think, I, I happy for nail and my point, I love to invest in house. I do that too. I fix it my own house. I do for both. Yeah. I have. Yeah. I have rental now in Lebanon. I try to fix it my own too. Yeah, I do okay. I love it. I love two job.
- TIAO: How'd you pick up that? How'd you learn how to fix up houses?

- LE: I learned from YouTube. For remodeling, I have my friend, he do that, okay? And I know how to do plumbing, installing, painting. I love to do that too.
- TIAO: That's awesome. How do you do both jobs? Like how do you balance the workload?
- LE: Like? Yeah. Like you have this, I do when they not busy, and I do that.
- TIAO: Hmm. Wow.
- LE: I do my own house. Not somebody. Because I have couple of house I buy for rental.
- TIAO: How many?
- LE: I have three.
- TIAO: That's awesome.
- LE: That's why I'm busy all the time. This morning I do house. I set it up, and I do for... because my brother, he back in Vietnam and my technician, they go vacation. They just came back and I say, okay, I take the day off and I do my own job.
- TIAO: Which job do you like more?
- LE: Mm, I think I like to do nail more. Yeah. I have to, you know?
- TIAO: Fair.
- LE: My wife, she, I told her, yup, for house because too busy in salon, a lot of phone call. That's why it happened. Sometimes a phone call. Every minute, they calling.
- TIAO: What job do you think you would have done if you hadn't come to the US, like if you were still in Nha Trang, what do you think you would be doing?
- LE: Hmm. I don't know. I think nothing. In Vietnam, Nha Trang, it really hard to—even, you go, you finish in college, not easy to get a job. I don't know. That's why I say maybe I live in Vietnam right now, I don't know what I do. Maybe drive a taxi, something. All my family? They drive the taxi, something like that. If you get a good job, not

easy. You have to money. That money, food on the table. Even some they finish college, they don't have a job. Yeah. Not easy.

TIAO: That's pretty crazy. What did your brothers do then while they were still in Vietnam?

LE: Hm?

TIAO: What did your brothers do while they were still in Vietnam?

LE: Oh, my brother? My brother, he had a business. Before, he in Vietnam, he had... He still in Vietnam, right now. He back and forth. He work over there. He have a company over there for seafood. He buy our seafood.

TIAO: Which brother is that one?

LE: My second one. My older one, they live here and my second, they live in US and they go six month in Vietnam and two month in America, then after that he go back because he own business down there.

TIAO: What is your oldest brother? Does anybody else in your family do something like that or no?

LE: Only that guy do that. And my older one, he working here.

TIAO: What did your oldest brother do when he was still in Vietnam?

LE: He have a company like the bus. Dartmouth Bus? He have the bus. He drive to Nha Trang to Saigon, Saigon to Nha Trang. Like tourist. He drive for somebody who need the car. 30 people, 40 people, he have a whole bus. He earned money from that. He living. He living.

TIAO: That's a far drive.

LE: Yeah. Eight hours.

TIAO: What does he do in the US?

LE: Right now, he work with nail too in Boston. All my family do nail. I don't know why. I try my family do different one. They have to learn. They come, and they do nail.

TIAO: What do you mean by that? Like you wish they had done something else or...

LE: Yeah, I like my brother do for the different one, like construction, the builder or something like that. And everybody, we do nail, and now my brother do nail. That's it.

TIAO: Does your sister also do nails?

LE: Uh, no, my sister, she stay at home. She's still the daycare. She take care of the baby.

TIAO: What does her husband do?

LE: Yeah, her husband work the company. American company.

TIAO: So someone's not doing nails. So wait, you have, did I remember this correctly, two younger brothers or is it one?

LE: I have two.

TIAO: Which younger brother is with you in Lebanon?

LE: Oh, he's like he work with me right now? My younger one. And my next one, he own nail salon for Littleton, New Hampshire.

TIAO: Oh?

LE: Yeah, he own nail salon. He live down there. One hour from here.

TIAO: Where is it again?

LE: Littleton, New Hampshire.

TIAO: What's that nail salon called?

LE: The Littleton Nail Spa.

TIAO: Wow. Your family really is involved in the nail business.

LE: Yeah, we all have business for nail.

TIAO: Do you see him very much?

LE: Sometimes, yeah. Every couple of weeks when he go back to Boston. Sometime he come over to my house. Sometimes I come his house.

TIAO: Sorry. That's the youngest brother or is that the...

LE: No, my second. I'm older. He younger. And younger one, is here.

TIAO: Oh, so he's here.

LE: Yeah, here, with me.

TIAO: Do you think he's going to get his own nail business?

LE: I think so, yeah. Because he owned business before. And he sell them. Maybe, maybe he thinking about it back.

TIAO: Did he own one in Boston?

LE: Yeah, he do. And he's, and he bought it and he sell it. He just get married. His wife just come here only one week from Vietnam.

TIAO: Oh really?

LE: Yeah. Only one week. He back to Vietnam and get married, and he have his son for one, almost two year old. And she just arrived only one week.

TIAO: How did they meet?

LE: How they meet?

TIAO: Yeah.

LE: Maybe his friend, you know, from here? I know that his wife and that side, maybe, yeah.

TIAO: Not as much of a cool love story as yours and Mary's.

LE: Yeah.

TIAO: Do they live in your home as well?

LE: Yup. They live in my home right now. And we can leave, go back in Boston, they live with my mom.

TIAO: Why did he sell his other business?

LE: Because, when, you know, he buy the business, he don't have technician. The technician, he buy from Boston for one hour. People, they say far away. They don't want it. That's why. He's tired. That's why he just made a decision. He sell somebody else.

- TIAO: Do you see your other two brothers very often?
- LE: My older one?
- TIAO: Yeah.
- LE: My older one. They, I see them every time I go home and stay. And one in Vietnam. We didn't see him. Maybe a year, two times when he came back two or three times. That's it.
- TIAO: So your, your brother sounds like he felt pretty tired. Do you feel similarly at all about owning a nail salon?
- LE: Can you say again?
- TIAO: You were saying that your brother felt pretty tired from owning a nail salon and it also being so far from having a lot of technicians. Have you felt similarly at all?
- LE: Yeah. Yeah. Maybe, you know, yeah. I think he feel tired. After that, when his wife come in, maybe he thinking about like not right now, maybe a year, two year.
- TIAO: Can you tell me a little bit about the differences between your daily life in Boston versus Hanover because you lived so long in both? I'm just kinda curious how you feel like your life has changed at all.
- LE: Yeah. In here. Little quiet. Boston, it's a little busy. Yeah, I like quiet.
- TIAO: That's true. You said you didn't like the cities.
- LE: Yeah, I live in city for a long time and I don't like it no more. Yeah, I like the country side. People nice.
- TIAO: Was Nha Trang more like a big city when you were a kid or no?
- LE: No. Nha Trang small city. Right now, it's still small city. Nha Trang, maybe around Nha Trang city, maybe you back and forth about 15 or 20 minutes around the city. You ride a bicycle from—I think for the motorcycle about 15 minutes around and everywhere. Not, not too far. Yeah, a small one. Right on Nha Trang is near the water. They build up a lot of hotel. Yeah, a lot of, a lot of hotel. They—I think there investment in a lot of hotel right now.

TIAO: When you go back home, do you just stay at your mom's home or, sorry, go back to Nha Trang, do you just stay at your mom's house?

LE: Yup, because I have a lot of friends still there and my uncle and aunt, they still there. Sometime I stay in the hotel. Sometime, yeah.

TIAO: Do you also go to Saigon to see—oh well I guess Mary's family came here so...

LE: Yeah, I go to Saigon, too. And Mary still have brother living in Saigon.

TIAO: Do you know what Mary's family—like did their political views of Vietnam align with your family's? Like was that ever a point of tension or anything?

LE: What you say for that?

TIAO: Like you were saying that your family doesn't much like how the government is run in Vietnam. Did Mary's family feel similarly or like does she feel similarly?

LE: No, I don't think so. For Mary's side? Yeah, I don't know much about that.

TIAO: I guess I don't really actually have that much more. I guess my last couple of general questions are like how do you feel about the US in general? How do you feel about Vietnam in general now?

LE: How do you feel? Can you make, what do you mean by that? I don't understand.

TIAO: Uh, like how do you feel about being in the US like, um, I dunno, I guess... Like, do you have any strong opinions about anything that you like or dislike about the US per se or anything? Cause like, I know you've talked a lot about what you like about the US but is there anything that you wish were different?

LE: A lot of US, they good for kids sleep here and freedom speaking, and if you work hard and you still have, money, what do you want to buy? You know, that's, you know, I think it's, uh, yeah, in Vietnam is different. They, the people, they live for a little bit different, like American.

TIAO: Well, what do you mean by that?

LE: Like in Vietnam, people, if they working hard, they don't have much money too because the people only \$300 a month average. You know, some people earn more like, you know, and average people working, you know, like, yeah, I am in this. If you live in America, if you working hard, and you, you buy what you want.

TIAO: Okay. Is there anything else you think would be important for me to know about you?

LE: No.

TIAO: Um, okay. Then I think that's about it. Well, thank you so much for your time.

LE: You're welcome. Thank you. All set?

TIAO: Yeah.

[End of interview.]