

Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho

The Reminiscences of
Erica Ann Trinh

Asian American Comparative Collection
University of Idaho
2020

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Erica A. Trinh conducted by Kathy M. Min on July 31, 2020. This interview is part of the Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho project, conducted in partnership with the Asian American Comparative Collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Transcriptionist | Kathy M. Min |
| Narrator | Erica A. Trinh |
| Interviewer | Kathy M. Min |
| Session Number | 1 |
| Location | Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from Boise, Idaho. |
| Date | July 31, 2020 |

00:00:01

Q: So today is July 31, 2020. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer. Today I'm talking to Trinh, the narrator, and we're both calling over Zoom from the Boise, Idaho area, and the proposed subject is an oral history of Trinh's life for the Asian American oral history project. So first question, what is your full name?

Trinh: Erica Ann Trinh.

00:00:28

Q: And when and where were you born?

Trinh: I was born July 29, 1999, in Boise, Idaho.

00:00:36

Q: And what is your current occupation / educational background?

Trinh: I'm just a student at University of Idaho. Educational background—what do you mean by that?

00:00:50

Q: Yeah, student, that makes sense. What are you studying?

Trinh: Psychology.

00:00:56

Q: Cool. And what are the names of your parents?

Trinh: Trang Pham and Cuong Trinh.

00:01:03

Q: Can you spell those?

Trinh: Yeah, T-R-A-N-G P-H-A-M for my mom and then C-U-O-N-G T-R-I-N-H for my dad.

00:01:12

Q: And what do they do for a living / what is their educational background?

Trinh: We own a restaurant and a couple of apartment complexes in town, and I don't think my dad graduated high school, but my mom graduated high school in Vietnam. And that's it.

00:01:32

Q: What years were they born?

Trinh: My dad was born 1979. My mom was 1977.

00:01:41

Q: And yeah, how'd they end up in Idaho?

Trinh: My grandparents came to Idaho when they were—in the '60s or '70s.¹ I'm not sure. But they came on a boat and my dad was one when he moved here. And then my dad went back to Vietnam when he was 18 and met my mom, and my mom came here when she was 21.

00:02:05

Q: So you know that your grandparents came to Boise first?

Trinh: I think so, yeah. They just came straight here, because they knew they had some friends in the area that would help them out.

00:02:17

Q: Okay, and then you know that they came on a boat?

¹ Most likely in the late 1970s, as Trinh later stated in the interview that their paternal grandparents were boat people, most of whom migrated in the second wave of Vietnamese refugee migration beginning in 1978. Additionally, if Trinh's father was one at the time of migration, the year of migration would likely be 1980. From Chia Youyee Vang, "Southeast Asian Americans," in *The Oxford Handbook of Asian American History*, ed. David K. Yoo and Eiichiro Azuma (New York City: Oxford University Press, 2016): 92.

Trinh: Yeah.

00:02:19

Q: What part of Vietnam is your family from?

Trinh: We're from Can Tho, which is southern Vietnam.

00:02:28

Q: Do you know what the circumstances were for your grandparents leaving?

Trinh: My grandpa came from a kind of a poor family, so he wanted to save up money and start a new life for his family, because he didn't want them to go through what he did, pretty much.

00:02:44

Q: And by "what he went through," could you elaborate on that?

Trinh: I'm pretty sure he moved like during the [Vietnam] war. So things were really controlling, obviously, so he didn't want to be controlled by them. So he kind of just took his wife and moved to America when they had the opportunity to.

00:03:06

Q: I know you said you don't know the exact date, but do you know what the political climate was in Vietnam? Was the Communist Party in power and things like that?

Trinh: Yeah, I'm pretty sure they were.

00:03:20

Q: Okay, so the US troops and stuff had already started retreating out of Vietnam by that point?

Trinh: Yeah, I just heard through stories when I was a kid. So, yeah.

00:03:31

Q: Yeah, are there any stories that stand out to you in your memory that they've told you?

Trinh: They said it was a really difficult journey. They'd been on a boat for a long time. It was a pretty small boat and they didn't have a lot of food with them and stuff. But I just remember my grandma telling us about how my dad was one, and it was really cold. And they didn't have much food, but this one guy gave them a chocolate bar or something, and that was the best thing ever

in her eyes, because they didn't really have much. But yeah, I don't really remember that much, but that's the story, I guess.

00:04:08

Q: Yeah. So do you know if they went anywhere between Vietnam and Boise first?

Trinh: I think they might have stopped in Cambodia or something. I think the boat, they didn't stop anywhere—I'm not sure. I wish I knew the full story. But yeah, that's all I know.

00:04:25

Q: No worries. Yeah, so your dad spent years one through 18 in Boise, then?

Trinh: Yup.

00:04:34

Q: Yes. And what was that like for him?

Trinh: He was kind of a “troubled kid.” He would hang out with the wrong crowd and stuff. He had a hard time for my grandparents, because my grandparents would spend all their time working and he would just get into trouble all the time. But that's why he didn't graduate high school, because he was really close to it, but he kept messing up, so they just pulled him out and sent him to Vietnam, and they were like, “Don't come back until you find a wife.” So that's pretty much how they [Trinh's parents] met. It was kind of like an arranged marriage.

00:05:09

Q: What were your grandparents doing when they got here?

Trinh: He started out working in a restaurant for other people. But then he kind of took notes and eventually saved up enough to open up a restaurant of his own.

00:05:22

Q: And do you know what kinds of restaurants that your grandpa was working at?

Trinh: Yeah, he worked at mainly Chinese restaurants, so that's the one we have right now. He can speak Vietnamese, Chinese, and English now. He just learned through working with them.

00:05:36

Q: Really? Is it Mandarin or Cantonese?

Trinh: Mandarin.

00:05:39

Q: Oh, interesting. So your family doesn't really have Chinese connections in Vietnam, though?

Trinh: No, we don't.

00:05:50

Q: And then did your grandma work as well?

Trinh: Yes, she helped out with the restaurant, but she also actually—I think she got a job in Micron. But one year, they eventually were laying a bunch of people off, and she got laid off, but they were old enough that they get retirement money now, I guess. I don't know really. But she helps out at the restaurant too.

00:06:10

Q: Um, and do you know around what time your grandma was laid off?

Trinh: Probably around 2010. Maybe a little later.

00:06:20

Q: Okay, so, kind of on the heels of the 2008 recession.

Trinh: Yeah, something like that.

00:06:24

Q: I see. Do you know how many years your grandma was at Micron for?

Trinh: I'm not sure. Maybe less than 10, I would say, but she was there for quite a while.

00:06:48

Q: Have they [Trinh's paternal grandparents] told you a little bit about what life was like for them first coming to the US and those first few years of being in the US?

Trinh: They said it was really hard for them, because they didn't speak English very well. They had to start out in a small neighborhood and live in an apartment pretty much, with just one room. They didn't have enough money to buy a lot of food. They said they'd be happy with just one tiny bowl of rice for dinner. But eventually they saved up much money, learned a bunch of skills to open their own restaurant. Yeah, anything specific you want to know?

00:07:26

Q: No, I think that everything you said makes sense. Did your grandparents open a Chinese restaurant then?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:07:38

Q: Is it American Chinese food or [from] a specific region of China?

Trinh: I think it's Americanized Chinese food.

00:07:49

Q: Do you know what schools your dad went to while in Boise?

Trinh: I think he might have went to Boise High, but then I think he got kicked out of there and they tried to enroll in Bishop Kelly [High School] or something. But then he got kicked out of there too. I'm not sure. That's what I've heard.

00:08:08

Q: Yeah, definitely. And then, do you know what your mom's life in Vietnam was like before coming to the US?

Trinh: She lived in a small house too, by the river. When the river would rise, their house would get flooded and stuff. They had to deal with that all the time. Her parents owned a cafe. So she helped out in that cafe, and I think she helped out in a pharmacy too.

00:08:34

Q: And this is all in Vietnam?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:08:39

Q: And is she from the same part of Vietnam that your family's from?

Trinh: No, she's not. My [paternal] grandpa's family's more northern. It's called Cá Mau. And then my mom's is more southern.

00:08:52

Q: Okay, so your paternal grandfather in your dad's side of the family is from northern Vietnam and then your mother—okay, I see.

Trinh: They kind of butt heads, sometimes.

00:09:06

Q: Really? Is there a reason why?

Trinh: Apparently, northern and southern Vietnamese people don't really get along.²

00:09:16

Q: I see. And so, what was your parents life—actually, how long was your dad in Vietnam for?

Trinh: He just went to Vietnam. He met my mom, and three months later, they got married, because it was an arranged marriage. Our parents knew each other. I heard this from them, but he went from house to house looking for a wife pretty much, and then met my mom and kind of chose her, I guess. That's how that works.

00:09:52

Q: So your grandparents on your mom and dad's side knew each other before they got married?

Trinh: I think they had heard of each other because they're kind of well-known around their area, because my grandparents on my mom's side are really, really nice people. So everyone knew them. So my [paternal] grandfather knows, "These really nice people have a daughter, and I have a son." So that's kind of how they got together.

00:10:18

Q: Um, and so your dad was just going to where your mom lives, and ran into her?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:10:29

Q: Is there a particular reason why he was in that area?

Trinh: If there was, I don't know it. I've never heard that part of the story, but—oh, my grandpa's brother lives in their neighborhood, actually. Yeah, I think he moved to southern Vietnam.

² Ben Stocking, "North-South divide persists in Vietnam," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 2007, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2007-mar-04-adfg-vietdiff4-story.html>.

00:10:46

Q: So that would be your uncle, right? Or your grandpa's brother?

Trinh: Yeah, my grandpa's brother.

00:10:54

Q: So great uncle. Do you know when your great uncle moved?

Trinh: I have no idea.

00:11:00

Q: No worries. I know all these things are decades back. And then, how long was your dad in Vietnam for?

Trinh: Like when he went to meet my mom?

00:11:12

Q: Yes.

Trinh: I would say for like less than four months. He just went to meet somebody and bring her back here.

00:11:19

Q: And then, were your family US citizens? I guess your dad's side of the family—so your dad and his parents—were they US citizens already by that point?

Trinh: Yeah, I think they all took their citizenship test and all that stuff.

00:11:37

Q: Do you know when they became citizens?

Trinh: No idea.

00:11:47

Q: So, then your dad married your mom in Vietnam?

Trinh: Yes. Yeah, I think so.

00:11:53

Q: Do you know what year that was?

Trinh: 1998.

00:11:59

Q: Okay, yeah. And then, once they were married, they moved back to Boise together?

Trinh: Yep.

00:12:09

Q: How old was your mom at that time?

Trinh: She was 20 or 21—yeah, 21.

00:12:19

Q: Yeah, tell me a little bit about their life settling in Boise together, what that was like.

Trinh: So by the time they got married, my grandpa was already pretty successful in his business. So she came here, took all her citizenship classes and stuff. But I remember when she was taking her classes, my sister and I were already born, because I remember being in the building, waiting for her to take her classes and stuff.

00:12:47

Trinh: So we had kind of built both of our houses—we were the first ones in the neighborhood in Eagle, and everyone was giving them a hard time, because they were like, “Nothing's ever going to be out on Eagle. It's always going to be really small. It's stupid of you to build a house here.” But I feel like things turned out pretty well. A lot of people started moving here.³

00:13:04

Q: Interesting. So you have a sister. Do you have any other siblings?

Trinh: Yeah, I have two little sisters.

00:13:14

Q: You're the oldest?

³ The population in Eagle, Idaho, grew by nearly 50 percent between 2010 to 2019. From Kathryn Tacke, “Idaho Cities Continue Strong Population Growth in 2019, Housing Growth Lags,” *idaho@work*, June 1, 2020, <https://idahoatwork.com/2020/06/01/idaho-cities-continue-strong-population-growth-in-2019-housing-growth-lags/>.

Trinh: Yep.

00:13:18

Q: What are your sisters' names, ages, what are they like, et cetera?

Trinh: I have two little sisters, and one of them is 11 months younger than me. She's 20. And then one of them is five. Her name's Emma.

00:13:36

Q: What are your sisters like?

Trinh: I'm actually watching the five-year-old one. I have to kick her out of the room right now. Yeah, I'm taking care of her with my mom at work. But my other sister, the 20 year old, she dropped out of college. So my family was really mad about that. They kind of kicked her out of the house. But she is working as a dental hygienist right now, so she's doing fine. And they'll be talking to her again, but education is really important to my family. So they were really mad at first.

00:14:11

Q: Sorry, where was she going to school beforehand?

Trinh: She went to U of I [University of Idaho] for one semester. Then, she moved back home, went to CSI [College of Southern Idaho] for a semester. Then she just dropped out.

00:14:23

Q: Again, you don't have to answer these, but is there a reason why she dropped out?

Trinh: She doesn't like going to school. She never has. But also with the added stress of my family, because my dad was going through a hard time at that point. So he was always yelling at us. So she was tired of it and just dropped out.

00:14:47

Q: How would you say your relationship is with your sisters, parents? Yeah, we can start with those.

Trinh: I would say I'm closest with my mom and my older sister, the middle sister. I'm close to my little sister too, but the age gap is really hard. So I just feel like I'm another parent watching her all the time. I'm not that close to my dad. And I'm close with the rest of my family.

00:15:18

Q: Yeah, and then do your parents have other siblings?

Trinh: Yeah. My mom, well, she had two brothers. One of them passed away 2013. And then my dad has one sister.

00:15:32

Q: And are they all in Boise or the US?

Trinh: My mom's whole family is still in Vietnam, so she doesn't have any family here. And my dad's family's here, but he has a lot of family still in Vietnam, but his sister's here. But my mom's brothers are in Vietnam.

00:15:58

Q: How about your aunts and uncles that are in the Boise area. What are they like, what do they do? Things like that.

Trinh: My aunt is an accountant. She works for the [Idaho State] Tax Commission. She graduated with a master's degree at BSU [Boise State University]. And I'm super close to her, but my dad hates her and he never talks to her.

00:16:21

Q: Wow. What is the age difference between your dad and your aunt?

Trinh: Six years. She's six years younger than him.

00:16:29

Q: So she also went to school in Boise then.

Trinh: Yep.

00:16:33

Q: Did she also go to Boise High?

Trinh: I think she did. I'm pretty sure she did.

00:16:38

Q: Do you have cousins in the Boise area?

Trinh: Yeah, my aunt has three daughters. But that's about it. She has a five-year-old, a six-year-old, and then another baby that turns one in September.

00:16:56

Q: So they're all a little bit younger and closer to your little sister's age. Do you spend time with your cousins or does your family spend time with your cousins?

Trinh: Yeah, we used to spend a lot of time with them, and then my dad and my aunt kind of started arguing. So now he doesn't want us to talk to her or her kids. But then I still go out and see them all the time without them knowing.

00:17:19

Q: Thanks for sharing. Yeah, as always, you don't have to answer questions that you don't want. And then, do you have any pets?

Trinh: We had a dog, but he died a couple years ago. We had a hamster when I was a kid, but my mom doesn't really like animals in the house.

00:17:39

Q: And so are your grandparents also still in Boise?

Trinh: Yep. They both live four minutes away from us, across the road, pretty much. And my grandpa still works at the restaurant.

00:17:55

Q: Okay, so the restaurant—you were saying your family operates a bunch of different restaurants around Boise. Does that include the one that your grandpa opened?

Trinh: Actually, we only have one restaurant, but we have apartment complexes that we rent out to people.

00:18:13

Q: And then, are your grandparents still working?

Trinh: Yeah, my grandpa works. My grandma works three days out of the week, but he worked every other day. Yeah.

00:18:22

Q: Wow. Are they still working with COVID and everything?

Trinh: We closed the inside out, and we only do—we have deliveries and drive-through and pick-up orders.

00:18:36

Q: And then, we're obviously living through a world event right now but, aside from COVID, have there been world events that had an impact on you or your family when you were growing up?

Trinh: World events?

00:18:59

Q: Yeah, I mean, you can interpret that how you want. It could be something that happened in Boise, something that happened in the US, something that happened internationally. Yeah.

Trinh: Not much. Not anything that I can think of. They don't really talk to us about their problems really. They don't really talk about that stuff to us.

00:19:25

Q: And then describe to me a typical family dinner. Do you all eat together as a family? Who does the cooking? What are some favorite foods?

Trinh: We don't really eat together a lot, because my parents work from nine in the morning to ten at night, so I never see them unless I'm at work. But we sometimes have family dinners on Sunday, and they cook pho or spring rolls or something. My mom does all the cooking and cleaning. My dad just sits around, does nothing.

00:20:05

Q: In the restaurant, though, is it both your parents that are cooking?

Trinh: Yeah, my dad and my mom both cook a lot. But my mom also does the waitressing and she answers phone calls and stuff.

00:20:20

Q: And then, how are holidays celebrated in your family? Do you have any special traditions?

Trinh: We go to the Buddhist temple here occasionally for the Buddhist events and stuff. And we kind of celebrate all the holidays, but not seriously. We'll say "Merry Christmas" and stuff like

that, and I'll get them presents, but they'll just give us money. We kind of celebrate Halloween, especially with my little sister now, because she likes Halloween a lot. Yeah, we celebrate holidays like that. Nothing too serious though.

00:20:58

Q: And then, are there any particular meanings to the names in your family? Either last names or first names or anything like that. Or if you have a Vietnamese name or anything.

Trinh: I do have a Vietnamese name, but no one really calls me that. It's just something that you have, you know. Everyone calls me Erica. He's really proud of his last name—my grandpa is—but I don't think there really is a special meaning. It's just they're proud of it, I guess.

00:21:37

Q: We could talk a little bit more about growing up. So how would you describe your experience going up? It's a broad question, but yeah.

Trinh: It was good generally, I guess. We would go on family vacations every once in a while. We would go back to Vietnam every four years to visit my mom's side of the family. My mom was the one that spent most of her time at home with us. When we were younger, she would have to take care of us, pick us up from school, and all that. But once we got older, like old enough to drive and stuff, they would both be working all the time. We'd take care of ourselves. I guess it was pretty good.

00:22:22

Q: What are the trips to Vietnam like for you? Do any trips stand out to you in your memory?

Trinh: Yeah, every single one is memorable, because it's just me, my sister, and my mom, because my dad stays home and works the restaurant. But we normally go at the beginning of the summer and stay for the whole summer, so it's a bunch of time we get to spend with my grandma, which is really fun.

00:22:48

Q: And are you still living in the house that you grew up in?

Trinh: Yes, but for school, I'd go back up to Moscow, and I live in an apartment.

00:22:57

Q: Right. What was your house like growing up? What's your neighborhood like? Things like that.

Trinh: We live in a pretty nice house, I guess, in like a Two Rivers [Subdivision] in Eagle. We're the only “minority group” I ever see. It's full of white old people. That's what my neighborhood's full of. Same with my grandpa's neighborhood, which is pretty close to here.

00:23:32

Q: Do you consider English your first language? Do you consider yourself multilingual?

Trinh: My mom actually taught me Vietnamese first. I learned English when I was three or four, at the same time. So I guess I learned them both at the same time, but I do speak both fluently.

00:23:50

Q: Do you also read and write Vietnamese?

Trinh: I can read Vietnamese pretty fluently, but I can write it if I tried really hard, but I'm way better at reading, for sure.

00:24:00

Q: And then for your parents—because I know your dad spent basically the first 18 years in the US—do you consider both your parents multilingual? What languages are most comfortable for them?

Trinh: Yeah, my whole family speaks Vietnamese and English, but my dad, he has no accent when he speaks English, like me. But my mom has a really thick accent, so people have a hard time understanding her. Same with my grandparents. But my dad and my aunt are both really good at English. My mom has a harder time.

00:24:34

Q: Does your mom speak Vietnamese at home with you?

Trinh: Yeah. Me and her speak Vietnamese mainly. My other sister, the 20-year-old sister, speaks English with her mainly, because she moved out of the house and she isn't surrounded by Vietnamese people as much anymore. So I feel like it's harder for her to speak Vietnamese now, but she's still fluent. But she's not as comfortable speaking as I am. Yeah, we all speak it, Vietnamese, to each other, except for my dad. I speak to him in English.

00:25:04

Q: Is there a reason why you think you're more comfortable with Vietnamese compared to your sister?

Trinh: Yeah, because I'm a lot closer to my mom. And my sister's—we're both pretty independent, but she kind of made the decision to move out where I never would, because I know how important education is to my family. But she just decided to do it herself.

00:25:29

Q: And then growing up, did you have any favorite toys or games or hobbies?

Trinh: I played the piano. My mom made me play the piano as a kid. So that kind of got me interested in playing other instruments. So now I like to play a lot of instruments for fun.

00:25:48

Q: What kinds of instruments?

Trinh: I can play the piano, the guitar, ukulele, the bass, violin. I just like to have a whole collection that I just play all the time.

00:25:58

Q: Awesome. So would you say that's kind of the activities that you would spend a lot of your childhood doing?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:26:08

Q: And then, what were your friends like when you were growing up?

Trinh: I also played basketball as a kid, so a lot of my friends actually played basketball with me. I mainly hung out with people—we would do homework together. That's what I would do, hanging out, because my mom never let us have sleepovers or anything. So we'd just do homework, play basketball, and hang out. That's it.

00:26:31

Q: Did you have any friends who were Asian growing up or was it majority white, or anything else?

Trinh: It was like all white. There weren't very many Asian people at my schools, either. All the Asian people I knew were from the Buddhist temple. So I did know a lot of people from there too.

00:26:49

Q: Did you feel close to the people in the temple?

Trinh: We kind of grew up together, because my mom actually met a couple of the ladies that were at the temple from the citizenship class. So she invited them to the temple and she had kids our age, too. So we would all just hang out, and we grew up together pretty much.

00:27:11

Q: What was the role of Buddhism and religion in your life and your family?

Trinh: We all kind of consider ourselves Buddhist, but we're not like we all go to the temple every single week. We donate money to a temple and we go for all the events, but there's a lot of stuff that they do that we don't do.

00:27:36

Q: Do you feel very connected to Buddhism as a religion or practice?

Trinh: Yeah, I like it a lot. Out of all the other religions, I would say I feel the most comfortable with Buddhism.

00:27:49

Q: And then, did you ever have any family chores or allowance or anything like that?

Trinh: Yeah, my sister and I would do all the work around the house. We'd vacuum, do the dishes, mop, do everything, like mow the lawn. And we didn't have an allowance as kids, but then when I started going to high school and college, they decided they should start giving us money, because they wouldn't let us get jobs either. We'd just work at the restaurant and help out.

00:28:19

Q: Do you feel like you've always kind of been working at the restaurant from a young age, or did it start at a specific point?

Trinh: I've been going there since I was five, and I would help out with little stuff at first, but then I started coming on the weekends to make egg rolls or something. I didn't start seriously working there until three or four years ago.

00:28:41

Q: And so, does working mean serving or cooking or kind of a mix?

Trinh: I do pretty much what's needed. I can cook a lot of stuff. I answer the phone a lot of the times. I do deliveries. I work on the inside. I just pretty much go where I'm needed.

00:29:08

Q: Um, and then with the restaurant, is that something that is mostly just your family working there, or are there other people working there as well?

Trinh: We have a handful of other employees too, but just my grandpa and my dad, they do the cooking mainly. No one else cooks. If they weren't there, no one else could do it. The restaurant wouldn't be able to run. And then my mom's the manager, so she manages like all the employees and stuff. We have three other waitresses and four or five delivery drivers.

00:29:37

Q: And is the majority of the staff Chinese?

Trinh: My family's all Vietnamese, but everyone else is white.

00:29:45

Q: Oh, interesting. But your dad picked up Mandarin through work?

00:29:51

Trinh: Yeah, my dad and my grandpa. My grandpa speaks it fluently, but my dad knows a little bit.

00:29:57

Q: How did your grandpa learn Mandarin again?

Trinh: He learned, because when he moved here, he didn't have a restaurant at first. He worked at other people's restaurants.

00:30:06

Q: So the other restaurants is where he picked up Mandarin at first? I see. And then, in your childhood, was there ever particular moment where you "realized" you were Asian?

Trinh: Not really, because I feel like my mom always made it a priority to keep us immersed in the culture. So I always knew that I was a part of this community and not part of the other community, I guess. But yeah, I don't remember getting bullied a lot in school, but every once in a while, someone would make a stupid joke or something, and I'd be like, "I get it, I'm different." But I already knew.

00:30:48

Q: Did you have any childhood heroes?

Trinh: Like celebrities?

00:30:56

Q: Yeah, it's open-ended. So it could be a celebrity, could be someone you know.

Trinh: I think it's just my mom. I'm the closest with my mom. She's still my hero.

00:31:08

Q: Is there a particular reason why you say it's your mom?

Trinh: Yeah, my dad and my dad's side of the family is really difficult. But the fact that she's made it this long as part of this family, it's amazing to me, because they're really strict and really mean.

00:31:25

Q: Do you consider yourself close with your grandparents?

Trinh: I'm close to them in a sense, but I'm way closer to my mom's side of the family.

00:31:37

Q: Oh, sorry?

Trinh: Even though they're still in Vietnam, I feel closer to them for some reason.

00:31:47

Q: Did you ever feel like you or your histories were represented in school textbooks or in media?

Trinh: Not really. I don't really remember a lot from high school, especially the history classes. It wasn't my favorite subject. But I think we went over the Vietnam War stuff, but only the American side. We never really learned a lot about Vietnam in any of my classes or anything about Asian culture in general, really, in any of the classes I've ever taken.

00:32:20

Q: And you've touched a little bit on school, but what was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Were there particular activities that you participated in?

Trinh: I've been always—my mom was really proud of me when I was a kid, because I would do pretty good at school. But I feel I had to work hard to make her proud, but I was always in AP [Advanced Placement] classes, taking summer classes. I graduated high school when I was 16—and my mom was always super proud of that—because I just took a bunch of summer classes to just get it done.

00:32:59

Trinh: And then I went to college. I went to BSU for two years. Then I went to U of I, and I'm finishing up this semester. My favorite subjects in high school were science classes, like biology, anatomy, and all that stuff. So that's why I started out in college studying pre-med, but then I switched to psychology, because that was a lot more interesting to me. Then I started playing rugby in college. And that's pretty much it.

00:33:31

Q: What schools did you attend, by the way, elementary through high school?

Trinh: I started out Eagle Hills Elementary. Then we moved to Boise and I went to Maple Grove Elementary—no, I went to Eagle Hills first, then Jackson Elementary. Then they closed down. Then I went to Maple Grove Elementary. Then went back to Eagle Middle School. Then Eagle High School.

00:33:58

Q: You've touched a little bit on the schools being all white or majority white. Is there a way that that played out in your experiences of those schools?

Trinh: I didn't feel like—I don't know. I wasn't—like what specifically are you asking? My experience or?

00:34:22

Q: Yeah, I think it's not the best question or phrased the best, but I think what were your experiences of or in an all white environment?

Trinh: I think it was pretty average. I didn't have trouble making friends or anything because I feel like I kind of stayed below the radar. I didn't do anything crazy so people didn't like call me out or pick on me or anything. Everything was pretty simple. I didn't really have much trouble.

00:34:53

Q: And then this again is kind of a broad question, but are there any particular communities that you feel you identify with?

Trinh: Definitely the LGBT community. I didn't really start opening up until I made more friends that were gay, because in my high school, no one was out, really. So I was more shy or introverted. Everyone who knew me in high school, if they saw me now, they wouldn't even recognize me, because I'm like a completely different person since going to college. But after meeting the LGBT community, I've been coming out of my shell a lot more.

00:35:29

Q: Where are those interactions taking place, if that makes sense? Was the community something you found in college, for example?

00:35:39

Trinh: Yeah, so in BSU, I didn't really join any clubs or anything. So I was still living at home. So I didn't really feel like I was in college. But after going to U by, I was at the opening activity fair thing where all the clubs have all their tables. And I walked up to the rugby table, and these girls told me to play. And I was like, "Sure." So I joined. And a lot of people on the team are gay, so it was really cool meeting more people that were also gay and we all got along. And that's how it happened.

00:36:14

Q: You were also saying it's something you felt shy about in high school, and it was related to just other people not being out. Were there any particular experiences for you in terms of—or do you have any reflections or feelings about what that time period was like for you?

Trinh: Yeah—hold on, I need to tell my sister to get out real quick.

00:36:50

Trinh: Okay, so, I didn't come out until junior year of high school, which is pretty much my senior year since I only had three years. But I remember being really scared to come out because I was scared my best friends would judge me and stuff, but eventually I just did come out. And it wasn't even a big deal. My friends were really cool about it. And they were like, "We already knew the whole time." So I don't know why I was so nervous. Probably because no one else is out in school. But yeah, that was my experience, pretty much.

00:37:24

Q: Yeah—wait, give me one moment.

[INTERRUPTION]

00:37:27

Q: Yeah, so you were saying you came out to your friends in your junior year?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:37:37

Q: Did you come out to your family as well?

Trinh: I didn't come out to my mom until a little bit later, but I came out to my sister first, because I'm really close with my sister. But I didn't really come out to anyone else. I just came out to my mom. She pretty much said she knew the whole time. At first she wasn't very supportive, but then eventually she got more supportive. And my grandparents didn't find out until earlier this year, but they haven't addressed it. They're kind of just like keeping me in the background, I don't know. And then my dad, he's just a mean person. So he always makes annoying jokes and stuff.

00:38:20

Q: So your dad knows?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:38:25

Q: Yeah, these are also really sensitive, so totally appreciate you sharing. You don't have to answer, but, is there a reason why you think they are that way—your grandparents and your dad?

Trinh: Yeah, because they still see it as a weird thing, I guess. Being gay in Vietnam isn't as common, I guess.⁴ I won't say it's not as common, but it's not as accepted as it is here and they're still in that mindset. So that's why, I think, that they're not supportive of it.

00:38:59

⁴ Vietnam's government has made pledges to defend the rights of the LGBTQ community, including lifting its ban on same-sex marriage in 2015, but many LGBTQ individuals, especially young persons, in Vietnam continue to face bullying, harassment, and violence. Youth in Vietnam report "families, peers, and teachers implicitly and explicitly enforc[ing] heterosexual and cisgender social norms" (Human Rights Watch). From Simon Lewis, "Same-Sex Marriage Ban Lifted in Vietnam But a Year Later Discrimination Remains," *Time*, January 18, 2016, <https://time.com/4184240/same-sex-gay-lgbt-marriage-ban-lifted-vietnam/>; Human Rights Watch, "'My Teacher Said I Had a Disease': Barriers to the Right to Education for LGBT Youth in Vietnam," February 12, 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/02/13/my-teacher-said-i-had-disease/barriers-right-education-lgbt-youth-vietnam>.

Q: And it also sounds like it's [Trinh's identity's] something that you've grown more and more comfortable with over the years, right? In what ways is your sexuality meaningful to you, if that makes sense?

Trinh: Meaningful to me?

00:39:20

Q: Yeah, I'm also trying to think of how to phrase some of these questions. But I guess, it's an important part of your identity. I'm wondering if there's ways that it feels important to you. I don't know if that makes sense.

Trinh: It kind of makes sense. I remember feeling really uncomfortable as a kid whenever my family would make me wear dresses and stuff. And I feel like they forced me to go homecoming with this boy that asked me to go. And I just remember feeling uncomfortable all the time, mad. So eventually, just coming out, I feel more free, if that makes sense. It's more comfortable, easier for me. I feel like I don't flaunt it to everyone else, so it shouldn't affect anyone else. So, I don't see why they're making such a big deal out of it.

00:40:13

Q: Yeah, and I'm sorry that certain parts of your family feel that way. You also were saying being a part of the LGBTQ community is really important to you. I'm wondering what it is to you in terms of what it means to be a part of that community.

Trinh: I guess just people with similar experiences to me. I can talk to them, and they'll be like, "Oh yeah, my family did that too." I just feel like it's easier to talk and relate to people that have experienced similar things, because then you can just get over it together and just move on, I guess, as a group.

00:40:51

Q: And for you, is the community mostly from the rugby team, or is it broader?

Trinh: Yeah, it's mainly from the rugby team, for sure.

00:41:06

Q: Is there a way that race intersects with your engagement in the community?

Trinh: There's not a lot of gay Asian people in general, because I feel like the way they grow up, they feel like it's something they have to hide. So I feel like being a minority and being a part of the LGBT community might help other people see and join too, if that makes sense. I guess it's

more like representation. And I have a lot of other friends that—I don't even know how to word it. I don't really know.

00:41:49

Q: Yeah, I'm also struggling a lot with wording, so, you're good. Is the rugby team, for example, is that diverse or is it also majority white?

Trinh: It's majority white for sure. We have a Pacific Islander on the team. We have another Asian. We have a Japanese girl on the team. She's gay too. We have, I think, someone from the Dominican Republic. We have a couple, but it's majority white for sure.

00:42:40

Q: Does the rugby team being all white or majority white space, does that play a role in anything or it's not as important?

Trinh: I don't think it's important at all. I feel like the rugby team's the most supportive group I've ever met. They don't care about anything. They just include everybody. They don't care who you are, what you are there. They're just all inclusive of everything. Really supportive.

00:43:13

Q: What was the impetus for you joining the rugby team?

Trinh: Like the reason why I joined? Honestly, I was just walking through all the tables, and I saw a cute girl at the booth. So I walked up. And I'd never heard of rugby before, so I just joined because she told me to join, pretty much. One of my favorite—

00:43:32

Q: At U of I?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:43:34

Q: Sorry, what were you saying? I interrupted.

Trinh: Oh, nothing. I just said, then it became one of my favorite sports ever. And I'm really glad I joined.

00:43:48

Q: I definitely want to keep talking about gender and sexuality, but a few more questions related to race and ethnicity. What ethnicity would you characterize your friends as being?

Trinh: What ethnicity?

00:44:03

Q: Yeah, are your friends of a particular ethnic group? Is it mostly white? Mostly POC? Things like that.

Trinh: I have a lot of friends that are people of color. I have a lot of friends from Mexico, like I just met a bunch more people in college that I wouldn't have met if I didn't go. Yeah, a lot of my friends are people of color, I'd say. But most of my white friends are from rugby.

00:44:33

Q: Interesting. And then, obviously white people aren't a monolith. But how would you say you get along with white folks?

Trinh: I feel like I have to watch what I say a little more, because if I feel like a lot of the white people I know, at least, are more sensitive about certain topics. So I just had to watch what I say around them, but that's about it.

00:44:59

Q: Yeah, maybe relatedly, is there a different way you interact with people who are straight?

Trinh: Not really. I have a lot of straight friends too. A majority of my friends are gay, but I have a lot of straight friends, and they're from rugby, so I just act the same around them.

00:45:18

Q: In your time in Idaho, have you ever experienced stereotypes or discrimination?

Trinh: Yeah, for sure, from my peers, mainly, just making jokes about my skin color or about my eyes or something like that. Or saying "how smart I am," saying, "You should easily get an A-plus." I feel like those are more microaggressions rather than straight-up harassment and stuff, but nothing too crazy. Like race-wise or gender and sexuality-wise?

00:45:59

Q: Either, both. Yeah.

Trinh: I've experienced some gender stuff, because before I started testosterone and stuff, I had short hair. And I'm 5'11", like six-foot, so I'm pretty tall. So when I would use the women's restroom, I'd get weird looks sometimes. But I now just use the men's rooms, and I never get a second glance, because I feel like I'm fully passing as male.

00:46:25

Q: What do you see as your "identity"?

Trinh: Honestly, I have no idea. I don't really identify with anything really.

00:46:35

Q: Yeah, do you feel like "Asian American" is a term you label yourself with, or just "American" or "Vietnamese American"?

Trinh: Asian American, yeah. Vietnamese American. Whichever.

00:47:07

Q: This is also a question that it might not apply, but if you were interested in having children, would you want to pass down certain traditions or beliefs to them?

Trinh: If I have children, they definitely speak Vietnamese. We'd still go to the Buddhist temple. That's about it. I definitely want them to speak Vietnamese, because it's a lot easier going to Vietnam to visit when you can actually speak the language, you know? And it's a lot more fun, I feel like.

00:47:39

Q: Yeah. And then, I've always perceived Idaho to be a pretty—or I guess a lot of people from Idaho—to be quite homophobic and transphobic, and I'm wondering, is that something that you feel you experience a lot in Idaho?

Trinh: I feel like the community I surround myself with are more open. I feel like college students in general are more open to the idea, but definitely in Eagle, just going to the store and stuff, if I'm with a girl, we kind of pass as a straight couple, so I don't get as many glances. But I have lesbian friends who are out with their girlfriends and get weird looks all the time. And get people who frown at them or honk at them, or catcall them or something. Transphobic, I can see that being more of a thing. But I feel like I pass better in general than some other trans people, so I don't get *that* end of everything, you know.

00:49:04

Q: This is, again, kind of a broad question, but what do you see as your “place” in America? If that makes sense.

Trinh: My place in America. What do you mean?

00:49:16

Q: Yeah, it's so broad. I honestly think you can interpret it how you want. Your place being how much belonging do you feel like, what is the position you view yourself as? It's quite vague, though, so I don't know if it makes sense.

Trinh: I guess my place in America—I guess I just have to do my best to make a change. I know some people are like, “I'm an American citizen, but I'm not even gonna vote, because my vote's not going to matter anyways.” I feel like my place is I have to take initiative and and do stuff that I think would be for the greater good, instead of just sitting around doing nothing, if that makes sense.

00:50:11

Q: Does race, gender, and sexuality intersect for you in any way?

Trinh: Intersect?

00:50:20

Q: Yeah. Do they kind of overlap or intersect in any way?

Trinh: It's kind of hard being gay and “transmasculine,” I guess, in the Asian community because that kind of stuff isn't as “normal,” I guess. But my mom told her friends and stuff that I had a surgery and that I'm gay, and everyone's been really supportive—my mom's friends, at least. Nothing's really clashing in a bad way, except for like in the family.

00:50:57

Q: That's good to hear that most people are accepting and happy for you. Do you mind me asking about the surgery, or is that something—

Trinh: It's all good.

00:51:09

Q: When did you get a surgery and what was the reasoning behind that for you?

Trinh: I had the “double mastectomy,” I guess in May this year, earlier this summer. And I had it, because before I'd been binding my chest since sophomore year of high school. So it's been five or six years. And I was getting tired of it, because last summer was really hot. And I was like, “I can't deal with one more summer binding every single day.” So I saved up money.

00:51:45

Trinh: My mom actually helped me a little bit with it. When I first told her about it, sophomore year [of high school], she was like, “There's no way you're doing that.” And I was like, “Okay, cool.” But then I started saving up money, and I was like, “I'm gonna do this anyways, with or without your help.” And then she was like, “I was actually supportive from the beginning. But I actually wanted to make sure you wanted to do this.” Because it's kind of irreversible, so she wanted to make sure that I actually wanted it. And then when I told her I really did, she eventually started to help me.

00:52:11

Trinh: But then my grandparents and my dad were really mad about that at first. And they kind of disowned me. They said they're never talking to me again. But then my grandma called me every single day after I had the surgery. So she was just, I guess, shocked when I told her. But my dad and grandpa eventually loosened up, because I'm still working with them every day, but they're still not as supportive of it, if that makes sense.

00:52:32

Q: You were also saying that you started hormone treatments [therapy] and so I was wondering—oh, sorry?

Trinh: What was your question?

00:52:42

Q: Yeah, I was just wondering, did that happen before the surgeries and what was the reasoning for you to start that?

Trinh: I started the hormones May of last year. So I've been on them for a year, before the surgery but no one in my family knows. I don't know how they don't know, because my voice probably changed five octaves lower, but I just said it's because I've been working out a lot and your body naturally produces more testosterone when you work out. And I guess that's enough for them to forget about it. But yeah, I started it because I heard that it made your breasts smaller. That didn't really happen for me, but I like the other effects it has had on me. So I'm glad I made

the decision, I guess. And I kind of got the idea from a counselor. She said she thought this would improve my quality of life and it did.

00:53:39

Q: That's great. Obviously, this involves a lot of interactions with doctors in the medical system. Would you say that's been a positive experience for you?

Trinh: Yeah, pretty much. I've been dealing with Planned Parenthood mainly, so everything's been really nice.

00:54:07

Q: And are there other sorts of medical treatments or changes that you are anticipating or thinking about?

Trinh: No, I'm done. This is it.

00:54:21

Q: Is there a reason for that?

Trinh: I get asked a lot if I wanted to get the bottom surgery too, but I feel like I'm totally fine being the girl with a flat chest. That's all I want in life [unclear]. I don't even know. I was confused before, but now I'm like this is what I'm supposed to be—so not really [unclear].

00:54:46

Q: You were saying you were confused before. Is there a reason for that confusion?

Trinh: Yeah, because before, what you see, there's people who are trans and then people who aren't. And if you're transitioning, then you have to go all the way. No one just gets the top surgery and stops there. No one just does testosterone, doesn't do anything else. So I was like, "If I start testosterone and get top surgery, do I have to get the bottom surgery too?" But then I was, "Why would I have to," you know? So yeah, I'm just not going to.

00:55:22

Q: Yeah definitely! I'm in the "looking forward" section of my questions. So COVID aside, again, how is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?

Trinh: How is it different? I guess it's different, because with the whole social distancing thing—is that what you're asking?

00:55:54

Q: Oh, I was saying, aside from COVID, because obviously, that is a huge, huge difference.

00:55:58

Trinh: Other than COVID. Okay. I guess my parents are more lenient. When I was a kid, they'd be really strict about everything. I have to go to bed by eight. No sleepovers, no one could come over. Had to finish all my homework, had to do homework for a specific amount of time every day. Play the piano for a specific amount of time. But now they let me—as long as I tell them what I'm doing—they let me stay out, do whatever I want pretty much, because I've been in college. All they wanted for me to do was to graduate from college. And since I'm so close, I feel like they're starting to loosen up on the reins, a little bit.

00:56:36

Q: To talk a little bit more about college, is there a reason why you first want to BSU and then also why you ended up going to U of I?

Trinh: Yeah, because I was 16 when I graduated, so my parents didn't want me to go too far from home. I kind of wish I just went somewhere else straight out of high school, but they wanted me to stay at home. And I was like—I wanted to transfer up there so I can have a little bit more breathing room, I guess, to have an actual college experience, because I felt like I was still in high school, just going to class and coming home. So it still felt like high school and I wanted a different experience.

00:57:18

Q: Is there a reason why you stayed in Idaho? Is there a chance that you would see yourself going beyond Idaho at some point?

Trinh: For sure. I stayed in Idaho because tuition's a lot cheaper and my parents are paying for everything, so I don't want them to have to pay that much for me. And they won't let me get a job to help. So I'm like, might as well just stay in-state. But it's like it's the furthest I can get without going too far, you know? Yeah. That's why I chose U of I.

00:57:47

Q: Yeah. So, you do see yourself as leaving Idaho, in the long term?

Trinh: Yeah.

00:57:53

Q: And why is that?

Trinh: Because I want to go to graduate school after I graduate for psychology and I just wanted a good change of environment, because Idaho's really close-minded, I feel like, compared to other states. I just want to go somewhere else, see what it's like.

00:58:13

Q: Are there any places you're thinking of, in particular?

Trinh: Definitely the East Coast. I wouldn't mind going to more in the West Coast, by the ocean or something. But I haven't really looked seriously into any psychology programs yet, but I've heard Yale has a really good psychology program. Haven't really done much research yet but I probably should.

00:58:41

Q: Yeah, at some point. We can talk a little bit about current events, so COVID is obviously huge. In what ways has it affected you and/or your family?

Trinh: We started quarantine in March and I was up in school. I was finishing up my last semester of the third year. And I'm the president of the rugby team. So, I'd scheduled five games for the season. We ended up not being able to play any of them, because of the coronavirus. And I also had to move back home to live with my parents, so that was really depressing because I like living up there a lot and I hate living down—because when I'm here, I have to work at the restaurant, all that stuff. I don't have as much free time, you know.

00:59:37

Trinh: And also the restaurant, we closed the dining room and stuff. And we thought we were going to get hit hard because everyone sees it as the "China virus." No one's gonna want to come to a restaurant to get food, but we actually were busier during the quarantine than normally, so that was good.

00:59:55

Q: Yeah, that is interesting. And then another current event is that this summer, we've seen a lot of protests related to Black Lives Matter. I'm wondering, is that something that's caused reflection or action on your end, as well as within your family?

Trinh: So the protest mainly started happening while I was recovering from my surgery. I really wanted to go to the vigil for George Floyd at the Capitol Building a couple months ago, but I

couldn't do that because I was a couple weeks out of surgery. But I share a lot of petitions on Instagram and stuff. I'm trying to stay active online as much as I can.

01:00:40

Trinh: But my parents—well, my grandpa's a Trump supporter. My mom's kind of a Trump supporter. But my dad, he tries to hate all the things I like, so he'll always try to talk about that and make me mad about it. So he always makes stupid jokes about Black Lives Matter and all that stuff, but I just don't let it get to me.

01:01:03

Q: Is there a reason why you think your grandpa and your mom are more either conservative or Trump-leaning?

Trinh: They just like him because he's a good businessman and he is “so strong” and “so awesome.” I don't even know! They don't have any specific reason why they like him. I can think of a lot of reasons why they shouldn't. I don't know why they do, you know? I think my grandpa's trying really hard. I feel like he's trying so hard to be a white man, you know? I feel like he hates being an Asian, honestly. He always acts like he's white, if that makes sense, just from what I've seen.

01:01:47

Q: Could you elaborate on that a little more?

Trinh: It's so hard to explain, but he always shares Trump on Facebook and a bunch of racist things that Trump does on Facebook. Applauding him for it, and he's always like, “Yeah, get these minorities out of our country. Tell these people to go back to Mexico,” and stuff like that. I'm like, “Did you forget how you got here,” you know? I don't understand. But he confuses me a lot.

01:02:26

Q: Some more questions, more about you than current events, but what accomplishments are you most proud of?

Trinh: I guess the main one is finally making the decision to have the surgery, because I never thought I'd do it. Graduating from high school, because my family's really happy about that. Almost graduating from college. Yeah, those are pretty much it.

01:02:59

Q: And what is one thing you want people to remember about you?

Trinh: I don't know, that I try my best to help as many people as I can? That's what I want to do with my job eventually, just to help as many people as possible.

01:03:19

Q: Are you thinking of going into counseling or psychiatry?

Trinh: I've been mainly leaning towards counseling psychology. I want to help like people in the LGBT community eventually.

01:03:36

Q: This might be kind of related to some previous questions, but what was the most important and meaningful event or experience in your life? Also what was happiest moment in your life?

Trinh: The most meaningful event in my life? Honestly, probably when my sister dropped out of college, because she was like, "Why are you doing all this stuff that Mom and Dad and Grandma and Grandpa are telling you to do, if you're not happy doing it?" She's like, "Why are you doing this for them if it's your life?" And I was like, "True, I guess." That's kind of what pushed me towards getting the surgery too, because if I'm doing it for me, it's not going to affect them in any way. So yeah—sorry, that's my sister in the background.

01:04:28

Q: No, you're good. Also, I think we've been talking a lot about this, but how would you characterize being an Asian American in Idaho?

Trinh: Characterize?

01:04:45

Q: I guess your own experiences of being Asian American.

Trinh: There aren't a lot of us. I feel like it's hard for me to have an opinion, because like I haven't really met a lot of people. I guess we're trying our best to fit in and not stick out from the crowd, I guess. Not draw too much attention to ourselves.

01:05:12

Q: And then we've also touched on this, but what are your dreams and visions for the future?

Trinh: I want to be somewhere on the East Coast, successful, fully independent, so my parents don't have to worry about me anymore. But in a job that helps people. That's it. That's all I want in life.

01:05:34

Q: And then, I'm just at the end of my questions. So, yeah, is there anything you'd like to add to the interview that you feel like we haven't covered? If not, do you want to leave any final words?

Trinh: Not really. Just I hope that I helped your research, because I don't really talk that much. So I just hope the interview is enough for your research.

01:05:56

Q: Oh yeah, I mean it's not like a strict study, where I need to get a specific answer. So yeah, of course, it was helpful. I'm going to stop the recording then.

[END OF SESSION]