

Interview (Part 1) with Uyen Phuong Nguyen on March 24, 2023

0:00:03.190,0:00:07.770

Hello! Good afternoon, Uyen! I'm so happy to see you today. How are you?

0:00:08.250,0:00:12.340

-Yeah, I'm great. How are you?

-It's great to see you again.

0:00:12.410,0:00:27.640

All right. I'm going to begin with a little introduction. Thank you so much for taking the time to tell me to tell us your story. As you know, I'm Heather Bruce Satrom, and I teach in ELAP, English Language for Academic Purposes at Montgomery College,

0:00:27.930,0:00:35.510

and this project is called History in the Making: Documenting Stories of Immigrant and Refugee Students at MC.

0:00:35.910,0:00:46.120

The goal of this project is to help others better understand the experiences of immigrants and refugees in the United States, particularly in Montgomery County.

0:00:46.270,0:00:57.940

And telling your story will enable others to better understand the challenges that immigrants and refugees face and better appreciate the resilience and perseverance of people in your community.

0:00:57.980,0:01:00.850

So I am grateful for your participation.

0:01:01.370,0:01:14.480

Today is the first interview. Today is Friday, March 24, 2023, and this interview will be focused on your experiences in your country of origin, which is Vietnam.

0:01:14.910,0:01:25.840

And then next week we will talk about your experiences after you moved to the United States. So we'll take about an hour today, but we can talk longer if you choose.

0:01:26.040,0:01:34.510

As a reminder at any point, if you would like to skip a question. Just let me know. That's perfectly fine.

0:01:34.810,0:01:41.940

Okay, let's begin with the first question. Could you please tell me your full name and spell it, please?

0:01:43.120,0:01:46.370

My name is Uyen Nguyen.

0:01:46.790,0:01:48.270

(spells name)

0:01:48.770,0:01:57.220

0:01:57.660,0:02:04.060

My last name is Nguyen.

0:02:04.240,0:02:07.100

(spells name)

0:02:07.300,0:02:14.280

0:02:14.690,0:02:18.320

Thank you so much. And do I have permission to record this interview?

0:02:18.800,0:02:20.140

Yes, you do.

0:02:20.190,0:02:28.900
Thank you. All right. So let's begin by talking about your name. Do people in the United States have trouble pronouncing your name?

0:02:30.030,0:02:31.970
Yes, but..

0:02:32.830,0:02:41.270
I think it depends. So, random people I think they have trouble mostly in my name.

0:02:41.600,0:02:51.610
Oh, one time I stay in.. When I take a shower, I laugh out loud because the sound of that person come up to mind

0:02:51.860,0:02:56.070
when he tried to pronounce my name, Uyen Nguyen,

0:02:56.300,0:03:02.850
but it turned out like "win win", so it is so weird to me.

0:03:02.920,0:03:09.880
when I have my friends in the U.S.. And a question recently I asked them,

0:03:10.290,0:03:14.350
Do you guys have trouble to saying my name?

0:03:14.550,0:03:19.120
Because I want to change my name if you guys have trouble,

0:03:19.210,0:03:25.230
but it turned out that my friends didn't have trouble saying my name. and they like my name.

0:03:25.690,0:03:30.900
Actually, Uyen is a hard word to say, even in Vietnamese.

0:03:32.270,0:03:35.930
Some Vietnamese people still have trouble saying my name.

0:03:37.230,0:03:45.990
Yeah, that's my first name, but my last name is a popular name, and I expect people to say it correctly.

0:03:47.190,0:03:49.640
Does your first name have a special meaning?

0:03:50.080,0:03:54.470
-My last name or my first name?
-Your first name.

0:03:54.630,0:03:59.930
Yeah, my first name, it stand alone, it has no meaning,

0:03:59.980,0:04:03.540
but it is goes with another..

0:04:04.650,0:04:07.980
"Phuong Nguyen" means intelligent.

0:04:08.120,0:04:18.450
I'm not sure what my parents want me to do.

0:04:18.459,0:04:19.610
But yeah to me that is the meaning.

0:04:21.279,0:04:28.190
Like day one when they give me "Uyen."

0:04:29.260,0:04:31.490
Thank you. Thank you for sharing this story.

0:04:32.120,0:04:35.860
And where do you live now?

0:04:36.590,0:04:39.780
I live in College Park.

0:04:40.100,0:04:44.430
Okay. And you're at the University of Maryland at College Park?

0:04:44.960,0:04:57.600
Yeah, it's really near the University of Maryland. It takes around 10 minutes to get there. I usually travel by the UM shuttle.

0:04:57.900,0:05:02.640
Can you tell me a little bit about what you're studying at the University?

0:05:03.490,0:05:10.090
Yeah. I am a senior who majors in computer science

0:05:10.150,0:05:12.590
at the University of Maryland.

0:05:12.880,0:05:16.920
I'm interested in quantum cyber security.

0:05:17.070,0:05:19.440
Also, recently,

0:05:19.620,0:05:24.460
I feel engaged more in the design and implementation of

0:05:24.690,0:05:32.080
interpreters and compilers for programming languages based-security,

0:05:32.550,0:05:35.580
actually.

0:05:35.790,0:05:42.730
So that's fascinating. Can you tell me a little bit more about your studies, and why you chose this major?

0:05:43.700,0:05:55.220
When I come to the U.S., I had a background in food and nutrition and some background in law, but I feel that

0:05:55.300,0:05:57.810
I can study anything.

0:05:58.150,0:06:01.320
But at the time, I didn't think that

0:06:03.340,0:06:09.340
I should follow law or something related to English, because that's

0:06:09.650,0:06:20.350
my weakness. So I want something practical to have my life first, and then I come to math and computer science.

0:06:20.520,0:06:24.170
And actually, after that, I got attracted to my major

0:06:24.210,0:06:28.070
So most interesting,

0:06:28.360,0:06:32.410
and I think that with the

0:06:32.830,0:06:44.120
the skill and my knowledge from the University, also MC, is going to have me to find a better job. Also, I can use this to help other people.

0:06:45.340,0:06:52.950
I believe that a public server is very important. so I can. I can contribute

0:06:53.030,0:06:58.820
a bit to tackle some national issues in the future.

0:06:59.380,0:07:02.890
And you're also working as a teaching assistant now. Is that correct? You enjoy that work?

0:07:02.990,0:07:03.970
Yeah.

0:07:04.050,0:07:05.400
Do you enjoy that work?

0:07:05.740,0:07:10.060
Yeah, I enjoy that work. Seeing people have trouble

0:07:10.070,0:07:15.790
with that class like me before, and you helping them.

0:07:16.080,0:07:20.470
help me earn more knowledge and deep understanding of the concepts.

0:07:20.500,0:07:26.770
I also help the Professor design the exam,

0:07:26.980,0:07:31.770
grading the exam,

0:07:32.830,0:07:38.650
and maintain the communication channel with student in this course. So that helps me to study more and more.

0:07:39.250,0:07:47.980
-That's wonderful. And you also mentioned that you work for Vietnamese American television in Arlington, Virginia. Is that correct?

-Yeah.

0:07:48.090,0:07:50.060
Can you tell me a little bit about that work?

0:07:50.520,0:07:54.410
when it comes to the U.S.

0:07:54.560,0:08:06.010
I usually be a writer for the Vietnam American television. And then

0:08:06.180,0:08:07.660
I get..

0:08:08.600,0:08:11.950
I get the job as a consultant

0:08:12.060,0:08:22.350
and technical staff. Maintain the software. Help people use the software at the office.

0:08:22.730,0:08:25.790
I also contribute to ... human rights topic.

0:08:25.850,0:08:28.590
That's very personal to me.

0:08:29.780,0:08:34.270
Is Vietnamese American Television aimed at

0:08:34.400,0:08:39.679
an audience of Vietnamese people living in the United States? Is that right?

0:08:39.950,0:08:50.830

Yeah, that's correct. And also they put some YouTube videos so that the Vietnamese colleagues in Vietnam can

0:08:51.120,0:08:57.140
upload to that video. We try to speak the truth

0:08:58.820,0:09:04.010
and bring some international interests to the people in Vietnam

0:09:04.310,0:09:06.010
so they are aware of them.

0:09:06.630,0:09:15.790
You mentioned that human rights is a topic that's very important to you. Do you want to talk a little bit about that? How did that become such an important value to you?

0:09:16.670,0:09:29.470
When I was in Vietnam, I was a student activist, in particular,

0:09:31.150,0:09:32.040
I break this..

0:09:32.910,0:09:38.590
my freedom.. I'll speak against China and got arrested in the South China Sea.

0:09:38.720,0:09:42.080
And because of that I got arrested by

0:09:42.130,0:09:51.030
the Vietnamese Communist government. Yeah, at the release from jail,

0:09:53.410,0:09:58.930
under the pressure of the government, I could not go to

0:09:59.120,0:10:12.980
any public school. And then I had to study by myself using the online resources. On the other side, I still contribute to human rights.

0:10:13.220,0:10:16.310
Some..

0:10:16.460,0:10:20.590
democracy activity

0:10:20.970,0:10:24.620
like go to streets, speak out your opinion,

0:10:24.720,0:10:31.720
and spread the freedom of speech. Yeah.. helping people to know their basic

0:10:32.300,0:10:33.960
human rights.

0:10:34.560,0:10:46.270
I definitely want to come back to that story because I think it's really important, that part of your life. But let's begin going farther back in time. We'll start at the beginning.

0:10:46.360,0:10:54.240
-Tell me, you were born in a village in Vietnam named Hâm Trí. Is that correct?
-Yeah, that's correct.

0:10:54.550,0:10:56.720
Can you tell me a little bit about

0:10:56.730,0:11:01.380
the village of Hâm Trí? What is it like, or what was it like when you were growing up there?

0:11:03.090,0:11:14.250
Yeah, of course. Hâm Trí is a small village located in southeast of Vietnam.

0:11:14.570,0:11:19.870

and my grouping is well known for growing dragon fruit,

0:11:20.340,0:11:23.810
in the past, like when I was 5,

0:11:23.830,0:11:26.180
around that, people

0:11:26.750,0:11:32.020
growing rice, but they switched to growing dragon fruit

0:11:32.680,0:11:39.810
because it's easier to grow, and it's been profit to people because it's easy

0:11:39.880,0:11:45.110
to sell. Yeah, they went on for dragon fruit.

0:11:45.890,0:11:48.230
That's interesting.

0:11:48.710,0:11:56.950
Was your family involved with growing dragon fruit? Is that something that your family has connections to.. that local industry?

0:11:57.500,0:12:02.910
Yeah, my parents are actually growing dragon fruit

0:12:03.360,0:12:09.870
They are also growing rice. But this makes more work than growing dragon fruit.

0:12:11.290,0:12:15.440
And how many people live in this village?

0:12:16.220,0:12:20.250
I'm not really sure. When I was a kid,

0:12:20.390,0:12:23.690
not much people, but now people sale.

0:12:23.940,0:12:27.830
They make the farm to be

0:12:28.100,0:12:32.060
home. So, it's a lot of people right now.

0:12:33.150,0:12:38.330
And when you were growing up, who was in your family? Can you tell me a little bit about your family members?

0:12:38.790,0:12:44.760
Yeah. When I was a kid, under three years old.

0:12:44.910,0:12:57.710
My parents lived with me, with my grandmother, grandfather, and sister of my mother. But when my mom saved enough money,

0:12:58.500,0:13:00.040
they move out.

0:13:00.120,0:13:07.900
And my parents build their first house by hand, and the help from their friends.

0:13:08.380,0:13:17.930
So that's our first house. I had no siblings until age 12. Yeah. And that's the only sibling I have.

0:13:19.060,0:13:25.480
So you grew up in an extended family with your grandparents, did you say?

0:13:25.650,0:13:32.390
Yeah, my grandparents and also my mother's sister

0:13:32.840,0:13:35.010
and brother as well. That's a lot of people.

0:13:35.290,0:13:37.090
Yes, that's a lot of people.

0:13:37.490,0:13:42.520
And can you describe the first house? You said your parents built it by hand?

0:13:42.940,0:13:43.900
Yeah.

0:13:45.280,0:13:50.820
Yeah. let's see some more health, and we had only one room..

0:13:52.030,0:13:53.000

0:13:53.540,0:13:57.140
One bedroom to sleep together.

0:13:57.320,0:14:00.760
And we have one living room and one kitchen.

0:14:01.240,0:14:09.860
So yeah, not much furniture there. Just basic furniture like a table and a chair.

0:14:09.970,0:14:13.150
I remember when I was

0:14:13.200,0:14:16.070
around 8 or 10, my mom

0:14:17.750,0:14:30.300
found an affordable TV, a black-and- white TV. And then the other family didn't have have a TV. So it was a lot of kids, and their parents got it to my house

0:14:30.550,0:14:45.010
in the evening, to what TV together. and of course there was not much entertainment in a TV, but the news. But it's what we see on TV.

0:14:45.080,0:14:53.940
-So they still gather in my house in the evening to watch a TV.
-Hold old were you when your parents got the television?

0:14:54.500,0:14:57.580
8 or 10, I think.

0:14:57.910,0:15:01.620
-And you remember people gathering at your house to watch shows together?
-Yeah.

0:15:01.800,0:15:05.410
Did you have any favorite shows that you enjoyed watching?

0:15:05.700,0:15:08.750
I wish, at the time, people..

0:15:08.950,0:15:18.660
There was no cartoon on the TV.

0:15:18.920,0:15:19.800
So,

0:15:19.850,0:15:24.090
I'm not the person who likes to watch TV at the house.

0:15:25.620,0:15:33.730

Do you remember any American television shows or American movies? Did you watch any when you were a child?

0:15:33.830,0:15:36.620
No, I don't think so.

0:15:37.500,0:15:42.930
So did you say you watched cartoons, or you wanted to watch cartoons?

0:15:45.170,0:15:49.360
I like people gathering at my house,

0:15:49.390,0:15:58.020
but I actually, I didn't enjoy the TV because the TV just the news every day. It's so boring.

0:15:58.070,0:16:03.520
So I like to talk with other friends like the neighbors.

0:16:04.090,0:16:10.050
-You enjoyed the social aspect more than the television itself.
-Yeah.

0:16:10.520,0:16:22.300
I understand that. Let's see. Can you tell me a little bit more about your neighborhood, your community, other activities that you did when you were growing up?

0:16:22.840,0:16:35.470
When I grew up, me and other kids usually play in the street. We draw playground on the ground.

0:16:35.570,0:16:46.010
And then collect the stone together and play with it, instead of a particular game like kids now do.

0:16:46.370,0:16:51.320
Because we don't have a playground, so we play in the street.

0:16:51.500,0:16:57.730
At the at that time, not most.. actually no car at all.

0:16:57.910,0:17:02.760
Usually a bicycle or a motorcycle.

0:17:03.210,0:17:05.170
So yeah.

0:17:06.140,0:17:13.660
Do you have memories of school when you were a child? Can you tell me a little bit about those memories?

0:17:14.349,0:17:23.970
Yeah. I remember a professor.. a teacher actually. I liked her a lot

0:17:24.180,0:17:31.950
because when I come to the first grade, I didn't recognize tests at all.

0:17:32.050,0:17:34.900
I've been like go to school for fun.

0:17:35.320,0:17:39.340
I'm not sure if I think that. And on the test day,

0:17:39.500,0:17:44.720
I took the test as a homework assignment. So I didn't do that.

0:17:45.890,0:17:53.960
Yeah. And I go home without doing that. I think I can do something, but not all the same.

0:17:54.120,0:17:55.140
So,

0:17:55.390,0:17:58.830

basically almost feel the same.

0:17:58.900,0:18:04.610
So that teacher talked to my parents about that.

0:18:05.220,0:18:10.860
And then during the first summer, I had to stay in her home

0:18:11.250,0:18:14.940
to practice more for once I go back to the school.

0:18:15.550,0:18:27.400
-That's so funny.
-You would be at your teacher's home to study?
-Yeah. She liked to have me at her home, so she can teach me more during the summer.

0:18:27.710,0:18:30.140
Oh, that's very kind.

0:18:30.370,0:18:32.420
Yeah, I like her.

0:18:32.830,0:18:39.800
I still remember her name. Her name is Hing. I like her a lot.

0:18:40.020,0:18:45.820
Yeah, and basic fun. I remember when I stay in, go home,

0:18:46.260,0:18:48.400
they say,

0:18:48.690,0:18:54.460
I don't know how to say it, but she grow..

0:18:57.560,0:19:02.390
To grow some plant

0:19:03.270,0:19:06.510
that is a weed plant. So I think that's the grass,

0:19:06.720,0:19:17.000
not a plant.
-Like a yard or a garden?
-No, this is the weed plant. That's not a garden.

0:19:17.030,0:19:24.700
But I go there. I think that's just grass, so I pull it out, and that's the grass died.

0:19:24.750,0:19:27.880
But actually, as something rises.

0:19:29.860,0:19:33.990
So you were pulling it out, but it was..

0:19:34.840,0:19:36.470
And what plant was it?

0:19:36.810,0:19:41.700
I'm not really sure, but it is grasses.

0:19:42.290,0:19:46.260
How did she respond to you? Did she tell you, don't do that?

0:19:46.710,0:19:51.530
So she wasn't at home at the time. She was at the market. .

0:19:51.910,0:20:01.980
So I was a kid being aware of this. Some kind of plant like that.

0:20:02.210,0:20:05.350
Did you say a rice plant?

0:20:07.620,0:20:10.010

No, it's something related to..

0:20:11.520,0:20:12.870

medication

0:20:12.950,0:20:16.700

Interesting. This sounds like a herbal medication?

0:20:18.090,0:20:20.600

Yeah, maybe something like that.

0:20:20.880,0:20:27.300

It sounds like your teacher had a really positive impact on your life inviting you to stay with her.

0:20:27.940,0:20:28.810

Yeah.

0:20:28.990,0:20:33.300

Was that just one summer, or did you stay for multiple summers with her?

0:20:33.630,0:20:41.170

I stayed for one summer, because that is when I was in the first grade.

0:20:41.410,0:20:45.320

So when I moved to second grade, I had another teacher.

0:20:46.710,0:20:47.470

Yeah.

0:20:47.510,0:20:54.680

And I still need to stay in my home to watch out for my parents to go to market

0:20:54.820,0:20:55.820

all the day.

0:20:57.060,0:21:03.230

What kind of responsibilities did you have when you were a child? Did you have chores that you needed to do every day?

0:21:03.510,0:21:10.120

Oh, yeah, of course, if my mom see the house have dirt,

0:21:10.340,0:21:12.170

I'm going to get

0:21:12.910,0:21:15.110

in jail from her.

0:21:15.170,0:21:18.440

So yeah, I do that every day,

0:21:18.460,0:21:20.670

and..

-What kind of chores did you do?

0:21:21.370,0:21:24.390

That's kind of weird

0:21:24.610,0:21:29.310

I need to clean the stuff

0:21:29.730,0:21:31.970

in the house and then

0:21:32.250,0:21:34.600

across the house by my hand.

0:21:35.320,0:21:37.810

You had to clean the house by hand?

0:21:37.950,0:21:38.790
Yeah.

0:21:39.150,0:21:40.820
And you..
-And I washed the dishes..

0:21:41.360,0:21:42.140
Yeah.

0:21:43.020,0:21:46.900
My father likes to grow

0:21:46.930,0:21:52.140
a tree. So I also take care of the tree when he is not home as well.

0:21:53.640,0:21:57.680
So can you talk a little bit more about dragon fruits?

0:21:57.920,0:22:01.580
You mentioned that that's an important fruit in your village.

0:22:01.790,0:22:03.490
Yeah.

0:22:03.590,0:22:07.260
Actually, that's an expensive fruit, right?

0:22:07.290,0:22:14.680
But I don't like to eat that, because I eat that a lot when I stayed in Vietnam,

0:22:14.760,0:22:22.660
so not so much fruit to eat, but because my parent's friend is, we have a lot of dragon fruit in my house.

0:22:23.180,0:22:25.650
So my mother would just say,

0:22:26.200,0:22:37.890
There you can eat there. Why do we need to buy more fruit? So, I ate that a lot, so I don't want to eat that more when I come to the U.S.

0:22:39.530,0:22:51.510
Also I remember, China.. a lot of Chinese people would come to my village for buying dragon fruit.

0:22:52.170,0:22:57.610
And a lot of time I got in trouble because they

0:22:57.740,0:23:04.690
suppress the price. So we don't have a good price when the season comes.

0:23:04.750,0:23:07.540
Because a lot of dragon fruit needs

0:23:07.690,0:23:11.520
to be sold. So they don't want

0:23:11.560,0:23:15.440
the farmers to have a good price to sell...

0:23:20.330,0:23:24.890
So it affected the cost of the dragon fruit?

0:23:25.960,0:23:35.100
Yeah. Sometime I see a lot of people who throw out the dragon fruit on the street. And this some short come in dragon fruit

0:23:35.120,0:23:48.200

and compress it. I feel like a hook or something, because that's my parents hardworking in there,

0:23:49.040,0:23:51.250
and then nothing pay off.

0:23:52.000,0:23:57.880
-So they put a.. I just want to make sure that I understand.. they put a lot of work into producing the dragon fruit, and then..
-Yeah, growing dragon fruit.

0:23:58.030,0:24:01.770
and then..

0:24:02.240,0:24:07.080
Because the cost is really low.

0:24:07.300,0:24:18.130
they got to collect the really big dragon fruit, so the order of dragon fruit is not quality.

0:24:18.230,0:24:24.280
A lot of people let for the big to eat, but

0:24:24.340,0:24:28.490
it's still a lot of dragon fruit.

0:24:28.660,0:24:31.300
They can't consume. So they threw way.

0:24:31.560,0:24:32.880
They threw it away?

0:24:32.890,0:24:33.870
Yeah.

0:24:35.300,0:24:37.440
To affect the prices of the fruit?

0:24:37.790,0:24:38.530
Yeah.

0:24:39.380,0:24:45.740
Is it very hard to grow dragon fruit? What kind of things do you have to do to get a good harvest of dragon fruit?

0:24:46.740,0:24:47.800

0:24:48.500,0:24:54.240
I actually saw my parents doing that, but they don't want me and my

0:24:54.360,0:25:02.060
younger brother to do that. They want us to pay attention to school stuff instead.

0:25:02.270,0:25:07.730
But I see they go and try and put that by.. They try to make it

0:25:07.740,0:25:11.480
every season. Not a special season.

0:25:11.610,0:25:14.360
So they fly a bowl

0:25:14.520,0:25:15.940
to make the

0:25:16.000,0:25:20.170
temperature appropriate for the

0:25:20.180,0:25:22.440
dragon tree to

0:25:22.820,0:25:27.930
have flowers, and from there they are going to have fruit later.

0:25:28.330,0:25:30.690
Yeah, They also need to

0:25:32.490,0:25:33.920
remove some

0:25:33.970,0:25:41.460
dragon fruit, because if the tree have too much dragon fruit there, the fruit was going to be small.

0:25:41.740,0:25:44.350
So they were going to remove it while it was still young.

0:25:45.450,0:25:50.950
And you said, your parents preferred you to focus on school.

0:25:51.560,0:26:00.120
Yeah, I take care of the house and working on my school stuff instead of go to the farm.

0:26:01.340,0:26:02.700
And..

0:26:03.270,0:26:12.480
Let's go back a little bit to.. I'll return to the topic of education, but first, maybe we could talk a little bit about when you were growing up,

0:26:14.160,0:26:20.270
about holidays. Were there any special holidays that you remember? Any fun memories you have?

0:26:20.730,0:26:27.620
Yeah, it's a lot of holidays. But the most I like is New Year.

0:26:28.100,0:26:31.790
and we have our own New Year.

0:26:32.880,0:26:44.140
The Vietnamese New Year, is Tet, t, e, t. So during that time, the older person

0:26:44.160,0:26:55.260
is going to give money to the kids and kids are going to wish them a Happy New Year, or use a fancy word to say Happy New Year to you,

0:26:55.350,0:26:56.510
the person.

0:26:56.520,0:27:06.010
Yeah, the older person. I really like that because during that time, I can get some money and give back to my parents.

0:27:06.300,0:27:11.670
Also, we have no school during the time, so, I enjoy. It

0:27:12.020,0:27:15.230
Sounds like you have very fond memories of New Year.

0:27:16.540,0:27:22.030
Do you wear special clothes at that time? Was there a special color to wear, or something like that?

0:27:22.270,0:27:35.380
Yeah, people usually where the light colors, red and yellow. Red and yellow are the main colors on that holiday.

0:27:35.630,0:27:39.110
And what kind of foods are important at that holiday?

0:27:39.750,0:27:50.580

We have a special name for food, so I don't think we going to have the corresponding word in English to say that.

0:27:50.760,0:27:53.120
(says name in Vietnamese)

0:27:53.400,0:27:58.970
Yeah, it's just rice and in the middle they have meat, also green bean.

0:27:59.400,0:28:02.040
(says name in Vietnamese)

0:28:03.280,0:28:07.020
Yeah, that's a traditional food for that.

0:28:09.580,0:28:18.770
Are there other foods that were important to you that you remember growing up? Maybe foods that you miss not eating here now?

0:28:19.270,0:28:26.860
I'd say rice, I mean, I ate it every day. I did in Vietnam.

0:28:27.450,0:28:32.350
Yeah. When I was in Vietnam I ate rice everyday.

0:28:32.830,0:28:33.630

0:28:33.830,0:28:42.770
We have three meals. So the breakfast, I may skip breakfast. Lunch and dinner we were going to gather together

0:28:43.110,0:28:46.890
cooking and eating. And rice is a main food

0:28:47.270,0:28:48.320
in every meal.

0:28:49.330,0:29:07.060
One thing that you mentioned to me in an earlier conversation was about how meditation is very important to you. Could you tell me a little bit about how you learned to meditate? Who taught you to meditate, and how that became a valuable practice for you?

0:29:07.950,0:29:17.370
Yeah, when I was in Vietnam, I told you that, after I was arrested and police put me in jail,

0:29:19.840,0:29:24.220
the government didn't allow me to go to a state university.

0:29:24.350,0:29:27.010
I was really stressed

0:29:27.140,0:29:27.980
because

0:29:28.240,0:29:34.520
I want to have an official education. So,

0:29:34.920,0:29:42.780
I go to temple to pray and I learn meditation from there.

0:29:43.100,0:29:46.910
Meditation.. yeah, from a Buddhist.

0:29:47.900,0:29:50.520
So I think around

0:29:52.270,0:29:53.380
seven day

0:29:53.430,0:29:59.350

in the temple, we didn't use phone or read newspaper. We just isolate

0:29:59.640,0:30:00.760
completely

0:30:00.910,0:30:04.820
from electronic devices.

0:30:05.270,0:30:15.980
We eat one meal. That's it. Before noon, we were going to eat one meal. And from there we didn't eat anything. We just drink.

0:30:16.520,0:30:20.300
We practice meditation

0:30:20.430,0:30:21.670
all day.

0:30:21.710,0:30:25.630
and each time we do it, we're going to do two hours.

0:30:25.830,0:30:26.680
Uyen Phuong Nguyen: Just

0:30:26.800,0:30:30.080
Just straighten your back,

0:30:30.610,0:30:32.010
and then breathe.

0:30:32.610,0:30:35.080
Close your eye and focus

0:30:35.130,0:30:47.880
on your internal and breathe. Follow the way. That helped me a lot when I came to the U.S. as well, because I have a pain on my back.

0:30:48.480,0:30:55.200
So that's like a tool I have to help me maintain my health,

0:30:55.520,0:30:59.810
and also help me to focus.

0:31:02.040,0:31:06.760
And so you continue a meditation practice today to help you with stress?

0:31:07.040,0:31:16.950
Yeah, sometimes, I don't know.. I feel like I want to cry because something I don't know, but I want to cry...

0:31:17.900,0:31:26.200
I don't know why, but then, when I sit down and do meditation it...

0:31:26.630,0:31:31.960
and during the meditation, if I feel pain in my mind or I feel pain

0:31:32.840,0:31:36.410
in my body, I can cry, and after that I feel

0:31:36.590,0:31:47.220
strong again. Nothing can beat me up. Yeah. I still practice meditation.

0:31:47.520,0:31:52.390
Do you practice meditation on your own? Or are you part of a meditation community here?

0:31:52.840,0:32:05.880
I practice on my own because the meditation with other people, I don't know. Maybe they have a group, but for me this is a religion belief,

0:32:06.410,0:32:07.330
so,

0:32:07.400,0:32:11.970

in my mind, I think alone is better.

0:32:12.040,0:32:15.910

It is good to find a quiet place

0:32:15.970,0:32:21.790

under a tree to sit down and do that. It is better than do that with other people.

0:32:22.130,0:32:23.170

Interesting!

0:32:23.510,0:32:36.890

So let's go back in time. You mentioned that you went to an elementary school. You had elementary school teachers who helped you. You mentioned that your parents put a focus on education and the importance of education.

0:32:36.910,0:32:42.970

Did you go to high school in your village, or did you go farther away to go to high school?

0:32:43.490,0:32:49.310

There's only a high school near my house.

0:32:50.340,0:32:59.380

So it takes me 30 minutes with a bike. Yeah, I'd ride my bike there.

0:32:59.400,0:33:09.230

Yeah, it takes around 30 minutes to get there. And it's the only high school I can get to it to study. So yeah, I attended that school.

0:33:09.940,0:33:15.040

Is that when you begin to have an interest in math and science and computer science?

0:33:15.420,0:33:25.690

Actually, no, I don't feel I like any subject in school. I think I can learn anything, but I don't

0:33:26.170,0:33:39.890

have a particular interest at that time in math. Yeah, I didn't do well in mathematics in high school.

0:33:40.010,0:33:43.000

You didn't do well?

-Yeah, I didn't.

0:33:43.510,0:33:52.090

-But now, you do so well.

-I think in high school.. I think that I'm good in remembering.

0:33:52.420,0:33:59.410

If the subject requires me to remember, like biology or something, but not math or physics.

0:34:00.710,0:34:05.540

Which subjects did you enjoy the most when you were in high school?

0:34:06.310,0:34:08.840

I liked

0:34:09.540,0:34:10.989

literature.

0:34:12.360,0:34:16.350

Did you study Vietnamese literature?

0:34:16.489,0:34:21.270

Or literature from other countries.

-Vietnamese literature.

0:34:21.489,0:34:24.080

When did you first start studying English?

0:34:24.620,0:34:27.270

When I was

0:34:27.699,0:34:29.130

sixth grade.

0:34:29.540,0:34:35.969

Yeah. But we never got seriously on studying English,

0:34:36.110,0:34:46.590

because, you know, in a small village like that, we lack English teachers. So I remember my mom bought me a dictionary,

0:34:46.670,0:34:52.020

and I didn't know how to use it. Sometime, I want to learn something

0:34:52.150,0:34:59.890

because that is the book.. this doesn't help me to now, and I don't know how to look at the letter

0:35:00.580,0:35:03.170

The phonetic alphabet?

0:35:03.350,0:35:06.300

Yeah. So..

0:35:06.400,0:35:10.330

How old were you when she gave you that dictionary?

0:35:10.860,0:35:12.370

12.

0:35:13.160,0:35:15.620

So that's when you first started studying English.

0:35:15.720,0:35:16.660

Yeah.

0:35:16.830,0:35:22.440

You had no idea then how important English would become for you in the future.

0:35:22.750,0:35:30.430

Yeah, I ... You know what, when I was 12, not 12, 12th grade,

0:35:31.450,0:35:32.020

0:35:32.840,0:35:42.550

I just only know how to say hi to foreign people. Say "Hi! How are you? How are you doing?" just the basic sentence.

0:35:42.940,0:35:45.640

I can't make a longer sentence.

0:35:46.270,0:35:50.460

And look at you now, explaining complicated things in English.

0:35:50.920,0:35:56.060

So tell me you. You said that you studied nutrition at first?

0:35:56.660,0:36:00.590

Yeah, that's my first major in

0:36:02.360,0:36:03.990

the undergraduate level.

0:36:04.370,0:36:10.430

Where did you go to begin your undergraduate studies in Vietnam? Which city did you go to?

0:36:12.570,0:36:16.550

That's in Saigon. So at the at the High School,

0:36:16.660,0:36:19.890
when I was 17 you so

0:36:20.050,0:36:31.340
I needed to look to a bigger city. So Saigon is the second biggest city in Vietnam on the south.

0:36:31.570,0:36:36.740
So, I moved there. That was the first time I lived far away from my parents.

0:36:37.730,0:36:43.720
Was that to adapt to life in the city, after growing up in a small village?

0:36:43.940,0:36:47.650
Yeah, I need to find a place to live in,

0:36:47.850,0:36:54.380
and it's really hard because my parents didn't have enough money to pay for me every month.

0:36:54.730,0:36:57.490
So I need to find a cheap place.

0:36:57.680,0:37:02.870
Actually in a small room, I lived with nine people.

0:37:03.020,0:37:04.200
Nine people?

0:37:04.250,0:37:11.200
Yeah, we know each other because we all come from

0:37:11.230,0:37:15.370
the same groupings. We know each other.

0:37:15.510,0:37:20.230
So yeah, I live with my people, boy and girls. So yeah, I lived with nine people, boys and girls.

0:37:20.480,0:37:22.270
Oh, my goodness.

0:37:23.010,0:37:28.720
What was that like to live with them all together in the small space? Were there moments that were fun?

0:37:29.590,0:37:32.040
Yeah. But sometimes,

0:37:33.000,0:37:37.170
you know, some people have conflict with each other, so it's not good.

0:37:37.420,0:37:47.820
We all have activity in that room. We don't have separate kitchen. We have only one room and one bathroom.

0:37:48.310,0:37:57.260
And I find a job. I didn't let my parent know

0:37:57.440,0:38:02.640
because if they know, they don't want me to do that. They want me to focus

0:38:02.900,0:38:12.890
only on the school work. But I look at my parents who don't have enough money to pay for me. So I find a job.

0:38:13.460,0:38:15.250
What kind of job did you do?

0:38:15.500,0:38:17.510
That's the..

0:38:17.660,0:38:19.130
being a waitress.

0:38:20.350,0:38:21.230
Yeah.

0:38:21.650,0:38:24.910
And you didn't tell your parents because you didn't want to worry them.

0:38:25.200,0:38:29.630
Yeah, I didn't want to worry, them. I earned

0:38:30.360,0:38:32.280
around \$4-5

0:38:32.930,0:38:39.040
for a party I worked for.

0:38:40.060,0:38:41.440

0:38:41.600,0:38:47.160
At the time, I think that's enough to pay for a week.

0:38:48.100,0:38:50.200
I can eat a week

0:38:50.450,0:38:53.620
with that \$4.

0:38:55.560,0:38:57.810
Wow! And..

0:38:58.500,0:39:07.570
And when you were beginning your studies, did you choose to major in nutrition, or were you told to major in nutrition?

0:39:08.360,0:39:09.690

0:39:09.830,0:39:14.690
picked the nutrition major because I think I have good memory

0:39:14.700,0:39:15.790
for..

0:39:15.810,0:39:18.590
the subject that requires

0:39:18.650,0:39:20.860
remembering. It's a lot of things.

0:39:20.950,0:39:24.340
So I think that is a good choice.

0:39:24.600,0:39:31.850
But then, when I figured out, yeah, I like computers at the time, also. But for my parents,

0:39:32.140,0:39:36.310
it wasn't affordable for a laptop,

0:39:36.630,0:39:43.100
to do something related to computer science. So I just picked food and nutrition.

0:39:46.830,0:39:50.110
Did you have access to computers at the University?

0:39:50.830,0:39:56.680
Yeah, but it's super slow. I remember the first presentation I make

0:39:56.920,0:39:58.840
on the slide.

0:39:58.900,0:40:01.700
It take me forever to run,

0:40:01.870,0:40:03.860
and then I just give up.

0:40:05.000,0:40:07.620
You gave up? It was too difficult, too slow?

0:40:07.970,0:40:10.480
Yeah, I go to..

0:40:10.670,0:40:12.830
they say "internet store"

0:40:13.990,0:40:19.610
where I need to pay for instead of using free in the school.

0:40:19.620,0:40:21.660
Oh, like an Internet cafe?

0:40:22.140,0:40:24.180
-Yeah.
-Interesting.

0:40:24.420,0:40:25.410
So,

0:40:26.220,0:40:33.840
how old were you when you demonstrated? And can you talk a little bit about your reasons for demonstrating?

0:40:34.430,0:40:44.250
Yeah, I think that's the first time I spoke to human rights activity. So it's a lot of young

0:40:44.820,0:40:47.500
people go to the streets

0:40:47.880,0:40:52.140
and it spread the feeling

0:40:52.180,0:40:57.250
against the Chinese presence in the South China Sea,

0:40:57.530,0:41:01.680
because at the time there's some fishermen get there on the sea

0:41:02.570,0:41:07.850
by Chinese. So let's get in touch

0:41:08.020,0:41:09.880
with our emotion.

0:41:10.290,0:41:11.790

0:41:12.160,0:41:16.870
And you know, it's a lot of students

0:41:17.510,0:41:29.910
who get kicked out from their school because of going to the streets. I fortunately didn't get caught by the police in that

0:41:30.120,0:41:31.290
first

0:41:32.910,0:41:34.320
demonstration.

0:41:35.560,0:41:38.430
How old were you at the first demonstration?

0:41:38.750,0:41:40.390
18.

0:41:40.460,0:41:44.210
You are 18. So this was your first year of university?

0:41:44.810,0:41:47.710
Oh, that's the second year,

0:41:47.750,0:41:50.420
almost second year.

0:41:50.500,0:41:53.580
I then during that time I did exams, so..

0:41:54.120,0:42:10.180
-So you and other university students went out to demonstrate against the Chinese presence in the South China Seas?
-Not only students because we get a call from Facebook.

0:42:11.240,0:42:16.730
so a lot of people get in the streets and show some slogans.

0:42:18.080,0:42:20.040
Yeah, that's it, the first one.

0:42:20.120,0:42:33.700
For people who will watch this video who don't know much about this topic, could you tell us a little bit about what was happening in the South China Sea? And what made you feel so

0:42:33.840,0:42:39.160
motivated to demonstrate against this? Can you give a little bit of background?

0:42:42.870,0:42:46.060
If people care about the area

0:42:46.250,0:42:50.700
South China Sea area, they're going to see that

0:42:50.970,0:43:01.140
China has drawn an area with a U-shape to barricade

0:43:01.350,0:43:04.390
the sea area. They want to

0:43:04.470,0:43:06.330
get it, their own.

0:43:06.550,0:43:10.250
but the area conflicts

0:43:10.430,0:43:23.320
with other countries like Vietnam, Philippines and other countries around there. So when fisherman get in the area to get

0:43:23.480,0:43:24.320
fishing,

0:43:24.700,0:43:30.750
it's very dangerous because Chinese policy can

0:43:30.830,0:43:37.640
kill them any time. But the Vietnamese government is..

0:43:38.110,0:43:40.300
has no

0:43:40.590,0:43:49.020

power to speak up or to protect their citizens. That caused the anger from our students.

0:43:49.050,0:43:50.060

0:43:50.820,0:43:57.060

So how many people demonstrated in that first demonstration that you attended approximately? Do you know?

0:43:57.490,0:44:04.610

I don't think I remember because that is the first time I spoke to that

0:44:05.130,0:44:15.260

as an attender instead of activist. I was more of a supporter than an activist.

0:44:15.540,0:44:21.540

I truly become an activist at the release from jail.

0:44:21.660,0:44:26.460

But before that, I'm like a political dissident

0:44:26.780,0:44:28.930

and supporter of human rights.

0:44:29.540,0:44:38.310

So you were not arrested the first time that you went out with these demonstrations, but later you were arrested?

0:44:38.630,0:44:39.450

Yeah.

0:44:39.480,0:44:42.530

Can you talk a little bit about that? What happened?

0:44:43.170,0:44:49.730

There's a lot of things related to that beside of China Sea.

0:44:51.670,0:45:02.270

the South China Sea, and fishermen get killed by the Chinese police in that area. We have a conflict in the history.

0:45:02.610,0:45:10.590

Before 1975, we have an old government and we have

0:45:10.680,0:45:16.350

a civil war with a Communist party who come from the North.

0:45:16.800,0:45:19.530

And..

0:45:19.610,0:45:27.820

they take control of the country from there. So before they come, they take control of the whole country,

0:45:28.070,0:45:30.660

We had another flag.

0:45:32.900,0:45:43.590

That's what you can see in the Eden Center, Virginia, the flag before 1975 stands for Vietnam.

0:45:44.180,0:45:49.010

So we have a yellow flag with three red lines. That's the old flag.

0:45:49.640,0:45:56.780

And the flag right now is a red flag with a yellow star.

0:45:57.180,0:46:05.640

So I didn't know that happened in the history. They told us something. They try to.. hidden, something from us.

0:46:06.940,0:46:11.360
So as a young person, who cared about a country,

0:46:11.670,0:46:15.680
I try find out why they do that.

0:46:16.200,0:46:17.500
And you know,

0:46:18.680,0:46:20.300
in 2012,

0:46:21.380,0:46:23.420
when Facebook got

0:46:24.040,0:46:30.450
popular in Vietnam, and Internet is also a srenght.

0:46:31.920,0:46:45.410
I spoke to everyone. So I get on the Internet trying to find some information about that, and I
pick out, that's our

0:46:45.530,0:46:47.040
historical

0:46:47.220,0:46:48.850
flag as well.

0:46:48.920,0:46:54.890
so I want the other people like me to know about the history...

0:46:55.930,0:47:10.170
and I hand, not actually hand, but I show other friends that yeah, that's the flag in history
from which year to which year,

0:47:10.730,0:47:12.980
under which King,

0:47:13.110,0:47:24.460
something like that, and they don't allow me to do so as well. So when they arrest me, they use
a lot of pressure

0:47:24.900,0:47:28.910
to say that I violated the law.

0:47:29.140,0:47:31.990
there are a law. But actually I don't

0:47:32.190,0:47:36.680
feel that's worth it to jail me

0:47:36.860,0:47:39.760
for months or years.

0:47:41.180,0:47:45.360
So, if I remember correctly, from what you've told me before,

0:47:45.370,0:47:49.310
your arrest had to do with distributing leaflets?

0:47:49.780,0:47:51.340
Yeah, that's correct.

0:47:51.550,0:47:55.360
Yeah. Also

0:47:55.630,0:48:05.190
about the flag. me and another friend timed that, we brought it out, put it in a box

0:48:05.480,0:48:14.790
and spread it out for people to... We want people to pay attention and know about the truth

0:48:15.260,0:48:16.470
because they

0:48:16.840,0:48:23.840
they are busy with their life every day. They didn't, I don't know, maybe have time,

0:48:24.390,0:48:35.380
because that would be their habit, to ignore everything. So we wanted them to pay attention to the issue of the country.

0:48:36.410,0:48:40.440
Yeah, so we it's spread out of the fliers.

0:48:40.670,0:48:50.380
It sounds like your decision to become involved as an activist came from your study of history. Is that correct?

0:48:50.670,0:48:56.550
That the more that you learned about history, the more motivated you felt to get involved?

0:48:56.690,0:49:02.690
Yeah, that's correct. My grandparent on the mother's side,

0:49:03.200,0:49:06.590
he died really soon, but when I was a kid,

0:49:07.180,0:49:13.660
he usually picked me up from the school, and he told me about history as well.

0:49:13.790,0:49:18.620
He was a soldier from the older

0:49:21.660,0:49:27.610
government, from when we had the yellow with three red lines flag

0:49:28.550,0:49:30.990
Yeah. He gets in jail as well.

0:49:33.280,0:49:37.640
So your grandfather told you stories that made you interested in history as well.

0:49:37.820,0:49:39.390
Yeah, Once I was a kid.

0:49:39.780,0:49:47.770
and I told you about history of the flag, when I get older, I feel like that's

0:49:48.240,0:49:49.700
Also my..

0:49:50.890,0:49:57.930
my accountability to let other people like me to know what happened in the history

0:49:58.350,0:49:59.590
of the country.

0:50:00.600,0:50:11.680
because most of the people saying that the winner is the one who has the right to say the truth, but that's not true. Truth is truth.

0:50:14.070,0:50:16.120
Yeah, I feel like they

0:50:16.430,0:50:19.000
try to hide a lot of things.

0:50:19.850,0:50:23.000
So how old were you when you were arrested?

0:50:23.990,0:50:27.020

I was 20.

0:50:28.300,0:50:32.640
Yeah, I was arrested in 2012.

0:50:33.520,0:50:36.000
Can you talk a little about what happens?

0:50:36.990,0:50:39.010
Oh, that's so scary!

0:50:39.020,0:50:44.840
When I remember, I was crying when I tried to bike

0:50:45.130,0:50:49.480
in the street because I knew that they were going to arrest me.

0:50:49.910,0:50:50.990
You knew.

0:50:51.030,0:50:58.430
Yeah, I knew. But I couldn't let my parents know because that may hurt them

0:50:58.780,0:50:59.620
so..

0:51:00.710,0:51:12.290
so I don't know how to do anything, but I just ride my bike and my mind wondering, thinking

0:51:12.600,0:51:16.230
a lot. Anything that it is worse.

0:51:16.710,0:51:20.340
It wasn't.. it's going to take me one year,

0:51:20.720,0:51:31.500
and I still have a chance to get back to university, so I am willing to do that. Just one year.
Okay.

0:51:32.130,0:51:35.640
I go home and I'm waiting for them to arrest me.

0:51:37.130,0:51:39.650
But when they arrest me,

0:51:40.470,0:51:45.710
they didn't have an announcement to arrest me.

0:51:45.830,0:51:49.360
They say that they invite me to their office

0:51:49.960,0:51:55.500
and then they just keep me there forever until they tell me officially.

0:51:55.900,0:51:59.010
So they don't have announcement until today.

0:51:59.150,0:52:02.390
They put me in jail officially.

0:52:03.500,0:52:07.030
and when I was in jail,

0:52:07.460,0:52:12.470
they do investigation for five months,

0:52:12.770,0:52:17.340
five and a half months, before I go to

0:52:18.910,0:52:26.750
prison for the first time.

0:52:28.050,0:52:32.100

So I feel frustrated because

0:52:32.320,0:52:34.740

that's not what I expected.

0:52:36.070,0:52:39.980

Yeah, even I do something not wrong,

0:52:40.770,0:52:48.340

but I think they going to jail me for one years before, but now they sentenced me to six years. I was shocked.

0:52:49.430,0:52:53.700

You were sentenced to serve six years in prison?

0:52:53.960,0:52:55.800

Yeah, for the first sentence.

0:52:57.040,0:53:00.270

And I feel shocked like they were cruel.

0:53:00.440,0:53:02.500

They were brutal.

0:53:03.520,0:53:05.370

I keep waiting,

0:53:05.510,0:53:10.970

and when I first met with my parents after five and a half months,

0:53:11.190,0:53:23.740

My parents encouraged me to tell the truth, even that's their city, and it turned out

0:53:25.650,0:53:28.780

on the second sentence,

0:53:28.980,0:53:31.860

when I go there, they just released me,

0:53:32.000,0:53:35.070

with time probation,

0:53:35.340,0:53:44.470

And I recognize, from that time, I recognize the International

0:53:44.670,0:53:52.440

effect. So from that time, when I get out of jail, I actually

0:53:54.830,0:54:06.360

commit my time for being a supporter for human rights activity by calling for international attention.

0:54:07.380,0:54:10.760

How much time did you end up serving in prison?

0:54:11.690,0:54:13.780

10 months.

0:54:13.870,0:54:14.790

0:54:15.490,0:54:18.190

There must have been a very, very hard time for you.

0:54:18.780,0:54:23.900

Yeah. When I did, there was a movie

0:54:24.150,0:54:28.460

related to jail in the U.S. I thought before

0:54:28.560,0:54:32.080
going to jail. I think this would be

0:54:32.850,0:54:39.110
be something like that. But actually it's not. It's more terrible. The environment in a jail is really bad.

0:54:39.150,0:54:40.960
And the food as well.

0:54:41.000,0:54:42.930
They didn't treat

0:54:43.110,0:54:44.840

0:54:45.110,0:54:48.020
prisoners as a human, I believe.

0:54:48.300,0:54:49.980
Because sometimes,

0:54:50.100,0:54:54.410
in the rice there are some insects, when they eat,

0:54:54.500,0:55:07.590
I just recognize when it's around here, I hope. I'm about to throw it out, but it's too late.

0:55:08.400,0:55:09.130
Yeah.

0:55:11.800,0:55:22.070
What did you do to keep your spirits up in prison? How did you get through that time? What helped you?

0:55:23.830,0:55:26.120
At the time, I was too young.

0:55:26.180,0:55:31.150
I have my own beliefs in Buddhism, but at home we just pray and chant.

0:55:31.220,0:55:37.250
We didn't practice.. I didn't practice meditation at the time.

0:55:37.580,0:55:39.400
So I was so weak.

0:55:39.820,0:55:42.660
I just cried all day when they put me

0:55:42.710,0:55:51.280
in jail. I just cried all day, day by day. And you know the feeling when we were eating,

0:55:51.420,0:55:58.070
I hold the bowl with rice there, and my tears, just drop off, drop off, to the bowl.

0:55:58.930,0:56:06.570
So even there were some prisoners that treat me well. They're really old,

0:56:06.680,0:56:09.600
like my parents,

0:56:09.870,0:56:22.200
just gave me some words to realize me. And when I dreamed, not actually a dream, because I was still awake,

0:56:22.330,0:56:36.230
but I lie on the ground there, I feel somebody, I call her like mother, but actually

0:56:37.520,0:56:39.450

I know that's not my mother.

0:56:40.800,0:56:43.220
Yeah, my mother's name is (Nhung).

0:56:43.390,0:56:45.570
I think..

0:56:46.020,0:56:51.500
That's not my mother, but in my mind I call that person my mother.

0:56:51.910,0:56:53.320
Uyen Phuong Nguyen: So in my

0:56:53.400,0:56:57.180
So in my belief, my religion, that is

0:56:57.300,0:56:58.610
kind of Buddhist.

0:56:59.530,0:57:05.440
Yeah, I didn't say anything to that person. But I look at her.

0:57:05.760,0:57:08.260
And when I wake up, I feel stronger.

0:57:11.760,0:57:15.770
That's a powerful story. So it was kindness of other prisoners that helped you?

0:57:16.720,0:57:27.050
Not, not actually. The first time when they put me in jail, and I meet that two persons and then they moved that two person in another jail.

0:57:27.550,0:57:32.130
Then they put me with other prisoner.

0:57:32.890,0:57:38.970
But the prisoner was just a police investigators.

0:57:39.190,0:57:43.150
They sent them to live with me. So they asked me a lot of questions related to my case.

0:57:43.900,0:57:45.820
Yeah, I..

0:57:45.930,0:57:50.760
When I was at that space, I'm so feeling young.

0:57:50.860,0:57:53.280
So I trust people.

0:57:53.840,0:58:02.690
And when I get released from jail, my mom and other activists told me that that's not a good person,

0:58:02.810,0:58:11.730
and they explained to me then, I know. But when I was in the jail, at that time I didn't know.

0:58:12.920,0:58:15.880
No, of course not. How could you have known? You were tricked basically.

0:58:16.050,0:58:16.890
Yeah.

0:58:18.740,0:58:27.000
So you got out after 10 months. And is that when you found out that you could not continue your studies in Vietnam?

0:58:28.000,0:58:32.150
Yeah, I tried to go to the university

0:58:32.520,0:58:35.010
I majored in food

0:58:35.360,0:58:42.000
and nutrition. I want, I hoped I come back to study,

0:58:42.160,0:58:44.540
but they just

0:58:45.350,0:58:53.040
but they just find any excuse to refuse me.

0:58:53.460,0:58:56.620
Finally I go to the village,

0:58:56.730,0:58:59.960
not stay in Saigon anymore. But I go to the village

0:59:00.730,0:59:06.130
and try to study by my own, buying some books and reading.

0:59:06.380,0:59:08.660
And I find Coursera.

0:59:08.710,0:59:12.700
That's an online website teaching several courses.

0:59:13.670,0:59:26.250
Even though my home didn't have Internet, I used a phone to buy a SIM card and used hotspot to connect it from the laptop to the phone,

0:59:26.680,0:59:35.090
and used the internet like that, to study some courses from Coursera.

0:59:35.670,0:59:38.430
The first course I studied was still food and nutrition,

0:59:38.830,0:59:46.660
and then I find more interesting courses like Politics 101

0:59:47.910,0:59:49.900
and other courses.

0:59:50.070,0:59:56.630
Also, when I have Internet connection,

0:59:56.920,1:00:03.390
I can find more and more classes. And I figure out that in Houston

1:00:03.490,1:00:10.630
there is a couple of teachers teaching about civil war and human rights activity.

1:00:10.840,1:00:14.270
I still keep connected to them,

1:00:14.650,1:00:17.460
and I..

1:00:17.570,1:00:21.090
learn some courses they designed, and they teach online.

1:00:21.560,1:00:29.480
So which websites were you using to try to self-educate? Where did you find lectures or information?
-Coursera.

1:00:33.190,1:00:34.330
How do you spell that? Can you put it in the chat?

1:00:34.660,1:00:45.180

Let me write in the chat. Yeah, let me type it out so nice so you have it correctly.
(Coursera.org.)

1:01:01.760,1:01:08.000
I'm going to the chat. Coursera! Interesting. These are free courses you could take?

1:01:08.040,1:01:09.090
Uyen Phuong Nguyen: of course. Yeah.

1:01:09.930,1:01:20.310
Is this when you started thinking about changing directions and trying to study computer science? Were you beginning to understand, like the power of

1:01:20.350,1:01:22.990
computer science for educating people?

1:01:23.970,1:01:32.160
I didn't recognize that. But well, I say, when I was thinking about computer science,

1:01:32.660,1:01:36.860
already overcome my fear of math, of doing math.

1:01:37.070,1:01:40.010
due to a professor. Her name is Peters, Monique,

1:01:43.120,1:01:45.320
in Rockville,

1:01:45.680,1:01:52.100
and I always get over 100% on the same assignments.

1:01:52.570,1:01:53.410
So..

1:01:54.810,1:01:55.700

1:01:55.720,1:01:58.260
I no longer fear doing math.

1:01:58.620,1:02:00.190
But before that,

1:02:00.250,1:02:03.500
before that I take math. I keep place, though..

1:02:03.640,1:02:05.740
That's it. Happy again.

1:02:05.930,1:02:13.180
Confident as well, because I can get a good grade on the placement test as well.

1:02:13.640,1:02:23.780
-But Professor Monique Peters is a good one to help me overcome my fear of math.
-Which Professor was that? Can you type her name in the chat or his name in the chat?

1:02:24.250,1:02:26.240
Yeah.

1:02:42.000,1:02:44.060
Monique Peters in Rockville.

1:02:44.400,1:02:45.220
Yeah.

1:02:45.470,1:03:01.830
Professors always feel so great when they hear stories like this about how someone can influence a student to overcome a fear of math or something else. And to see you grow like this, I think it'll be wonderful when she hears this story as well.

1:03:03.120,1:03:03.910

So..

1:03:03.940,1:03:12.090

You mentioned, and we only have a few more minutes, and in our next interview, we'll continue the conversation. But when you

1:03:12.160,1:03:29.550

got out of prison, and you left Saigon, you went back to your village. You decided to find a way to continue your education on your own. Was it at this point in your life when you started doing regular meditation practice to help you with dealing with your emotions

1:03:29.560,1:03:32.130

resulting from the prison experience?

1:03:32.560,1:03:45.960

Yeah, I do but not that time. After going to the village and I go, I apply for MC at that time, 2015.

1:03:46.040,1:03:50.740

-Okay.

-So the the school sent back to me

1:03:50.850,1:03:54.030

a document for applying to a visa.

1:03:54.210,1:04:12.460

But Vietnamese Government didn't let me go as an international student. So I did not apply for a refugee status at the time because I was scared that I'm going to leave my parents alone in Vietnam.

1:04:12.540,1:04:20.750

So I go back to Saigon again. But this time, I apply for an international university.

1:04:20.890,1:04:24.420

It has headquarters in Melbourne, Australia.

1:04:24.790,1:04:33.820

They accept me, but the tuition is really, really high. So I have a sponsor for me to study there, but just English.

1:04:33.860,1:04:35.320

But just English.

1:04:36.300,1:04:49.890

-I study one semester about English in that school.

-In Australia?

-Not in Australia, but they have a place in Vietnam, in Saigon.

1:04:51.480,1:04:54.380

So where did you study English?

1:04:55.100,1:05:05.380

In that school, international school. Its name is RMIT, Australia. That means all...

1:05:05.860,1:05:07.030

r, m, i, t.

1:05:07.440,1:05:10.440

1:05:11.710,1:05:17.120

So you studied English there and then. And then how did you end up coming to Montgomery college?

1:05:17.920,1:05:23.190

The story is that..

1:05:23.520,1:05:26.720

I get arrested a second time.

1:05:27.580,1:05:28.630

Oh, my goodness.

1:05:29.020,1:05:32.330

Yeah, because..

1:05:32.860,1:05:38.170

My accountability for letting people know about their human rights.

1:05:38.310,1:05:39.410

1:05:39.590,1:05:42.910

and practice their freedom of speech.

1:05:43.070,1:05:48.150

So I was the person who write the introduction for a book, not actually a book,

1:05:49.240,1:05:57.010

it's like a long article for a person, a Vietnamese person, who lives in...

1:05:57.330,1:06:01.010

Write that, and I write a..

1:06:01.260,1:06:10.830

an introduction for that book, actually it's a long article. And they arrested me

1:06:11.080,1:06:12.610

because of that.

1:06:12.900,1:06:18.850

But fortunately, this time they don't have enough reason to put me in jail, so they released me.

1:06:19.630,1:06:21.280

They keep my laptop

1:06:22.190,1:06:25.020

and everything. The title also.

1:06:25.400,1:06:28.620

You know, until the day I left

1:06:28.920,1:06:39.960

Saigon, I left Vietnam for the U.S. They just returned that back to me. So you know all the tools, they took it off. My parent is not rich.

1:06:40.300,1:06:45.480

So how can I continue to my education?

1:06:45.970,1:06:54.650

So a lot of pressure, I mean, for everything. I just feel my future is dark.

1:06:55.890,1:06:59.250

Yeah. So at at that time I go to the temple.

1:07:00.550,1:07:04.360

Do you want to talk a little bit about your experience at the Temple?

1:07:05.120,1:07:09.910

Yeah, the Temple helped me to lose like six

1:07:10.800,1:07:12.080

kilograms,

1:07:12.140,1:07:14.260

like 12 pounds, I think.

1:07:14.850,1:07:20.060

But I feel giving my body physical health and mental health,

1:07:20.160,1:07:25.840

I was getting stronger from that training.

1:07:26.260,1:07:29.770
How long was the training?

1:07:30.500,1:07:32.060
Seven days.

1:07:33.940,1:07:42.590
And so you felt at the end of seven days, of eating very little food, meditating a lot, you felt stronger after that.

1:07:43.360,1:07:48.210
Yeah, eating not much food because

1:07:48.340,1:07:51.780
we don't have much more energy

1:07:52.050,1:07:57.550
before late sleeping. Also we..

1:07:57.650,1:08:02.540
practice something like we don't try to enjoy the food.

1:08:02.870,1:08:06.830
But we try to use the food to

1:08:06.940,1:08:18.899
maintain the body instead of enjoying the food, because we don't want food to control our mind. Yeah, the belief behind is that

1:08:20.439,1:08:28.380
we also care about in the now. Look inside of us instead of looking at the outside.

1:08:28.569,1:08:32.229
So when other people do something wrong,

1:08:32.420,1:08:37.229
we can easily forgive them.

1:08:37.819,1:08:41.970
Because we know humans always make mistakes,

1:08:42.100,1:08:43.560
because I'm breathing.

1:08:43.890,1:08:48.390
And we also care about when we walk,

1:08:49.090,1:08:52.080
we walk really slowly

1:08:53.510,1:08:54.870
to avoid..

1:08:55.229,1:09:04.630
making mistakes, like you can step on an insect and make it die if you're walking really fast.

1:09:05.460,1:09:13.920
So we practiced the small things, more than meditation, in that Temple. It's not just..

1:09:14.380,1:09:19.649
sitting in and breathing, but also walking, and breathing.

1:09:20.680,1:09:23.770
And walking meditation as well, and breathing meditation.

1:09:23.970,1:09:26.109
Yeah, but I feel that..

1:09:26.779,1:09:31.859
sitting and breathing is easier for me.

1:09:32.920,1:09:35.580
But walking and breathing is harder.

1:09:36.140,1:09:37.840
Walking and reading?

1:09:41.960,1:09:43.580
Breathing.

1:09:46.310,1:09:48.350
Which word are you using? I'm sorry.

1:09:48.720,1:09:53.439
Breathing, like you take a deep breath.

1:09:53.460,1:10:03.300
Oh, breathing meditation. Yes, yeah, it sounds like this had a very big impact on the rest of your life, because then you started a regular meditation practice to help you.

1:10:04.650,1:10:05.350
Yeah.

1:10:05.590,1:10:09.920
So what year did you end up coming to the United States?

1:10:10.700,1:10:17.520
I left Vietnam for the U.S. around 2017,

1:10:17.720,1:10:19.060
On December.

1:10:19.510,1:10:27.160
The first day of December, I arrived in Los Angeles. The feeling is really weird, because..

1:10:27.500,1:10:37.500
on the other hand, I want to stay, and on the other hand I want to leave. I want to stay because my mother didn't want to come to the U.S. with me,

1:10:37.750,1:10:46.080
because she think that on the application, if I put all the name of family member there, it may take time.

1:10:46.450,1:10:51.620
And also she wants to stay to take care of her mother,

1:10:52.370,1:10:56.020
so she stayed there.

1:10:56.110,1:11:07.860
So I want to.. On the other hand, I want to stay there. And also, if I go to the U.S., how can I support for the human rights in Vietnam?

1:11:08.240,1:11:11.340
Yeah, I don't have the plan to do that.

1:11:12.630,1:11:17.590
But, on the other hand, if I stay there, also like 10 years,

1:11:18.380,1:11:20.330
and the..

1:11:21.460,1:11:33.960
Human rights in Vietnam didn't improve much, what's my future? I might be useless at that time because no education,

1:11:34.030,1:11:39.200
no degree. So I want to leave Vietnam for the U.S. to get

1:11:39.680,1:11:42.240
an official education.

1:11:43.470,1:11:53.340

I want to pause right here at this part in your story, and pick it up again in our next interview, because I think this is a good moment to

1:11:53.360,1:11:56.310

stop this part of the interview.

1:11:56.370,1:12:06.140

But before I do that, one last question for you: How do you feel now about sharing your story this way? What emotions are you experiencing right now?

1:12:06.790,1:12:09.500

Yeah. Some..

1:12:12.110,1:12:29.600

How can I say that? It's weird, it's not the whole emotional, exactly the same at time I was doing that and experiencing that, but somehow when I remember that, it still touch my emotion.

1:12:29.830,1:12:41.800

It can make me cry or something during the hard time, but now, I still feel happy and lucky to be in

1:12:41.920,1:12:52.340

the land of the dream, like the U.S., the land of freedom. Yeah. I think people who live in the U.S.

1:12:52.540,1:12:55.480

should be aware that they are lucky to be here.

1:12:56.410,1:13:06.180

Well, I feel very lucky to have you share your story with us, so thank you so much. I'm going to stop recording now, and then I'll talk to you a bit more. Let me pause right now.

=====

Interview (Part 2) with Uyen Phuong Nguyen April 2, 2023

0:00:03.000,0:00:07.000

Good afternoon, Uyen. It's so nice to see you today.

0:00:07.000,0:00:08.000

How are you?

0:00:08.000,0:00:11.000

Yeah, I'm fine, okay, thank you. How are you?

0:00:11.000,0:00:12.000

I'm doing fine. Thank you. Let's see, it is..

0:00:12.000,0:00:21.000

Today is Sunday, April 2nd. It's 1:53 in the afternoon.

0:00:21.000,0:00:28.000

This is our second interview as part of the Oral History Project, which is called History

0:00:28.000,0:00:45.000

in the Making: Documenting Stories of Immigrant and Refugee Students at Montgomery College, so we're doing a follow-up interview to our first interview from last week, and as a reminder to our viewers, I am interviewing Uyen. Can you pronounce your name

0:00:45.000,0:00:48.000

correctly for me?

-Uyen.

0:00:48.000,0:00:49.000

The whole name.

0:00:49.000,0:00:53.000

The whole name is going to be, Uyen Phuong Nguyen.

0:00:53.000,0:00:54.000

Thank you so much.. who is originally from Vietnam, and now lives in College Park, Maryland.

0:00:54.000,0:01:04.000

She was a student at MC, in 2018, and is now a teaching assistant in the Computer Science Department at the University of Maryland,

0:01:04.000,0:01:14.000

at College Park, and is a staff member at the Vietnamese American Television in Arlington, Virginia.

0:01:14.000,0:01:25.000

So welcome back. Thank you so much for being here. As a reminder, if there are any questions you do not want to answer, feel free to just skip them.

0:01:25.000,0:01:28.000

That's perfectly fine. If you need a break. That's also fine.

0:01:28.000,0:01:34.000

We'll take no more than an hour today, and let's just begin with the first question.

0:01:34.000,0:01:38.000

If you could state your full name again for me, please.

0:01:38.000,0:01:44.000

My full name is Uyen Phuong Nguyen.

0:01:44.000,0:01:54.000

Uyen, "u" as in "university," "y" as in "yes," "e" as in "evening," and "n" as in "noon."

0:01:54.000,0:02:04.000

Phuong, "p" like "pool," "h" like "high," "u" like "university," "o" like "oak,"

0:02:04.000,0:02:11.000

"n" like "no," and "g" like "good."

0:02:11.000,0:02:21.000

Nguyen, "n" like "no," and "g" like "good," "u" like "university," "y" like "yes," "e" like "evening", and "n" like "no."

0:02:21.000,0:02:25.000

Thank you so much, and do I have permission to record this interview?

0:02:25.000,0:02:27.000

Yes, you have.

0:02:27.000,0:02:33.000

Thank you so much. I wanted to start with a couple of follow-up questions related to our first interview.

0:02:33.000,0:02:37.000

When I went back and listened to your interview again, I realized that

0:02:37.000,0:03:03.000

I had misunderstood the answer to one of your questions. You were talking about the time, the first time that you were in prison, after being arrested for your demonstrations, or your distribution of leaflets related to your activism, related to the Chinese presence in the South China Sea, and your advocacy for the fishermen the Vietnamese fishermen in

0:03:03.000,0:03:07.000

the South China Sea. So you were in prison, and you were feeling incredibly lonely.

0:03:07.000,0:03:28.000

You described how the food was full of insects, how you were feeling hopeless about your situation, and then you said that you had this experience of a woman who was like a mother expressing empathy to you, and I thought when I heard that in our first conversation, that you were talking about another prisoner who showed

0:03:28.000,0:03:49.000

you kindness. But when I replayed the the interview I realized that you were describing a spiritual experience, related to the feminine incarnation of the Buddha. This figure is sometimes called Kuan Yin,

0:03:49.000,0:03:54.000

or Guan Yin, I've also heard Kuan Shin in some pronunciations, and I believe in Vietnamese,

0:03:54.000,0:03:57.000
it's pronounced, May Kwan Um, if I'm saying that correctly?

0:03:57.000,0:03:58.000
Yeah, you are right?

0:03:58.000,0:04:13.000
Thank you. So what I would love for you to do is if you could go back to that time and describe your experience and maybe explain to readers who are unfamiliar with this religious figure. Tell us a little bit about her.

0:04:13.000,0:04:19.000
So when I was in the jail, the prison.

0:04:19.000,0:04:22.000
You know, I'm crying.

0:04:22.000,0:04:23.000
I'm sorry.

0:04:23.000,0:04:37.000
I cry inside and outside, and then imagine where you have a kid three year old, who is crying. I cried like that. And imagine you have a mother..

0:04:37.000,0:04:45.000
The mother of a three-year-old-kid. Kuan mother is like that. So I cry and see if she

0:04:45.000,0:04:50.000
cares about me, or if the mother cares about the three-year-old who keeps crying.

0:04:50.000,0:04:59.000
The Kuan Um mother didn't talk to me to realize me on

0:04:59.000,0:05:07.000
doing anything, but just by her eye contact, I can feel that..

0:05:07.000,0:05:12.000
I can feel something from her. The energy or something. I can't

0:05:12.000,0:05:17.000
describe by any word but the feeling. So yeah, the mother

0:05:17.000,0:05:22.000
I mentioned in that conversation is Kuan Um mother.

0:05:22.000,0:05:27.000
So you felt some sense of compassion for your suffering.

0:05:27.000,0:05:34.000
Yeah, I do. And there's something I want to say about Kuan Um mother.

0:05:34.000,0:05:36.000
The Buddhist.. I didn't recognize this,

0:05:36.000,0:05:52.000
but after the release from jail, when I have more contact with a church in Saigon, that's a key..

0:05:52.000,0:06:05.000
I usually go to the church and stand around with the Mary mother statues.

0:06:05.000,0:06:06.000
This statue.

0:06:06.000,0:06:25.000
Yes, statue. So I think they may both be the same, because they are also.. people named them as mothers, and also, I feel when I need them.. like I keep with me a mother.

0:06:25.000,0:06:35.000

I always have them for support for my mental and spiritual, so I believe they may be the same.

0:06:35.000,0:06:38.000
Your mental and spiritual health?

0:06:38.000,0:06:41.000
Yeah.

0:06:41.000,0:07:05.000
I think some religious scholars have pointed out some similarities between the figure of the Virgin Mother in the Catholic faith and this figure of Kuan Yin in the Buddhist faith, and that there are similarities related to the idea of a mother figure offering compassion for

0:07:05.000,0:07:11.000
those who are suffering, or a figure who listens to those who need help.

0:07:11.000,0:07:14.000
Do you see those parallels?

0:07:14.000,0:07:28.000
Yeah, I believe so. Back to the history, 1975, when there's a lot of Vietnamese people, more people come to the U.S.

0:07:28.000,0:07:33.000
by the boat, so a lot of people die in the sea.

0:07:33.000,0:07:40.000
Yeah, a lot of people die in the sea, and I have changed to listen to some of them who survived

0:07:40.000,0:07:50.000
after that. Saying that when their boats almost sink to the sea, they pray for mother Kuan Um,

0:07:50.000,0:07:53.000
The Buddhist, and then the miracle just happened.

0:07:53.000,0:08:08.000
Some of them get on another boat, when on the other boat there's some other people seeing their boat sink into the sea, and some of them were just on the sea

0:08:08.000,0:08:14.000
for several days, but somehow they get into the rain..

0:08:14.000,0:08:24.000
Thank you so much for sharing that beautiful story about your faith and about the Vietnamese boat people who were looking for strength during

0:08:24.000,0:08:26.000
I'm sure, what was a terrifying experience.

0:08:26.000,0:08:48.000
I really appreciate you sharing that. My next question is also a follow-up question to the previous conversation we had. You mentioned that you had some support from an organization that helps refugees, and you mentioned the

0:08:48.000,0:08:56.000
LIRS, which I think stands for Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

0:08:56.000,0:08:57.000
Could you tell me a little bit about how

0:08:57.000,0:09:08.000
this organization helped you to get asylum status in the United States, or if they helped you with your relocation?

0:09:08.000,0:09:10.000
What was their role?

0:09:10.000,0:09:17.000
Their role was to help me to get used to life in the U.S.

0:09:17.000,0:09:24.000

When I relocated to the U.S. So I get help from the U.S.

0:09:24.000,0:09:29.000
Counselor and its office on my status to get here.

0:09:29.000,0:09:38.000
So after I get here, they organized.. And actually, I stopped from Lutheran Service..

0:09:38.000,0:09:52.000
Help me to get used to the life in the United States. For example, they wanted me on the street and teach me how to..

0:09:52.000,0:10:01.000
... under strict.. used in the life for workers.. yeah, that's so simple.

0:10:01.000,0:10:08.000
But it's not in my country. So I like that.

0:10:08.000,0:10:22.000
Also, they also support me about financial for six months. By first time, and also.. that helped also..

0:10:22.000,0:10:23.000
I'm sorry. Go ahead.

0:10:23.000,0:10:24.000
Yeah.

0:10:24.000,0:10:30.000
They want me go to work as well. So, after six months I need to go to work.

0:10:30.000,0:10:39.000
But you know, my plan was to come to the U.S. for education, to get an official education.

0:10:39.000,0:10:44.000
So I actually don't go to work full time.

0:10:44.000,0:10:48.000
Yeah.
-It would be hard to work full time and go to school,

0:10:48.000,0:10:49.000
while you're trying to learn the language

0:10:49.000,0:10:52.000
and readjust to the culture.

0:10:52.000,0:11:00.000
Yeah, so at that time, I feel I have a choice.

0:11:00.000,0:11:05.000
Go to work, or continue education. But I realize that I don't need to go to work

0:11:05.000,0:11:15.000
if I have.. I just need a basic living cost, and I still can go to MC.

0:11:15.000,0:11:21.000
So my friend, who, I believe.. who I treat as my uncle..

0:11:21.000,0:11:30.000
Yeah, I owe him a lot, because I.. amount of money during the time I go to college.

0:11:30.000,0:11:37.000
Yeah, and actually, the university is very good in service support for full student like me.

0:11:37.000,0:11:47.000
I never paid for tuition. But also, I get money from the financial aid as well.

0:11:47.000,0:11:48.000
It's not much, it's \$1,000 per semester.

0:11:48.000,0:11:55.000

That's not much, but that helps a lot.

0:11:55.000,0:12:01.000

I've heard that refugees have to pay back their airfare within

0:12:01.000,0:12:05.000

a certain number of months. Is that true?

0:12:05.000,0:12:20.000

When I come here, I pay.. I believe that around \$2,000 for the trip from Vietnam to the United States, and I need to pay that.

0:12:20.000,0:12:34.000

I know that some people didn't pay that. I'm not sure, but in my case, I paid that with a really low rate, like \$30 per month.

0:12:34.000,0:12:41.000

Yeah, I don't think that's much, and I don't need to pay it immediately.

0:12:41.000,0:12:47.000

Yeah, I can delay it until I graduate from the school,

0:12:47.000,0:12:48.000

but I just pay it, anyway.

0:12:48.000,0:12:49.000

Can you tell me a little bit about when you first arrived?

0:12:49.000,0:12:58.000

You said there's someone who is like an uncle to you that helped you with your adjustment, or with your housing here.

0:12:58.000,0:13:09.000

Yeah. I live in his house. His name is Don Wall is a handicap person.

0:13:09.000,0:13:14.000

And yeah, he is a handicap person. He's also MC former student.

0:13:14.000,0:13:15.000

Oh, really? Interesting!

0:13:15.000,0:13:24.000

Okay, yeah. And he really values education, because when he come to the U.S.,

0:13:24.000,0:13:29.000

he spent like 10 years for his undergraduate degree.

0:13:29.000,0:13:38.000

So he wanted to help me, because he also supports for human rights and the political issue in Vietnam.

0:13:38.000,0:13:39.000

He's originally from Vietnam, too?

0:13:39.000,0:13:45.000

Yeah. He supported me when I was in Vietnam too.

0:13:45.000,0:13:46.000

Oh!

0:13:46.000,0:13:57.000

Yeah, you remember my parent not have enough money to pay for me when I go to the school, the international school,

0:13:57.000,0:14:08.000

OMIT. Yeah, they don't pay for me, but that uncle helped me with some amount of money.

0:14:08.000,0:14:14.000

And was it this man who told you about Montgomery College?

0:14:14.000,0:14:23.000

Yeah, exactly. I apply for MC in 2015.

0:14:23.000,0:14:39.000

Yeah, that uncle helped me to apply to MC. Because I know nothing about which school is good or not at the time, especially two-year colleges, I know some four-year colleges, but not two-year colleges.

0:14:39.000,0:14:47.000

And he said that MC College is a good choice, because he already experienced education in MC.

0:14:47.000,0:14:48.000

Oh, that's wonderful!

0:14:48.000,0:14:57.000

Yeah. So he applied for my application at MC.

0:14:57.000,0:15:06.000

And I have a sponsor who is another person because he wanted to make sure that the school going to accept me.

0:15:06.000,0:15:12.000

So he have another person for my financial issue in MC.

0:15:12.000,0:15:20.000

And finish the document in MC. So finally MC accepted me as an international student.

0:15:20.000,0:15:31.000

So they send me the document so that I can apply for F-1 visa.

0:15:31.000,0:15:40.000

But it turned out that the government did not allow me to go to the United States as an international student.

0:15:40.000,0:15:49.000

So they didn't offer me the passport, so I didn't have a passport at the time.

0:15:49.000,0:15:50.000

Yeah.

0:15:50.000,0:15:57.000

So did you have to then apply for asylum status.

0:15:57.000,0:15:58.000

Refugee status?

-Refugee status, yes.

0:15:58.000,0:16:02.000

That's in 2015.

0:16:02.000,0:16:29.000

But then, two years later, I just applied for a refugee, because I worry that if I applied for a refugee, I have no chance to go back to Vietnam. And people in the human rights.. Other activists in Vietnam, they don't want the people to leave the country as refugees. They don't want that.

0:16:29.000,0:16:30.000

That's like

0:16:30.000,0:16:32.000

a shame or something. I don't know.

0:16:32.000,0:16:33.000

Interesting.

0:16:33.000,0:16:36.000

But by the counselor, the U.S.

0:16:36.000,0:16:45.000

counselor, and Uncle Don, I understand that that's not any shame.

0:16:45.000,0:16:53.000
This is a right. Actually, that's a rule of law, human rights law. When you have

0:16:53.000,0:16:59.000
somebody's harassment related to political issues,

0:16:59.000,0:17:05.000
you can leave the country, as long as there's another country accepting you.

0:17:05.000,0:17:12.000
So I understand that law and I decided to leave the country.

0:17:12.000,0:17:18.000
Can you tell me a little bit about your experience when you first came to Montgomery College?

0:17:18.000,0:17:23.000
How did you feel when you first started classes? And what was that experience like?

0:17:23.000,0:17:35.000
Yeah, I come to MC in Rockville the first time, and in the office I saw the flag.

0:17:35.000,0:17:43.000
Do you remember the flag in 1975, the yellow flag, with 3 red line?

0:17:43.000,0:17:45.000
You mentioned that in the last interview.

0:17:45.000,0:17:52.000
Yeah, I was surprised because it was never hanged in my country.

0:17:52.000,0:18:00.000
And now in UMD I never get an office that hanged the flag as well.

0:18:00.000,0:18:04.000
So I was surprise with that. At that time I was surprised that MC

0:18:04.000,0:18:10.000
has an office that hanged the flag. Yeah, I'm proud of that.

0:18:10.000,0:18:11.000
Did it make you feel welcomed to see that flag?

0:18:11.000,0:18:24.000
Yeah, because usually people hang the red with the yellow and black, than the other one.

0:18:24.000,0:18:33.000
-Interesting!
-Yeah, I feel like, diversity.. Yeah, actually, I have no conflict with..

0:18:33.000,0:18:34.000

0:18:34.000,0:18:35.000
I have no conflict with

0:18:35.000,0:18:40.000
the people who hang the other flags, but just the political issue

0:18:40.000,0:18:43.000
I want to have..

0:18:43.000,0:18:50.000
Somebody.. The government respect the history and also human rights. That's it.

0:18:50.000,0:18:58.000
Thank you for sharing that. So you saw that flag, and then, did you begin your classes with the American English Language Program

0:18:58.000,0:19:02.000
at that point? You started taking English classes?

0:19:02.000,0:19:17.000

At that point, when I go to the office, that was the first time, because I want to follow up the application in 2015. Yeah, that's in the winter, December.

0:19:17.000,0:19:27.000

Yeah. And there's a professor who helped me to do something through the major,

0:19:27.000,0:19:36.000

that helped my case. So I choose general studies so that I can get financial aid on some courses, like English courses.

0:19:36.000,0:19:45.000

So the first course I take is ESL 225 or 223.

0:19:45.000,0:19:59.000

But if it take 223, I need to get to Rockville, so I take 225, and I get that class in Takoma Park with Professor Annie.

0:19:59.000,0:20:00.000

Okay.

0:20:00.000,0:20:05.000

A repair for the English..

0:20:05.000,0:20:07.000

Yeah, that's in my first class.

0:20:07.000,0:20:08.000

So you started taking classes with

0:20:08.000,0:20:12.000

the Workforce Development Program, WDCE, the ESL classes.

0:20:12.000,0:20:20.000

I think that's ESL. But I'm not sure about the WDCE.

0:20:20.000,0:20:21.000

Yeah. It's called WDCE, the ESL classes are part of that program.

0:20:21.000,0:20:28.000

Workforce Development and Continuing Education.

0:20:28.000,0:20:29.000

Got you? Yeah.

0:20:29.000,0:20:32.000

So you started with those classes? Were they difficult?

0:20:32.000,0:20:43.000

They were not difficult, but you know, they give me a chance to interact with other person who, like me.

0:20:43.000,0:20:44.000

Good. Did you meet other Vietnamese students?

0:20:44.000,0:20:48.000

Or students from other parts of the world?

0:20:48.000,0:20:56.000

Yeah, I meet students from other parts of the world, from other countries.

0:20:56.000,0:21:05.000

Actually, I have my first friends.. we are still friends until now.

0:21:05.000,0:21:12.000

We both major in computer science and she just graduated from UMD last semester.

0:21:12.000,0:21:16.000

Her name is Priscilla, I met her in MC.

0:21:16.000,0:21:17.000

Where is she from?

0:21:17.000,0:21:23.000
She was first born here.. I'm not sure..

0:21:23.000,0:21:24.000

0:21:24.000,0:21:25.000
I'm not sure

0:21:25.000,0:21:30.000
where she was born, but she grew up in the United States.

0:21:30.000,0:21:37.000
Okay. She grew up in the United States, but was taking ESL classes?
-Not ESL classes. I mean later.

0:21:37.000,0:21:38.000
Oh, later. Okay.

0:21:38.000,0:21:41.000
When I take credit classes.

0:21:41.000,0:21:42.000
So something that some..

0:21:42.000,0:21:52.000
Oh, by the way, do you remember (friend's name)? She is a student of you as well in ELAP program?

0:21:52.000,0:21:53.000

0:21:53.000,0:21:55.000
I make friend with her as well.

0:21:55.000,0:21:58.000
That's lovely. I'm so happy to hear that.

0:21:58.000,0:22:00.000
Are you still friends with students from that class?

0:22:00.000,0:22:03.000
Yeah, yeah.

0:22:03.000,0:22:11.000
So you had this opportunity to meet students from other countries. But did you find that they were, even though they came from different backgrounds,

0:22:11.000,0:22:16.000
they had similar experiences and similar challenges that you had?

0:22:16.000,0:22:24.000
They have different challenges. Their country had different issues.

0:22:24.000,0:22:34.000
For example, instead of political issues.. actually, the origin is related to political issue anyway.

0:22:34.000,0:22:45.000
But other issues in their country and other pressing problems..

0:22:45.000,0:22:48.000
Yeah, it's so unorganized country.

0:22:48.000,0:22:58.000
But did you find that, as you were experiencing your life as a student, that you had similar

0:22:58.000,0:23:08.000

experiences related to stress, or related to cultural adaptation, or related to worries about money, things like that.

0:23:08.000,0:23:10.000
Did you find you had commonalities with the other students?

0:23:10.000,0:23:11.000
Yeah, yeah, of course, about us.. yeah, you are correct.

0:23:11.000,0:23:24.000
Because we both worry about spending too much time in MC and we never forget graduation.

0:23:24.000,0:23:27.000
How did that happened?

0:23:27.000,0:23:39.000
at the time.. I know that's stupid thinking, but at some point, we think about that, because we just took English class, but where we were going to graduate,

0:23:39.000,0:23:41.000
we didn't know at the time.

0:23:41.000,0:23:45.000
You wanted to quickly get to your credit classes, right?

0:23:45.000,0:23:46.000
Yeah.

0:23:46.000,0:23:56.000
That's what a lot of students say. They sometimes feel frustrated that they have to take English first before their credit classes. I think other students have mentioned that to me.

0:23:56.000,0:24:05.000
Can you tell me, though, looking back, do you feel like those English classes helped you to be successful in your credit level classes?

0:24:05.000,0:24:12.000
Yeah, of course.. Of course. I remember when I started your first ELAP class.

0:24:12.000,0:24:34.000
Your.. I don't remember the number, but that's my reading class, and after that class, I feel my level of language increased tremendously, because from knowing nothing about the general

0:24:34.000,0:25:00.000
vocabulary, what it's saying about the Panda habitat, I know nothing about that. Even about the vocabulary, but after that class, I have more vocabulary related to that aspect, and also the knowledge. After the first class with you, I take the credit

0:25:00.000,0:25:08.000
class in math calculus one, and then that helped me because reading skills was really needed in the class.

0:25:08.000,0:25:16.000
So the strategy to skim to the material, I learned from the reading class were very helpful.

0:25:16.000,0:25:20.000
To skim and highlighting the main idea.

0:25:20.000,0:25:32.000
Also, the vocabulary I learned from the class, helped me prepare for conversation with the professor, like asking questions,

0:25:32.000,0:25:35.000
clarifying question, or something like that.

0:25:35.000,0:25:41.000
I feel very happy to hear that these skills related to building academic vocabulary,

0:25:41.000,0:25:55.000
or to scanning for information, highlighting, organizing your thoughts. This makes me feel very happy to hear that it was applicable in your other classes, including even math classes.

0:25:55.000,0:25:59.000

That's really good to know, so thank you for sharing that.

0:25:59.000,0:26:00.000

0:26:00.000,0:26:05.000

What other experiences at MC were beneficial to you as a new student?

0:26:05.000,0:26:13.000

Did you ever, for example, go to the Writing Center, or to other Learning Centers on campus to help you with other classes?

0:26:13.000,0:26:22.000

Yeah, I did go to the Writing Center in the time of an assignment,

0:26:22.000,0:26:29.000

because I didn't get a good grade on the assignment, I believe. So I was curious why I got a bad grade like that.

0:26:29.000,0:26:37.000

So I go to the Writing Center and the professor there helped me to check on my assignment.

0:26:37.000,0:26:45.000

Analyzed each sentence for me to understand and the main idea about what I wrote

0:26:45.000,0:26:52.000

related to the topic I write, and helped me fixed my grammar also,

0:26:52.000,0:26:58.000

and made the essay more coherent. So yeah, I go to the Writing Center.

0:26:58.000,0:27:06.000

And from that, I learned.. I like.. the library environment.

0:27:06.000,0:27:21.000

So I usually stay in the library to do assignments after the class, because I love the environment in the library. It is quiet enough for me to focus on doing schoolwork.

0:27:21.000,0:27:28.000

I love the library at MC, too. I like the quiet space there and the fact that you can find so many resources there

0:27:28.000,0:27:38.000

to help you, from quiet spaces to computers, to books.

0:27:38.000,0:27:39.000

Yeah, I think it's very helpful.

0:27:39.000,0:27:46.000

Yeah, I forgot to mention something. One time I think my professor mentioned that,

0:27:46.000,0:27:55.000

but I figure out that.. so I go to the Writing Center and on the computer in the Writing Center,

0:27:55.000,0:27:58.000

I find some software, amazing..

0:27:58.000,0:28:15.000

I don't think that's offered for free at anywhere but the Writing Center. So you go to the computer and some software related to psychology, or something like, just open it

0:28:15.000,0:28:25.000

and get some material, also questions about the material that helps people learning about that.

0:28:25.000,0:28:29.000

Was it related to your psychology class, the software you were using?

0:28:29.000,0:28:32.000

One time I go there because I was curious,

0:28:32.000,0:28:40.000

so I open the software, but it's not related to my class, but I think it's going to benefit other students.

0:28:40.000,0:28:46.000

I love the way that you always are looking for ways to have technology help you with your learning.

0:28:46.000,0:28:55.000

This is something that you come back to again and again, and I think that it's wonderful the way you discover all these resources along the way.

0:28:55.000,0:29:12.000

If you today met a new students at Montgomery College, who maybe came from another country, what advice would you give him or her about how to see succeed at Montgomery College?

0:29:12.000,0:29:19.000

About.. I think..

0:29:19.000,0:29:29.000

First thing, if they try to improve their English skills and vocabulary, don't be shy to interact with other persons.

0:29:29.000,0:29:30.000

Don't be shy to interact. Okay.

0:29:30.000,0:29:36.000

Yeah, even they make mistake. But it's going to improve by time.

0:29:36.000,0:29:42.000

Even the first time they talk to other person, and they don't understand, just repeat it.

0:29:42.000,0:29:48.000

Until they understand. If they are tired, don't give up.

0:29:48.000,0:29:49.000

Don't give up. Don't be shy.

0:29:49.000,0:29:52.000

Keep interacting with other people. I like that a lot.

0:29:52.000,0:29:58.000

And for the credit level and other courses, don't be shy to ask the professor to clarify the vocabulary

0:29:58.000,0:30:09.000

that you don't understand. They can find other vocabulary to help you understand.

0:30:09.000,0:30:12.000

Yeah, because I had trouble with that as well.

0:30:12.000,0:30:25.000

When I took calculus one, and the professor used a word not familiar to me, but then he explained and used another word and I understand that.

0:30:25.000,0:30:30.000

And I learned another vocabulary. So don't be shy to ask the professor as well.

0:30:30.000,0:30:31.000

Don't be shy to ask the professor. I like that advice a lot.

0:30:31.000,0:30:33.000

Did you ever go to office hours of your professors?

0:30:33.000,0:30:44.000

Do you recommend going to office hours? Is that something that helped you?

0:30:44.000,0:30:52.000

Yeah, I actually go to office hours of the TA instead of the professor.

0:30:52.000,0:31:02.000

I used to write emails to the professor than go to their office hour, because I feel like they're going to be busy with other students.

0:31:02.000,0:31:15.000

So I first approach with the TA, first, and then, if they couldn't help with my problem, I'm going to reach to the professor. And office hours or TAs offered by MC,

0:31:15.000,0:31:18.000

I feel that's useful.

0:31:18.000,0:31:19.000

Now you're an assistant. You're helping other students.

0:31:19.000,0:31:32.000

Do you feel like you have a lot of empathy for the students who come to you for help, because you were in a similar situation?

0:31:32.000,0:31:39.000

Yeah, yeah, I feel sympathy when it comes to ask a question.

0:31:39.000,0:31:45.000

And actually, some of them get a question that I had before?

0:31:45.000,0:31:58.000

And I learned to be a good teaching assistant by not answering deep down the solution, but try to lead them to the solution by explaining and

0:31:58.000,0:32:10.000

making them understand the material to work for the assignment, instead of having them understand the solution I'm going to give them, not doing that.

0:32:10.000,0:32:19.000

That is a great thing to realize as a teacher. To help the student get to the solution on their own, instead of giving the answer. Absolutely.

0:32:19.000,0:32:20.000

Yeah, and I feel that I understand how my professors, like you and other professors, doing that way.

0:32:20.000,0:32:31.000

0:32:31.000,0:32:33.000

0:32:33.000,0:32:36.000

You can see that now, because you're teaching and you're assisting.

0:32:36.000,0:32:37.000

So you understand that now?

0:32:37.000,0:32:38.000

Did you feel

0:32:38.000,0:32:48.000

well prepared for your experience at the University Of Maryland at College Park. Did you feel like Montgomery College prepared you well?

0:32:48.000,0:32:58.000

Yeah, I think Montgomery College is my first choice in MD state.

0:32:58.000,0:33:01.000

Actually, I referred my younger student to apply for MC

0:33:01.000,0:33:13.000

next semester, because I believe MC is quality enough to prepare him for four-year college.

0:33:13.000,0:33:16.000

For example, when I apply to transfer from MC

0:33:16.000,0:33:27.000

to, UMD, I didn't lose any credit. Actually, I got 75 credits,

0:33:27.000,0:33:48.000

but the maximum count is 60 credits, because my number of credits.. because, as a normal student, you just need to satisfy the requirement and 60 credit is enough for them to get the degree.

0:33:48.000,0:33:52.000

So when I transfer to UMD, they count 60 credits

0:33:52.000,0:33:53.000

as general study.

0:33:53.000,0:33:59.000

So you were able to transfer 60 credits over from Montgomery College to University of Maryland?

0:33:59.000,0:34:00.000

-Yeah, yeah.

0:34:00.000,0:34:06.000

And that enabled you to begin as a third year student at University of Maryland?

0:34:06.000,0:34:09.000

Yeah, I will begin as a third year student.

0:34:09.000,0:34:14.000

And yeah, I say the number of credits is counted.

0:34:14.000,0:34:23.000

So some classes like Calculus 1, 2, and 3, Linear Algebra class,

0:34:23.000,0:34:30.000

I take it from MC. The computer science class was taken from MC. All of them are counted at the University of Maryland.

0:34:30.000,0:34:31.000

So I don't need to retake it.

0:34:31.000,0:34:34.000

That's great. That saved you time and money, then.

0:34:34.000,0:34:43.000

Yeah, I don't need to retake it, and also don't need to take the exam.

0:34:43.000,0:34:57.000

I need to say that because some, you know, some two-year college.. if I transfer from some other two-year college, I need to take the exam.

0:34:57.000,0:34:58.000

Which exam is that?

0:34:58.000,0:35:19.000

You already took the class in the two-year college, but you also need to take the same at the University of Maryland, so that they validate or evaluate your knowledge in terms of that class..

0:35:19.000,0:35:21.000

The material.

0:35:21.000,0:35:22.000

So would you say the transfer process

0:35:22.000,0:35:31.000

was relatively easy to understand, to transfer from MC to you University of Maryland?

0:35:31.000,0:35:33.000

It's easier to transfer from

0:35:33.000,0:35:41.000

MC to Maryland, because I don't need to take that exam, they count it directly.

0:35:41.000,0:35:51.000

My next question has to do with your experience as a an Asian refugee in Montgomery County.

0:35:51.000,0:36:00.000

There has been a lot of talk over the past few years about the Stop Asian Hate movement.

0:36:00.000,0:36:08.000

This is something that many of my students talk about. About discrimination against Asians and Asian Americans.

0:36:08.000,0:36:12.000

Have you experienced discrimination or stereotyping?

0:36:12.000,0:36:19.000

And if so, how have you responded to that or dealt with that problem?

0:36:19.000,0:36:25.000

After Covid,

0:36:25.000,0:36:31.000

the first time I go to UMD and I take a math class, undergraduate.

0:36:31.000,0:36:37.000

When I'm waiting for the class to start, so that I can get in the room.

0:36:37.000,0:36:42.000

I sit in a bench, and there's..

0:36:42.000,0:36:56.000

another student, maybe a native one.. When I sit on the bench, he just stayed away from me, and then he said something.

0:36:56.000,0:37:09.000

I didn't listen to it completely, but I think that kind of.. maybe hurt another person like that.

0:37:09.000,0:37:24.000

By doing that may be hurt.. I just ignored that because I didn't think too much about that. That's it.

0:37:24.000,0:37:33.000

Instead of thinking that he is doing something.. discrimination,

0:37:33.000,0:37:39.000

I just think that, maybe I think too much, so I don't care about it

0:37:39.000,0:37:42.000

anymore.

0:37:42.000,0:37:47.000

Do you feel.. How do you.. How can I put this?

0:37:47.000,0:37:59.000

If you face an experience where maybe you feel that people are stereotyping you, or making generalizations of you, how do you help people overcome those stereotypes?

0:37:59.000,0:38:05.000

How do you share your culture with other people, to help them

0:38:05.000,0:38:08.000

better understand your experience?

0:38:08.000,0:38:18.000

I'm sorry, because I kind of didn't explain to the person, except they asked me to explain for them.

0:38:18.000,0:38:22.000

I'm not going first to explain for them,

0:38:22.000,0:38:25.000

because they don't have the mean to understand. Why do we need to explain for them?

0:38:25.000,0:38:37.000

They are going to reject.. So I'm not doing that, first. Instead, if they ask, I'm going to explain for them.

0:38:37.000,0:38:38.000

0:38:38.000,0:38:46.000

If someone asked you to share your Vietnamese culture with them, what would you tell them, or what would you share with them?

0:38:46.000,0:38:51.000

Yeah, I usually share with them about the holiday.

0:38:51.000,0:39:05.000

So they are going to see that. Also, I'm going to share with them the traditional and cultural.. we count age different than U.S...

0:39:05.000,0:39:11.000

With my friends, we talked a lot about food.

0:39:11.000,0:39:12.000

0:39:12.000,0:39:16.000

Because, I think people like food, so..

0:39:16.000,0:39:21.000

Food is a good topic to start conversations.

0:39:21.000,0:39:25.000

food is a very good topic to start a conversation. I agree.

0:39:25.000,0:39:31.000

Let's see, I wanted to ask you a question about your future.

0:39:31.000,0:39:37.000

When you imagine the future say five years from now. What do you see for yourself?

0:39:37.000,0:39:40.000

What do you hope for yourself?

0:39:40.000,0:39:46.000

Yeah, I hope I get in the graduate school and try to do research.

0:39:46.000,0:39:55.000

Because I checked in to the U.S. because the high quality of education.

0:39:55.000,0:40:02.000

So now I'm just want to get higher in my education.

0:40:02.000,0:40:11.000

Higher..

0:40:11.000,0:40:16.000

A different experience. Now I am a student who learned the material.

0:40:16.000,0:40:25.000

How can I become a researcher who creates the material in the future.

0:40:25.000,0:40:39.000

So I want to try that in five years. So I'm applying for M.S, a program that is a combined program, B.S and M.S, so I can finish the M.S.

0:40:39.000,0:40:51.000

in 1-2 year faster. After that, when I have some experience in doing research, I'm going to go to industry.

0:40:51.000,0:40:56.000
And at that time we will know.

0:40:56.000,0:40:57.000

0:40:57.000,0:41:05.000
So you see yourself working in the field of computer science and continuing your education, going to grad school, doing research.

0:41:05.000,0:41:13.000
Yeah. On the other hand, in my life there are two things.

0:41:13.000,0:41:29.000
One thing is about education, and one thing I commit to myself, that as a Vietnamese, I want support for my country in some of the political and human rights issues there.

0:41:29.000,0:41:37.000
I want to better life.. the Vietnamese life in my home country.

0:41:37.000,0:41:42.000
Do you want to continue working in the field of human rights,

0:41:42.000,0:41:43.000
as an activist

0:41:43.000,0:41:47.000
or in terms of educating people or working in journalism?

0:41:47.000,0:41:50.000
How would you do that?

0:41:50.000,0:41:56.000
The way I work in.. the way I contribute to that

0:41:56.000,0:42:01.000
is not like I'm an activist, but it seem like I support them, more than that.

0:42:01.000,0:42:12.000
I care about woman and student because I was a student activist and a woman also.

0:42:12.000,0:42:20.000
So if there's some case where they need help and they want to leave Vietnam for the U.S.

0:42:20.000,0:42:33.000
I'm willing to prepare the document for them.. and contact the

0:42:33.000,0:42:43.000
the Senator or the people who work in the United States who will take care of that and have the power to help the case.

0:42:43.000,0:42:45.000

0:42:45.000,0:42:55.000
So you will continue helping other, maybe women in the same situation as you, to adjust.. to be able to come here and adjust and get an education.

0:42:55.000,0:43:04.000
Yeah, education and help them to start a new life in the United States where they we don't worry about

0:43:04.000,0:43:08.000
harassment anymore.

0:43:08.000,0:43:12.000
Yes, I can imagine you doing great things in that area.

0:43:12.000,0:43:38.000
When I think back to the story that you told me about how you first became involved with activism, and how your you were so worried that you would not be able to continue your

education, and you had all these problems in Vietnam.. When I think back to that experience and where you are now, I think it's

0:43:38.000,0:43:42.000

really remarkable how much you have accomplished in a short amount of time.

0:43:42.000,0:44:01.000

So my question for you next is, if you could tell someone in a similar situation, who was feeling that sense of hopelessness that you felt when you were in prison, what message would you give to them, thinking back on your own experiences?

0:44:01.000,0:44:15.000

That's hard to say, because when I was in the same situation which I usually have a nightmare about that until now.

0:44:15.000,0:44:26.000

So, I just pray. I think about the mother of nature.

0:44:26.000,0:44:35.000

Mary, or Kuan Yin mother. Even that, I go to the Temple and learn meditation.

0:44:35.000,0:44:43.000

Meditation helped me a lot in my mental and physical health as well.

0:44:43.000,0:45:05.000

So I recommend them to learn the method of their own belief. Not necessarily meditation, but maybe in their religions they have another method. Learn that, that's going to help their mental health, and the mental health is very important

0:45:05.000,0:45:06.000

It's very important!

0:45:06.000,0:45:07.000

to overcome the challenge.

0:45:07.000,0:45:09.000

0:45:09.000,0:45:15.000

Thank you for sharing that. How do you feel today about our discussion, about this conversation?

0:45:15.000,0:45:18.000

What emotions are you feeling right now?

0:45:18.000,0:45:27.000

You know what.. I already.. the university stay like 4-5 years, more than 5 years and I am about to get my U.S. Citizenship.

0:45:27.000,0:45:39.000

And from a person who is an introvert and shy,

0:45:39.000,0:45:46.000

now I am open to the other person more by the..

0:45:46.000,0:45:48.000

So I keep practice interact with person with the outside.

0:45:48.000,0:45:57.000

Even if that is opposite with my habit, I'm lazy to interact.

0:45:57.000,0:46:03.000

But because I want my English skill improved, so I need to do that.

0:46:03.000,0:46:10.000

And during the time it keeps me open-minded and open to other people.

0:46:10.000,0:46:14.000

So I like to share.

0:46:14.000,0:46:18.000

I love that, that even though you're introverted,

0:46:18.000,0:46:30.000

maybe a little shy by nature, you're now willing to keep trying, even if there are mistakes you're willing to communicate and open up, to learn more and to share your experiences with others.

0:46:30.000,0:46:37.000

I think that is something.. that is such a valuable lesson for other English language learners and for all students.

0:46:37.000,0:46:46.000

Is there anything that you'd like to add at the end of this interview about your experience, or any other final thoughts, before we conclude?

0:46:46.000,0:46:51.000

I don't have any question to ask.

0:46:51.000,0:47:03.000

I just want to say thank you, to you and other professors in MC for bringing me to another better version of me right now.

0:47:03.000,0:47:11.000

And bring me a good experience during my time at MC.

0:47:11.000,0:47:25.000

Make my life more memorable. I have a lot in my heart right now about the time at MC.

0:47:25.000,0:47:26.000

0:47:26.000,0:47:27.000

We at Montgomery College,

0:47:27.000,0:47:37.000

and in the English Language for Academic Purposes program, feel so grateful to have students like you. And so, once again, let me say, thank you so much for sharing your story.

0:47:37.000,0:47:46.000

I know it will benefit others. So thank you so much for your time today, we're really grateful to have students like you in the MC community.

0:47:46.000,0:47:47.000

Thank you.

0:47:47.000,0:47:50.000

I'm going to stop recording.