

Interviewee: Anh Vu Sawyer
Interviewers: Estanislau Pina & Donald Vo
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Abstract:

Co (Mrs.) Anh Vu Sawyer was born Vu Thi Ngoc Anh in 1953 and raised in Saigon, South Vietnam. Upon entering medical school in the early '70s, the Vietnam War would be the catalyst for her journey to the West. A dreamer at heart, upon arriving in the United States, Co Anh set her sights on achieving those dreams and goals. Graduating from Calvin College with a B.S. in Mathematics & Economics, her extensive work resume ranges from marketing, business ventures, to being a motivational speaker for ambitious achievers. Co Anh quotes, *"America spoils me with freedom because even when I was in Vietnam I always hungered for freedom"* and that freedom is a blessing that gives her strength. An author in her own right, Co Anh's autobiography *A Song for Saigon: One Woman's Journey of Freedom* is a love letter to those who helped make her "dreams come true." As Executive Director of the Southeast Asian Coalition of Central Massachusetts (SEACMA) in Worcester, MA and along with undertaking humanitarian projects in Vietnam, this connection between the east and west completes her identity in what she confidently declares herself a "daughter of the world." Today, she resides in Providence, Rhode Island with her husband of over twenty years, fashion designer Philip Sawyer.

Quote: "You know, America spoils me with freedom. Because even when I was in Vietnam, I always hungered for freedom...You see America gave me the freedom to be who I am and also gave me the resources so that I can get what I want. Also, American people gave me an amazing example of giving themselves to others."

EP: My name is Estanislau Pina and I'm here with Donald Vo. Today is March 28th, 2013 and I am here with Co (Mrs.) Anh Vu Sawyer. We are here on behalf of Assumption College and the Worcester Women's History Project in documenting the lives of women and understanding their connection to the great city of Worcester, Massachusetts. We both want to thank you for taking the time out of your schedule to do this interview with us. Before we begin, we would like to ask you for your permission to have this interview recorded for both academic and archival purposes?

AVS: Yes.

[START]

EP: Alright. So the first question, what is your maiden name? Your birth name?

AVS: My birth name is very long. It's a Vu Thi Ngoc Anh. It's V-U. That's the last name. T-H. Next word. I. T-H-I. N-G-O-C. A-N-H. That is my birth name.

EP: Alright. Is that's the name? Do you still keep that name?

AVS: No, because I'm married. So now I'm Anh Vu Sawyer. A-N-H. V-U. Next word. V-U and the last name is Sawyer. S-A-W-Y-E-R. You have my business card so it's all spelled out there for you.

DV: So you've identified that you're married. Okay, what is your husband's name?

AVS: Philip.

DV: Philip. Sawyer. So is this your first husband? Any previous marriages?

AVS: This is my first husband...

DV: First husband...

AVS: ...and last I hope!

DV: ...and last!

AVS, EP, & DV: [Laughs]

DV: Wait, how did you meet him?

AVS: I met him when I was in college and because you ask me how it is a very strange story. I'm---when I was in Vietnam, I was in medical school and it was pretty---I-I-I don't know why they made us take anatomy class right after siesta, right after lunch. In Vietnam we all took siesta after lunch and it was really, really hot in Vietnam. You could cut---the humidity is so thick you could cut blocks out of air.

DV: Oh yes it is. I lived in Vietnam for four years so I know.

AVS: Only four years, oh okay. So-so I-I-I did my anatomy lab and I always, I daydreamed of having a boyfriend who would come and rescue me from all of this because in the laboratory I had to work with cadavers. You know...

DV: Cadavers.

AVS: ...yes I would have to find out the muscles and this and that and the formaldehyde was really stinky and so I dreamt of this guy and he turned out to be in my dream, an American.

DV: An American.

AVS: Back then in the '76 I was in medical school in the '70s. In the '70s no women should be thinking of having an American boyfriend because only "ladies of the night" would be caught on

the street with an American G.I Joe. Here I was, dreaming of my boyfriend as an American and so I went to---fast-forward to 1975 I came to this country. I met this man in college and he looked exactly like that guy in my dream! The crazy thing is he noticed me first and so that's how we meet.

DV: So it was a dream come true.

AVS: It is! You know people kept saying, "You know it's impossible." It is! Dreams do come true!

EP & DV: Dreams do come true. They do.

AVS: [Laughs]

DV: That's great.

EP: You were born in Vietnam?

AVS: Yes Vietnam. I was born in Saigon, Vietnam.

EP: Your husband?

AVS: My husband is good old American! From---he was from a Chicago area.

EP: When did you come to Worcester? When did you actually arrive here?

AVS: I actually came to Worcester Christmas 2012. So it's only three months.

EP: For the first time in 2012?

AVS: First time! [Laughs]

DV: When you immigrated to the United States where did you go? Was it in Chicago?

AVS: No, when I came to this country I was in Fort Chaffee, Arkansas. In the refugee camp.

DV: Fort?

AVS: Chaffee. C-H-A-F-F-E-E.

DV: Okay, Fort. Chaffee.

AVS: In Arkansas, it is a military base.

DV: From there did you remain in Arkansas or did you go elsewhere?

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AVS: No, actually from there we were sponsored by a church called Christ's Church in Oak Grove in Chicago, Illinois in Oak Grove, Illinois. So after some months in the refugee camp, once we were sponsored we flew directly from the refugee camp to Chicago. That was in 19-- early 19--. You know it's a crazy thing is we have no sense of time because there's no calendar when you run---when you ran and you---stayed in refugee camps and moved from camp to camp. You see, so none of my siblings agree with each other. So I would say late 1975 early '76 because I actually met Philip, my husband in 19-- late '76. Late November 1976.

DV: Okay, and how old were you when you came here?

AVS: I was 22.

DV: 22.

EP: 22. Right.

AVS: I'm 59 Sunday and Donald didn't bring me any flowers and he knew!

DV: [Laughs]

EP: It will arrive. We'll come back with that.

AVS & EP: [Laughs]

EP: So what made you decide to come to Worcester?

AVS: Oh because I took the position here. I got a job here.

EP: A question that relates to a previous one. When were you really allowed to date?

AVS: When was I allowed to date when it was in Vietnam? Never!

EP: [Laughs]

AVS: It is the truth! It was suppose to be matched to be married and I was. Then the war broke out and everyone scattered so thank God it never happened!

DV: So that's good. So when you when were finally able to date so that kind of was in a way some part of your freedom?

AVS: You know America spoils me with freedom because even when I was in Vietnam I always hungered for freedom.

DV: Really. Okay wow.

AVS: So when I meet Phillip, when I first came here I realized my goodness this is worth dying for. If you want to know more about it you can go into my website, there is an article that I wrote for the Timeline Warner because they publish my book.

DV: Yes.

AVS: The article is called “Happy Valentines to Phillip” and I gave Phillip a tribute for allowing me to have this freedom.

EP: Freedom.

AVS: To let me be who I am.

DV: Freedom. That’s wonderful.

EP: Alright so tell us more about your parents. Their names, their birthdates and where they lived.

AVS: Sure. You know I’m very proud to tell you about my parents. My parent’s names I want to spell for you again. My father is Mr. Vu. V-U. We use the last name first. The next word is D-U-C.

DV: Duc.

AVS: Yes and the last name is Phuong. P-H-U-O-N-G.

EP: Phuong.

AVS: Have you heard of the [___???] team? The OSS [Office of Strategic Services] [___???] team?

EP: No, not really.

AVS: Okay. I will give you a tiny little information about it. Next time if you need more information I will let you know. Back in the early ‘40s my father helped Ho Chi Minh to fight against the French and the Japanese. Around that time he was famous for training guerillas, you know, underground soldiers.

DV: Underground rebels.

AVS: Underground rebels, yes. Back then---how do you explain it---they were instrumental to win independence back to Vietnam from the French and the Japanese. So, my father married to my mother. I don’t know when. I can’t even tell you my parents’ birthdate because Vietnamese

DO NOT follows birthdates. I would say he was born in the Year of the Dragon and my mother was born in the Year of the Mouse. That kind of a thing.

DV: Ooh. That's not compatible. In terms of, I know about the compatibility. Usually it's every--the spouses need to be four years apart.

AVS: You know what though, many Vietnamese, they avoid that. You are very right. You see, around the time my parents got married, I think around the early '40s, maybe late '30s. I don't know. I'll have to call my mom for you to check up on that. She may not even remember. The Second World War was going on and Japan occupied Vietnam and the Allies bombed Hanoi because the Japanese presence there. Secondly, the Vietnamese deserted Hanoi to weaken the French and the Japanese so they all expatriate. What do you call that? They left the big cities to make them completely empty so that they couldn't have any services. They could not cook they could not find food. Whatever. So that was one way to weaken them. So everybody left for the villages. My mom has older sisters and brothers except that the oldest sister got married and so she had four more younger sisters and in order for the younger sister to get married, my mom had to be the next to get married. So when they were in the village they thought it would be six months, but it turned out to be four more years. So when my father---well he was---well the Japanese was chasing him, as a fact he was put in [___???) they called them a "Hell's Prison" or Hanoi Hilton...

DV: Okay I've heard of it.

AVS: ...and no one escaped. I'm bragging about this because it's truly amazing. He escaped! The French tried to capture him and couldn't put him away for five more years but the Japanese caught him and he escaped and he ran to the village and when he was in the village, he went into the church on a Sunday morning and my mom sat in the front, he sat in the back. He only saw the back of my mom's neck, the nape of her neck and he fell in love with her. He asked to marry her and my mom agreed to marry him because she had four more sisters to be married. So the reason I told you about my parents because my father met my mom only three times for the following five years. That's it.

DV: What is your mother's name? Do you know?

AVS: N-G-H-I-A. She took my father's last name. V-U.

DV: Okay I see. Okay, one quote that I think really, I really like to talk more about. You said that "America spoils you." Is that in a good way? Is it in a fully good way or are there any negatives about it?

AVS: Oh, you what thought, "America spoils me like loving parents."

DV: Ooh. Okay.

AVS: So it's up to you whether you think it's good or bad but to me is very good.

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EP: I see. Yes, it's very good.

AVS: You see America gave me the freedom to be who I am and also gave me the resources so that I can get what I want. Also, American people gave me an amazing example of giving themselves to others. I came from a culture where life was SO, SO hard. You know what the "zero sum" is? The pie is only this big. If I give you part of it, then I don't have anything left. So I cannot share with you so much and opportunities only knocks once.

DV: That's true.

AVS: Okay. So it's that we mean or anything, just that life was so hard and then you have your children to take care of and Vietnamese are very family oriented. Very strong. We have to take care of our family first before we take care of anyone else. Before you know it, you have aunts, uncles, grandchildren, nieces, and nephews. So you cannot see further and---and---and so it is our value and I respect that. Until I came here and realize that, as crazy as it sounds the more you give, the more you get. I don't know how to explain it but from my own observation, that's how I turned out. **[Pause]** I'm talking about the more you give to others...

EP: Yeah.

AVS: ...in addition to giving to our own families. So in that sense, to answer your question, I'm spoiled because this is something I hungered for. Ever since I was little. Since the time I started thinking on my own. I always wanted to write, to get my voice heard, to dream and to pursue and I wish I can travel. Maybe, whatever I tell you may answer your future questions. For example when I was little, when we went to sleep, explosions could be all around us at night because that's the best time for the Vietcong to shell us and so you'll never know when you'll get up and be alive or not and I slept with my little sisters. We all shared a bed. You know, she would be so scared and she pinched me. You know, she dug her fingernails in my flesh every time we heard these huge explosions. So I told her, "Don't worry. We're going to die tomorrow. We're going to be blown to bits. Tomorrow, we're going to be in heaven with God when we wake up." Sometimes it would help her to go to sleep but sometimes it didn't help me to go to sleep. So I daydreamed. One image always came to my mind. We were Christians so the American missionaries would give us their old Christmas cards. If you memorize the bible verse, they would give us a card as an award and I got this one as a photograph of a really small pretty Cape Cod-type house and there was snow outside, snow on the roof, snow on the driveway. The sky was clear with the stars and through the window there was a Christmas tree with all of these amazing colorful lights and small boxes with colors. I have always thought of it that this must be heaven and I always wanted to be there. See where I am?

DV: You are currently here now.

AVS: New England!

AVS, EP & DV: **[Laughs]**

AVS: So in a sense, I AM SPOILED.

EP: & DV: [Laughs]

DV: In a GOOD way.

AVS: Yeah.

DV: Okay. I think you mentioned that you have siblings, how many siblings do you have?

AVS: We have six. Six siblings and we are very close.

DV: Brothers? Sisters? All sisters? All brothers?

AVS: Nope, we have three total. Three brothers, three boys and three girls. I'm the middle.

DV: Ah! Ooh! Okay. Do you have any children at all?

AVS: We have three children.

EP & DV: Three children.

AVS: Two boys and one girl. They are the pride and the joy of our lives. They truly are. Especially when they sleep.

AVS, EP & DV: [Laughs]

AVS: No, no, no but they are really great. I mean, we have to go through the teenager years but they are really great kids. My husband is a really good father.

DV: How old are they?

AVS: They are 25, 21 and 19 or 20. 19, 21, and 25.

DV: Do they fall? Is it boy, boy, girl? Or...?

AVS: Yep. Boy, boy girl.

DV: Wonderful. Do you have any grandchildren at all?

AVS: Well my kids are---no not yet but I save the toys and clothes for my grandbabies.

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EP: How was it when you got pregnant for the first time?

AVS: When I got pregnant? Okay. Well I was pretty old by then. Now don't forget, I was 35 and we lived in New York City almost 10 years by then and my husband just graduated with his masters in International Affairs? International Relations and he was going to take a job in Hong Kong. For some reason it didn't come through and I was glad. I think the part that it didn't come through is because I didn't have health insurance. How we see it go enough for us and so I was happy because I thought 35! I better have a baby now!

DV: [Laughs]

AVS: So that very day that because Stanley ask that question so I'm gonna answer you!

EP: [Laughs]

AVS: For your satisfaction so the very day that we made a decision that we would not take the job in Hong Kong, that's the day that we conceived our oldest son and he was born on the due date.

DV: Oh, wow. Okay

AVS: Crazy huh...?

DV: Wow.

AVS: ...and I was very happy!

EP: Ah, I imagine.

AVS: Both of us were just ecstatic.

DV: Okay. Okay, where did you end up finally making your---making your home, especially for your children?

AVS: So, my first baby in New York City for two years and then we wanted to have lots of babies. I wanted six, my husband is kind of like, "Well lets see."

AVS, EP & DV: [Laughs]

AVS: ...and so and then the Black Friday happened the stock market like crashed very big. Did you remember that?

EP: No.

AVS: Well you're too young to know.

EP: Yeah.

AVS: ...and so and, and, and if we both stayed in New York City both of us would have to work. I quitted my job so I could stay and take care of our oldest boy and so we decide to move to guess where?

DV: Rhode Island?

AVS: No! Kansas!

DV: Kansas! Wow!

AVS & DV: [Laughs]

AVS: Kansas...to-to Lawrence, Kansas and we have two more babies and by the third time, the third baby when Lena our youngest baby came I was almost 40 so she was our last and...what was the question?

EP: How it was, how like did you experienced it but I think you answered it.

AVS: Oh, okay.

EP: So how was life in Kansas?

DV: Well yes tell us about that. Why Kansas? Especially, why Kansas?

AVS: ...because Philip got a job there and we never, I never been to Kansas, I didn't where it was in the map. So I had to go to a-a-a luncheonette, a luncheonette like a tiny little dinner...

EP: Yeah.

AVS: ...like [___???] to get there, place mat, the place mat have the map.

EP: [Laughs]

AVS: [Laughs] Chicago! Kansas! Oh there it is, and the only Kansas I knew was the movie Wizard of Oz...

EP & DV: Wizard of Oz.

AVS: ...and so, so I said, "Oh this is great!" I told my mother-in-law I'm going to raise sheep and to make yarn and I'm going to raise chicken to get eggs and we gonna have a farm and all of that right, and if you could have seen us, my husband and I. Philip works as a clothing designer

and I love clothes right, and I'm a shoe addict so my mother-in-law just laughed and she said, "You remind me of the [??] couples." I don't know if you see the...you're not old enough to know, but it's two New Yorkers moved to the TV show about old people like very fancy New Yorkers, moved to the moved to the to the country and they made all kind off stupid mistakes because they so city like and so they so that's exactly what Philip and I were like when we moved to Kansas. We love it.

EP: I also, I also heard you talking to the women that was here that you've been to Colorado?

AVS: Yes, so after Kansas, five years in Kansas, Philip really would like, we really miss traveling because prior to, right after I got married, I also have helped for almost 10 years, I helped started an airline, called People Express Airline. It's a very innovated company, you should do some research on it. How would somebody [___??] us because it was really outside of the box type of company so, so I worked there for 10 years, but we travelled so much that, when I stay home to have our babies, we really missed so after five years we really missed travelling and this organization, and our heart is really close to humanitarian work, social change type of work, social enterprises kind of work. So this organization wanted us to joined them to do works overseas especially in Vietnam. So we said yes and we moved to Colorado because that's the headquarters and we been in Colorado for 10, 15 years.

DV: Okay, wow.

EP: Cool. Alright. So in Colorado, was life their better, similar than Kansas or New York?

AVS: Maybe I don't want to answer that question...

EP: Oh, sorry.

AVS: ...because, because it may not be as positive as the other parts, well lets put it this way. Let's just focus on the positives. Colorado is so beautiful and our home has a gorgeous view of Pike's Peak and we had a very big house. Five bedrooms, three bathrooms, five [??], horses and all of that and I always thought to myself, you know I always dream ahead of the time and our dreams did come true but it doesn't mean that it's, it's the end you know the-the our happiness, because I think it says a lot of, I'm not so sure Colorado Spring is the right place for us because we kind of crazy. My husband and I and the kids, you know we such "city rats." **[Laughs]** We left some of our friends in Colorado Springs [___??].

DV: Okay, so let's, let's when you-you were born in Saigon, you said now what was it now comparing how since you like to be, since you self proclaimed yourself as a city rat? What's what was Saigon like back then in back then in comparison to here.

AVS: To this country or to Saigon now?

DV: How about lets talk about the past, and then from there.

AVS: Okay, Saigon the past is, in my opinion it's very cold and very---civil how you, civilize?

EP: Civilized.

AVS: Civilized, because it is kind of the "melting pot" for both the east and the west, so you know I grew up doing the hippies so we knew about the Beatles, Bee Gees...

EP: Oh yeah.

AVS: ...and you know all of those wonderful musician and South Vietnam, we were much, we had lots of freedom, more so then the well I don't want to get to trouble so you may not want to add this but anyway. When I grew up in Saigon, we were able to we were exposed to the arts. We-we-we saw, I saw work by Picasso and we learned about the wonderful designers like Chanel and Schiaparelli and [_____??] so we saw a wonderful movie, Love Story was one of them that made all of South Vietnam cried! That---have you---you know about Love Story?

DV: I heard of the movie Love Story.

AVS: ...okay and Gone With the Wind.

EP: Oh I have to search for that.

AVS: Oh my goodness!

DV: Gone With the Wind.

AVS: Gone With the Wind! Oh my goodness! So I think it's-it's very "cosmo" in I remember it was very cosmopolitan and they were always foreigners on the street, so you would see Americans, French, Koreans, Canadians you know and the reporters would be anywhere taking pictures and then Saigon now is like Hong Kong.

DV: Oh yes it is.

AVS: It's like, it's not like it's-it's South Vietnamese are very progressive people.

DV: When was the last time you went to Vietnam?

AVS: I was there only three and a half months ago.

DV: Three and a half months, oh wow!

AVS: Yeah.

DV: Wow.

EP: Now, like in our day now, what-what would you considered your family ethnicity like to be just?

AVS: Yes, I told you that our family is a little bit “out of the box” type of family. I forgot that I--how can explain it? I feel like I’m a “daughter of the world” because I travel a lot and so, and I, I embrace my Vietnamese ethnicity very greatly. I learned so much from them, but I never felt that it is the only identity I have, I really, I think that I’m also, I embrace my American influence and so when people ask me who I am I always say I am Vietnamese by birth but American by life.

EP: Oh yeah.

AVS & EP: [Laughs]

AVS: Because if I say I’m Vietnamese no one would believe me. Because I’m a little bit to-to un-Vietnamese.

AVS & DV: [Laughs]

DV: So you proud to say you’re Vietnamese-American.

AVS: I, yes if you want to make their life easy, but our children, believe or not they half Vietnamese, half American and they for their census they always wrote down Vietnamese.

DV: Oh yes.

EP: Oh.

AVS: Yes and they all three have got Vietnamese names as well...

DV: Oh, okay that’s good.

AVS: ...and my husband is white green eyes, VERY HANDSOME. He looks like Richard Gere but he always though he’s Chinese.

DV: What his ethnicity by the way, your husband?

AVS: Who my husband?

DV: Yeah.

AVS: He’s French and English.

DV: French and English.

AVS: French-English-German. He's a mutt. Is that what you call it?

DV: I think---Caucasian.

AVS: Okay, I wonder if Donald knows what the mutt is. M-U-T-T?

EP: Mutt?

AVS: Of all different origins.

DV: Uhh-huh, okay.

AVS: It's a silly word.

EP: [Laughs]

AVS: [Laughs]

DV: Okay, okay this is one of the biggest question we like to ask is---I know since you just recently, you just moved here for three what you're, you been in Worcester for only three months but what's your connection? What is your connection to Worcester? Especially with the South Asian Coalition.

AVS: What is my connection?

DV: Yes, how do you, how do you connect yourself to Worcester.

AVS: Oh! You see, I was in Vietnam three about last November and I was on---we going, we on our way to do our humanitarian work in the northern highlands.

DV: Yeah.

AVS: We, my husband and I trained, help-help teach the Hmong women who were victims of the sex trafficking crime.

DV: Okay.

AVS: To sew because that's my husband also teaches at the Rhode Island School of Design. He taught sewing. So, we were on our way there and I got the an email from an authorization saying that this position is open. So the funny thing is, when I was leaving I thought to myself I only hope my husband start his clothing company because we had a clothing business and I-I-I'm done. I feel like I would now, you know he's---I would like very much to branch out and do something that I believe in and I'm good at. So when I saw this position opened up, I looked at my email and I said that I would like to consider. So that when that's when I was in Hong Kong, waiting for my fly to Vietnam and when I get to Hanoi they wrote and say, "Yes, I would like to

interview you. Can we interview you next week?” and I said next week I would be up, up, up, in the north, way northern by China is in China. Yeah, yeah. Hold on. Give a second. [Pause] The mountain that when they interviewed me and that when I got the Skype interview.

DV: Oh wow!

EP: Oh!

AVS: But, you know up there, I mean it’s hard enough to get Wi-Fi so we kind of say “Hello” and we couldn’t figured out what to say, I mean it just in and out so I came home right around Thanksgiving time, after Thanksgiving. After Thanksgiving it has to be and that when, so I came here and so that the connection with the Worcester and it was the first time I was in Worcester.

DV: What’s your impression of Worcester?

AVS: You know I when I told people that I have, I have lots of friends and so I told all our friends that I would be having an interview with the South Asian Coalition in Worcester and they say “Ehh! Woe to you!” and they say “I’m not so sure. Knowing your personality, not so sure if you would like Worcester.” because they know I’m really crazy but the arts and [___???] and so Worcester is a hidden treasure.

DV: Okay. Oh wow!

AVS: Okay. So if people the outside can not really see, unless you’re inside. It take me a month and then I really---everyday I love it more, I never even use the word like.

EP: So it seems like it changed you right?

AVS: Yeah exactly! I learn more about the people are so wonderful, and this is a place where dream come true. I have some ridiculously ridiculous dreams and they coming to our organization.

EP: How would you say it’s changed you?

AVS: How it’s changed me? I think it, for example the people it changed me in such a way that I have to look at the person that, I don’t think it’s changed me but it teaches me to look at people and culture at the heart of it, and every culture, every society, every community, every person, everyone of us have two things. One thing is we each have a gift within us and the second thing is everyone of us, every culture, every situation have a potential and if it could see that value within the person and a potential within a community, we will be able to im---not to improve but we will make it thrive. Make them thrive. For example, when we met the immigrants here, they have such a hard time because of their English barrier...

DV: English barrier.

AVS: ...and culture is really difficult for them, and they have to work two jobs to help the family here and help the family in back home and you know [___???] she have, and she has a good job and she still has two jobs right and so Asian have I think it's a blessing and also a curse. We work way too hard, we don't have time to rest or to enjoy life and so they work for factories because it's easy, assembling lines you don't need as much English, I didn't have time to learn English either but a lot of factories shut down and so they found themselves not having a job and not having the English for hiring for, being hired for the job and but when they came in I would interview them and I found out that many of them have amazing gift. Their gift is in, they have wonderful hand---they know how to use their hands to make things the something about Vietnamese, especially I mean Southeast Asian, especially women. So I'm hoping to bring them, I'm starting the sewing program and then I found out, from the Worcester Historical Museum, that Worcester used to be the center of industrial movement. Do you know that?

DV: Yes, I did. Yes I did.

AVS: This is my craziest dream, ridiculously crazy dream that as my tiny little organization, we're gonna start the movement of revi---the industrial revival movement back into Worcester.

DV: Wow.

AVS: With the sewing industry...

DV: With the sewing industry.

AVS: ...because the, we have the people who already have the skills many of them even have their own tailor shops in their country, and there so many sewing factories being shut down. It's empty here, lots of sewing machine idle, in these molded places and there's so many people out there who wanted---skill workers to make stuff for them. Not just clothes, but bags, shoes, furniture and the trend right now is "Made in the USA" products.

DV: Ah, okay...

AVS: [Coughs] So that's my crazy dream.

DV: ...and, it will come true.

AVS: We will see.

DV: We will see.

AVS: Yeah.

EP: [Laughs]

AVS: Some months from now, you come back and check on me.

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AVS: [Coughs]

AVS: Can I grab some water here guys?

EP & DV: Sure

DV: Can I ask you about you education level?

AVS: I got my Bachelor Degree in Math and Economic at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan and I also have a certification in teaching English as a second language at Wheaton College, Illinois---and I did some MBA class in cross work at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 2009 but Philip was really sick so I had to drop everything and take care of him.

DV: Okay what do, let's, I would like to talk, ask you about what was the difference between school in Vietnam and then when you came to when you came here, when you came to United States.

AVS: What schools are like?

DV: Yes what were schools like?

AVS: Okay.

DV: When you were, you were in the med-medical school in the Vietnam and then when you went to United States during your time in [___???

AVS: OK sure. Yeah I think in Vietnam the schools system is much harder, very hard and uh. I was in medical school but we didn't move, our country could not afford to buy us textbooks so we had to, there was one textbook but one set for every, for the whole entire school. So we had to do a lot of copying by hand. And because it's a medical school the textbook were in English so we had to decipher the English and the books were loaned to us so they were like 20 years old version. It's not current but it's still wonderful. And it was I appreciate the American way of education better because so much of rote learning in my culture and the students couldn't really ask a lot of questions. If we asked questions, we were considered as you were challenging the teacher. Exactly. And I got into trouble all of the time. Can you imagine? And because I only asked questions, not because, because I really I don't know. I just asked a lot of questions. And the American system allowed us to have more room to think to imagine to ask questions but the, it was difficult for me. I didn't do as well in the American school because I came here when I was older for 21, 22 years in Vietnam. Everything is by rote. So here you read the textbook, but you didn't have to memorize all of the paragraphs. In Vietnam you have to memorize word by word and so when you answer your teacher's questions and if you don't answer it like the way it is in the textbook, the teacher would assume that if I went out of their...I'll elaborate some more. They would have a different, they would wonder if I made it up. You see

DV: I see.

AVS: And so it's harder for me in this country. Because the freedom I was given is too great and I had to learn how to curb it, to learn to because my mind get used to one way of absorbing information and so you gave me so much freedom I went out on a tangent. If you ask me about the economy of Worcester for example, I would go onto greater Worcester and then I go to Boston and then I would go to Massachusetts and before you knew it I would go to California and all the states in between. You see.

DV: You're not focusing on one but you're expanding.

EP: Yeah.

AVS: Too much. Exactly but it's the American system that allows me to have that freedom.

EP: True. Alright this is very different from the question that we just asked but like how was the boys and girls. How were the differences between them in school? While they were in class as in recreation and things like that?

AVS: Oh, oh, okay You know what we matured much later than the Americans. Because we didn't have boyfriends/girlfriends until like much later in college. I think cause the food we ate. You know I, this is just a very unscientific observation. I think we grew our own vegetables out of our own soil. There's no chemicals, no hormones so I think physically we mature much later than our westerner counterpart. So our friends, my friends in high school and in college we were like brothers. Like boyfriend---like friends not boyfriend no, amorous you know.

EP: Like brothers and sisters. Like!

AVS: oh we are very close. We are so close. Yes and we wanted the best for each other. And a, and a lot of us were to be matched to be married so we didn't kinda messed around with that. Falling in love because it's gonna be heartbreaking.

EP: And the teachers? What is the difference between the teachers there and here now?

AVS: I love American teachers.

EP: [Laughs].

AVS: When I was in high school and middle—and we only had elementary school and high school, we didn't have middle school, I got spanked a lot. You know with the ruler on my hand.

DV: Very disciplinary.

AVS: Very disciplinary. Very military-like. And you don't have this really mentor-mentoring relationship. I saw I've seen that in my [___???] I see that in my college, to this day some of my

teachers are like my best friends and they are my mentors to this day and I didn't have that in Vietnam because respect meant differently in Vietnam than respect here. Respect in Vietnam means you have to look up and there is a distance like between you and God. **[Laughs]** Respect in this country means you want to hang around, You want to be mentored, you know you want to be influenced by your...

DV: It's very personable. The teacher-student relationship.

AVS: Yeah. You are right. They are interested in you as a person.

DV: Exactly.

EP: That is true.

AVS: In Vietnam, they are interested in you as how much they can teach you and how much you can remember everything they teach you word by word. **[Laughs]**

DV: Now I think I think now the concept is still the concept is still there. I don't remember but...

AVS: I hoped it's changed. I hope.

DV: It's slowly changing.

AVS: Now don't forget. I'm old. So what I've told you was from like last century.

DV: Of course.

EP: And what would you say about the schools? What's the difference between schools?

AVS: Mmm. Our school? Oh, I can only tell you about our school. Um, our uh my school my high school. This is so silly. We have wooden benches and wooden tables and a bunch of girls, all girls, high school, my schools all of us. Most high school are girls or boys, and not together. And I really, something about my school in Vietnam there is sent of it's almost, it's very gentle It's not rambunctious like school here. **[Laughs]** It's-it's you know, It's kind of romantic in it's own way. It is a wrong word to say, but every time I've thought of it it's like I was hallucinated. Because It's very dreamy like and here I think things move faster and so much for young people to do, Computer games, cell phones, you know all kind of thing, but back then we had nothing except each other and we also had time to take siesta to go home, to go eat and take a nap. And we all had to wear our Vietnamese uniforms. Yeah and so life was really slow and I think it's a grace. It's a grace because of that kind of environment gave me good memories of my time I high school. Other than that it was not easy.

DV: Was there segregation back then?

AVS: What do you mean segregation?

DV: In terms of for boys and girls.

AVS: No. We, we, we can mingle but we not allowed to hold hands.

EP & DV: Oh.

AVS: We are not allow to physically touch, kiss, no PDF. Right?

EP & DV: PDA. [Laughs]

AVS: PDA! [Laughs] PDA. And so, um so girls hold each other's hands, boys hold each other's hands, no problem. But in this country, they would see differently.

EP & DV: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

EP: Umm, we should've asked this in the beginning but what's the name of your schools that you went to?

AVS: Le Van Duyet.

EP: Is that preschool oh?

AVS: Oh no that was high school.

EP: High School.

AVS: L-E. V-A-N. And the last is D-U-Y-E-T.

EP: D-U-Y-E-D?

AVS: D-U-Y-E-T.

EP: E-T.

AVS: Yeah. Ok.

EP: And before that?

AVS: It's Thi Lang. T-H-I. L-A-N-G. Yep, that's it.

EP: That's it. Alright.

AVS: And we don't have. It's just elementary school and high school.

EP: Oh ok.

DV: Ok, one question. In terms, in terms of get in terms, how was it like when you studied...the transition from high school to university. Is it any difference?

AVS: From high school to university in Vietnam?

DV: Mmm-hmm.

AVS: From high school, is there any difference...?

DV: Were you required to take some kind of test?

AVS: Oh, oh, oh! I see what you mean. Very difficult. Because my parents wanted me to go to medical school. So, from the time I was in first grade to the time I was in 12th grade, they um I had to go to public school and then we were done about three or four I think. And then I had to go to private school, tutoring school. And then at night, a tutor would be waiting for me.

DV: Oh boy.

EP: So your life was schools.

AVS: My life was, the dream I told you it wasn't easy but... **[Laughs]** May I give you something to drink honey because this room is hot because when the sun came out this window is hot.

EP: Oh no, I'm fine, thank you. I don't know about Don but I'm fine.

AVS: Oh you're fine. Ok. Water? Or just take a walk. You're welcome to have some spaghetti.

EP: No I'm fine, thank you. Oh we will.

DV: Oh, thank you though. Want to continue?

EP: Since we are reaching into one hour and we still have a lot to go to do you want to continue?

AVS: I leave at 5:30. What time is it?

DV: Okay so it's...

EP: 5:19. 5:20.

DV: Another 10 minutes is alright?

AVS: Oh yes, that's fine. And then you can interview me through Skype. You know we do that.

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It's the best way. If you ever need to go further.

EP: Oh yeah, I mean yeah if we stop here...

AVS: I talk too much.

EP: [Laughs] No, so if we stop here then we could interview in the Skype then.

AVS: What number? 15?

EP: We are on the number 15th now.

DV: Ok, and you said, you said you were Christian?

AVS: Yes.

DV: Do you still identify as Christian now?

AVS: Yes.

DV: Ok this is, this is, kind of a sensitive question. You have, you can refuse if you like. Are you, what's your opinion on politics? Are you politically active at all?

AVS: Uh, yes and no. I am, I am very aware of politics. And I vote and I tell everyone they should vote and, and I am liberal and visi-visible enough out there for people to know what I would like, you know because I'm very strong on social change and justice.

EP & DV: Ok.

DV: Now what about , now how about in Vietnam was it the same?

AVS: It was opposite.

EP & DV: Opposite.

AVS: Because when I, okay this is when I was in high school. Like maybe 10th grade. I was so unhappy when I saw something that was not right. This was in South Vietnam now. South, Vietnam in Saigon. So I wrote an article and you know, I was a write ever since I was little and it was sent to the youth newspaper. And my mom found the article I was writing and she tore it to shreds and she burned it because she said, that "If the authorities knew it, I'm in trouble." I was criticizing the authorities.

DV: Ok.

EP: I think we can stop here. We don't want to make be late. We can follow up on Skype then if anything.

[END]