

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

The Reminiscences of  
Eric Nguyen

Asian American Comparative Collection  
University of Idaho  
2020

## PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Eric Nguyen conducted by Kathy M. Min on July 1, 2020 and July 20, 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	Eric Nguyen
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	1
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	July 1, 2020

**00:00:00**

Q: Okay, I think it's recording. Okay! So I'm Kathy Min, the narrator, and I'm interviewing Nguyen, and today is July 1, 2020. We're doing the interview over Zoom. But I think both of us are based in Boise?

Eric Nguyen: Yes, Boise.

Q: Boise. And the proposed subject of the recording is an oral history of Eric's life for the Asian American oral history project.

**00:00:34**

Q: Okay, so first couple of questions. What's your full name?

Nguyen: My full name is Eric Nguyen.

**00:00:38**

Q: And when and where were you born?

Nguyen: I was born here in Boise, Idaho, on December 6, 2001.

**00:00:47**

Q: And what are the names of your parents?

Nguyen: My mom's name is Tuyet Mai, my and my dad's name is Duc Nguyen.

Q: Could you spell this?

Nguyen: Yes, Tuyet Mai. And my dad, Duc Nguyen.

**00:01:15**

Q: And—big question. How did you and your family come to Idaho?

Nguyen: Okay, so it first started with my grandfather during the Vietnam War. He was a police officer, but he was serving for the sides of Americans. So, I believe for doing that, the Americans gave them citizenship and let them move to America. And after that my dad came over, along with my mom. And I think they set up in California first, and then Idaho. So, yeah.

**00:01:54**

Q: Do you know what time—and it's okay if you don't know—but around what time that movement happened?

Nguyen: I think we got here around the '90s—some time during the '90s. I'm not completely sure when during the '90s, but hundred percent sure it's during the '90s.

**00:02:13**

Q: So your grandpa was the first one to come to the US, and so your mom and dad were both born in the US, or they came as a result?

Nguyen: They came as a result. My dad was born in '72, my mom was born in '82. However, they moved over here during the '90s, along with my grandfather.

**00:02:33**

Q: So they had already met before coming to the US?

Nguyen: Yes.

**00:02:36**

Q: Oh, how'd they meet?

Nguyen: I think it was just really kind of an out-of-control story. My dad's friend knew my mom and they just hooked up after that. That's what they tell me.

Q: And that's how you were born.

**00:02:56**

Q: Do you know where they were living at the time?

Nguyen: In Vietnam?

Q: Mhm.

Nguyen: I think my dad was Ho Chi Minh City or Saigon. And my mom was just outside the city limits. I think she was from the countryside.

**00:03:16**

Q: Okay, so they're both from southern Vietnam originally?

Nguyen: Yes, southern.

Q: Okay. So as far as you know, your family for at least several generations has always lived in the South.

Nguyen: Yes.

**00:03:29**

Q: What caused your parents to decide to move to the US?

Nguyen: I'm not quite sure about that. Well, my best guess would be, just to give their children a better future, because the American Dream is something that's widespread around the world and so many people believe in it. That'd be my best guess.

**00:03:56**

Q: And so, your grandpa currently lives in California or is he also in Idaho?

Nguyen: He lived in Idaho, and then he moved to Vietnam and passed away there.

**00:04:07**

Q: Did he move back to Ho Chi Minh City?

Nguyen: Yes, yes, he did. Along with my grandmother.

**00:04:14**

Q: Oh, okay. Do you know what time that he moved?

Nguyen: He moved back to Ho Chi Minh City in 2016? I think so. 2016, yeah. Freshman year.

**00:04:29**

Q: And do you know why he moved?

Nguyen: Well, his health was worse. And he just wanted to pass away in his home country.

**00:04:41**

Q: And so your grandma went with him? Is she also still alive?

Nguyen: Yes, she's still alive. I think we're trying to get her back here just to spend some more time with us, but yeah, she's doing okay.

**00:04:56**

Q: Do you know when—dates are kind of a big thing in history—but do you know when your family moved to Idaho from California?

Nguyen: Probably late '90s, I would have to say.

**00:05:20**

Q: So, if I'm correct, the early '90s were when your dad and mom migrated to California and then the late '90s—or did I mess that up?

Nguyen: Hold on. So my dad came over first. Then my mom came over in 2001, like right before she had me. But she came directly to Idaho, instead of California. But my dad was here [the US] first, and then migrated to Idaho.

**00:05:50**

Q: Oh I see. So they were apart for a little bit.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:05:57**

Q: Do you have any idea as to why they were apart?

Nguyen: Beats me, honestly. I don't know. Actually, that's a good question.

**00:06:08**

Q: So I'm just getting the timeline straight. So your grandpa moved to California in the '90s, early '90s.

Nguyen: Yeah, with my aunt—two aunts—my dad, and my uncle. My aunt is still there in California. And then they went to Idaho, late 1990s.

**00:06:36**

Q: So your aunt and uncle also moved to Idaho.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:06:38**

Q: And they're still in Idaho or in California?

Nguyen: Yes, yes, in Idaho.

**00:06:44**

Q: Okay, cool. Okay, sorry, I think I keep asking, I just really need a timeline for myself—so early '90s, your grandpa and a lot of your extended family come to California. And then your dad comes to California at that time too or a little later?

Nguyen: Yes.

**00:07:03**

Q: Oh, so your dad with your aunts and uncles.

Nguyen: Yeah, they flew back between Vietnam and the US during this time too, but that's the first time they went to America?

**00:07:14**

Q: Okay. Do you know why there's the flying back and forth?

Nguyen: I would say visiting family. Family's a big part of our culture. So, yeah.

**00:07:25**

Q: So then you're saying your grandpa, he immigrated under a special program designed for Vietnam War vets?

Nguyen: I would say so. He never much talked about it. The only story that I ever get about it is like, “He was a police officer, the US liked that and got him over here.” That’s all my parents would tell me.

**00:07:52**

Q: Makes sense. So he was the first that you know of in your family to come to the US?

Nguyen: Yes, the first.

**00:07:58**

Q: And so then your dad comes over with your grandpa, early ‘90s, and your mom doesn't immigrate to the US and for another decade in 2001?

Nguyen: Mhm.

Q: Okay, so they were apart for like 10 years.

Nguyen: Yeah, well.

**00:08:21**

Q: Have they ever talked about it? Because to me, it sounds kind of difficult.

Nguyen: No they haven't.

Q: Yeah, it feels kind of far back, I'm sure.

**00:08:37**

Q: What do your parents do for a living?

Nguyen: The stereotypical nail technician, nail salon. [Stereotypical] for Vietnamese people.

**00:08:46**

Q: Where do they work?

Nguyen: They work at a place called Top Nails. It's at Five Mile [Road] and Ustick [Road].

Q: Okay. Yeah, I've never gone to a nail salon in Boise, so I'm actually not that familiar.

**00:08:59**



Q: That's cool. So both your parents work there.

Nguyen: Yes.

**00:09:02**

Q: And so they're both nail technicians?

Nguyen: Mhm.

**00:09:09**

Q: And what's their educational background?

Nguyen: High school. That's about it. They have vocational training, but barely.

**00:09:20**

Q: Where was the vocational training?

Nguyen: I think it was in Utah.

**00:09:24**

Q: Oh, how were they in Utah?

Nguyen: We travel to Utah, like almost every summer. Well, we used to. My dad used to work down there as a Mongolian chef.

**00:09:36**

Q: Oh, wow.

Nguyen: I don't know why it was Utah, but—

Q: Like a Mongolian BBQ?

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: Oh, cool.

**00:09:47**

Q: Wait, so does that mean your dad lived in Utah for a time as well?

Nguyen: If he did, it was very short lived. He might've done it for a couple months.

**00:10:03**

Q: I was just wondering, since you mentioned your dad's had multiple jobs, have both your parents worked at other things besides the nail salon?

Nguyen: Yes, my mom, when she first got over here, she worked dry cleaning. And after that she worked a bunch of nail salons, like she jumped between nail salons. My dad, Mongolian chef in Utah and a bunch of places in Idaho. And he also jumped between nail salons too.

**00:10:34**

Q: Okay, so he also worked as a Mongolian chef in Idaho as well?

Nguyen: Yeah, he used to.

**00:10:40**

Q: Oh, was that at a restaurant in Boise?

Nguyen: Yeah, I don't know if it's there. Maybe Mongolian BBQ down on Overland [Road] and Cole [Road]? I forget the place.

**00:10:53**

Q: I have not had Mongolian BBQ in so long. I think I went to the one downtown, but that was many, many years ago. To be fair, I have not eaten out in Boise in some time.

**00:11:11**

Q: Do you have any siblings?

Nguyen: Yes, I have one little sister and one little brother.

Q: Aw, so you're the oldest.

Nguyen: Yes, it's great.

**00:11:22**

Q: So what are their names?

Nguyen: My sister's name is Lilly Nguyen—do you want me to spell that out?

Q: Sure.

Nguyen: Right. Lilly, and Nguyen, same spelling. And my little brother Jayson. Jayson's a senior in high school. Lilly's going to be a freshman this year. So, both in high school.

**00:11:46**

Q: Wow, so Jason's applying to colleges soon, then.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:11:52**

Q: Wow. How does that feel, to have just gone through the process?

Nguyen: Oh, I can't wait to help. When I was applying, I had no help at all. So I can't wait to help him so it's not a tough journey for him.

**00:12:07**

Q: Are they all going to the same high school that you did?

Nguyen: Yes, Renaissance High School.

**00:12:11**

Q: Oh, you went to Renaissance?

Nguyen: Yeah, it's great there.

**00:12:16**

Q: All my middle school friends went to Renaissance. Yeah, kids I knew could either go to Centennial [High School] or Renaissance. That's cool.

**00:12:28**

Q: Tell me a little bit more about all the people in your immediate family. What are they like? What are their personalities like? Or if there's one person that you want to talk about in particular.

Nguyen: Okay, immediate family. So my dad—really hard working, really traditional man. Like, tries to do “man stuff,” like fix, gardening, that type of stuff. Yeah, he really inspired me to be really hard working. My mom's really caring. She does all the cooking in the house, which is

amazing. Also really hard working. I remember back in my youth, when they had no time for me when they worked really early hours to really late hours.

**00:13:20**

Nguyen: My brother, quite the opposite of me. He likes video games a lot. Doesn't really care about academic work at all. But that's okay. As long as he's happy, I don't care. Well, whenever he does try, like on a math test, he'll beat me. He's super smart. My sister. Really innocent. Really caring. Really emotional at times. Jayson's emotionless.

**00:13:59**

Nguyen: My parents, they both care about academics. A lot. But not so much so like the Asian stereotype where that's the end all be all thing. Honestly, they never really cared about which college I was going to, as long as I was happy.

**00:14:18**

Q: I'm sure they're so proud of you.

**00:14:23**

Nguyen: Yeah, so that's a little description of all of them.

**00:14:25**

Q: How would you say your role in the family is, being the oldest child?

Nguyen: Oldest child. I'm supposed to take care of my siblings, be a role model for them. It's kind of weird, but me and my brother are the last in our bloodline to carry on our surname. And that's really important to my grandfather and my father. That's a bit of our responsibility. Yeah, just have to be responsible, be a role model for any siblings, help out wherever I can.

**00:15:02**

Q: Because you also mentioned your parents sometimes can work really early or really late hours, so I imagined that also meant that you had to sort of be a parent in some ways.

Nguyen: Oh, absolutely.

**00:15:17**

Q: What are some examples of what that was like?

Nguyen: Making up meals with them. Meals as in frozen meals, because I can't cook myself. Try to manage them, make them do their chores. Help them study. Yeah, that's really hard, because I

wish my mom and dad had a little bit more educational background to help my brother and sister out, because I had to focus on my studies. And I just can't dedicate all my time to them. But yeah, other than that, I like doing chores and helping them out. Those are my responsibilities.

**00:15:56**

Q: I also meant to ask this earlier, but I have a few more questions about your parents. How old were they when they came to the US?

Nguyen: I think my mom was like 18, 19.

Q: No way.

Nguyen: She was really young when she had me. And my dad, ten years older, so like 28, 29.

**00:16:21**

Q: But your mom and dad had already known each other in Vietnam?

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:16:30**

Q: Sorry, I know you talked about it, but they met just because your mom was in Ho Chi Minh at the time?

Nguyen: Yeah, I guess so. I guess she had schooling there, maybe. She did have a place in Ho Chi Minh, beside the countryside.

**00:16:50**

Q: And, then on your mom's side of the family, since we've talked a lot about your dad's side, do you know anything about your mom's side of the family?

Nguyen: They're all in Vietnam. All my cousins on my mom's side are in Vietnam. There's no one in America. My grandfather from my mom's side passed away. So it's just my grandmother. They're all great people. They're all fun. But, yeah. I think one of them's going to college right now, but the rest just have high school education. They're all way older than me. Yeah, my mom and dad were the youngest of their family. So we're the youngest of the whole family tree, me and my siblings.

**00:17:44**

Q: So how many siblings does your mom have?

Nguyen: Eight. She has a lot.

Q: Oh, so you probably have a lot of cousins.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:17:55**

Q: And so out of the eight, she's the only one who lives in the US.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:18:03**

Q: And then on your dad's side, how many siblings does he have?

Nguyen: He has a lot. Two of them passed away in the past two years, so yeah, the only remaining siblings would be my aunt in California, my aunt here, my uncle here. So if they were still alive, I think he'd have six.

Q: A lot of a lot of aunts and uncles to keep track of.

**00:18:42**

Q: And something else that I meant to touch on earlier as well was, I was just wondering if you knew anything about what their life was like when they first got to the US. Because I imagine there's probably some hardships involved in coming to a new country.

Nguyen: It was definitely really hard for them. Some of them actually went to high school.

**00:19:04**

Q: In the US?

Nguyen: Yeah. I forget why, but they just went to high school.

**00:19:11**

Nguyen: I think there were like some social workers, I guess, to help them adjust to life here. Because I remember seeing them around parties sometimes. But yeah, they had to work long hours. They all shared one tiny house and had to sleep on the floor. And they had to work on their English. English at the time wasn't really reinforced in Vietnam. If it was, it was very

beginner level. And you know, it's really hard for them to adjust and get a job and adjust American culture.

**00:19:50**

Q: Definitely. Also, questions are not coming to me in order. Maybe this is more on your grandparents' generation, but do you know how they experienced the war in Vietnam?

Nguyen: So, since they were on the southern side or the US's side, it was like a losing battle for the US. Right, so I remember the story that my mother told me, where the Communists were coming into the countryside of Saigon at the time. And that's where my great grandfather had his house, and it was my grandfather's house too. And they deconstructed the house—they hid it away. And as the Communists came over, they're burning stuff. And they [Eric's family] hid the house. So the Communists did burn down the house. And as the Communists moved away, they [Eric's family] rebuilt the house. Obviously, they were against the Communists—the Viet Cong. So that's all I hear about their time and all.

**00:21:09**

Q: With your parents, they're also almost a generation removed from the experiences of war.

Nguyen: Yeah, I never heard anything about the war from them. Especially my mom—she was born in 1982, so she didn't really experience anything. My dad was but a baby. I don't hear anything from him either.

**00:21:34**

Q: Wow. Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah, my family's from China, and so my grandparents lived through the Cultural Revolution, but I don't know what happened with that. And they also tell me in Chinese. And so I'm like, I only understand half of it.

**00:21:57**

Q: Okay, do you have any pets?

Nguyen: I did. I had a really obese dog. He passed away a couple days ago. I miss him, but he's amazing.

**00:22:17**

Q: Do you want to talk about your dog?

Nguyen: Of course, no, no, it's not that sensitive.

**00:22:23**

Q: Okay. How long did you have—what was your dog's name?

Nguyen: Markey. I think he was a Bernese Mountain Dog. We've had him for six years—yeah, six years.

**00:22:36**

Q: Was it your parents that wanted Markey?

Nguyen: I think a little bit from everyone, honestly. My parents, me, my siblings. I also pitched in money. Like, I'll buy it.

**00:22:51**

Q: That's interesting, because I always feel like the stereotype of Asian parents who don't want a pet in the house.

**00:23:00**

Q: So you've also mentioned other family members who are in Boise as well. So it's your uncle and your aunt?

Nguyen: Yes.

**00:23:10**

Q: How are they in relation to your dad—like is there one sibling between, if that makes sense?

Nguyen: Yeah, so I think my dad's the youngest, and then it's my uncle, and then it's my aunt. And they're all really close.

**00:23:30**

Q: What are their names?

Nguyen: Uh—

Q: Same.

Nguyen: I just call them, like, "aunt." "Uncle."

Q: No, I don't think I know my uncle and aunt's names either.



Nguyen: I think my uncle's is Tham, I don't know how to spell it. My best guess is T-H-A-M. Oh, and my aunt's name is Mai, I'm pretty sure.

**00:24:06**

Q: And do you know how old they are, about?

Nguyen: I think, so my dad right now, let's see. I think he's 50, 50 something. Early 50s or late 40s. Not for sure. Actually, I'm not going to give an answer, because I don't know. But I know they're older than my dad, who's 50-ish, and younger than one of my aunts, who was 59. So somewhere in between.

**00:24:42**

Q: Somewhere in there in the 50s. You mentioned that like your dad is really close with his siblings. How does that work in terms of family get togethers, being close with cousins?

Nguyen: So, my aunt lives just the street behind me. Even though she's extended family, it's basically like we're close together. We live under the same household, almost. I always see my cousins from her all the time. My dad's a little bit distant, more distant, with my uncle. I see my cousins, like every two weeks or so. And they live probably all the way in Meridian, down by Victory [Road].

**00:25:33**

Q: And so, how old are your cousins?

Nguyen: Let's see. My aunt's children, who are my cousins, Tom Bui, he's 20 right now, turning 21 in November. Janny, who you know—23? I think she's 23. And then there's Jennifer and Julianne from my uncle. Julianne, I think, is also 23, and Jennifer is older than me, so 19.

**00:26:23**

Q: So they're all quite close in age to you, then.

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, it's really nice. But still younger than them though.

**00:26:36**

Q: It sounds like you hang out with your cousins quite often. What has that been like? Has that always been your childhood? What sorts of things do you do when you hang out?

Nguyen: Oh, we do everything. Back when we were younger, my aunt, she had to work really early in the morning—like three o'clock. So she'd drop off Janny and Tom at my house. And

we'd just hang out. We'd watch TV, dance, we'd play tag. We'd do what kids do. Nowadays, now that we're all grown up, play board games and just talk. We're adults.

**00:27:17**

Q: And so most of your cousins also live in the Boise area.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:27:21**

Q: Okay. What are they up to?

Nguyen: My cousins? Tom lives by himself—well not by himself, but lives away. Works a FedEx job. Janny's doing great. Is only [unclear]. Does marketing for a company. Julianne, she works at a clinic. I think she's working on getting her doctorate right now. Jennifer, she's about to go back to school. She's going to BSU [Boise State University], which is really nice.

**00:28:13**

Q: One other thing I was wondering was—okay, one of the many other things I'm wondering—but I guess I'm just wondering, was English your first language growing up?

Nguyen: I'd like to say I learned Vietnamese before I learned English. I never really truly learned English until I was in probably right before kindergarten, because I don't recall any English before then. I was actually really fluent in Vietnamese before I came to American schooling. Now I just don't know anything.

**00:28:51**

Q: Oh no! Yeah, kids are so fluent in all the languages. So you felt like you grew up speaking predominantly Vietnamese at home, and then once you entered kindergarten, you started speaking English and you feel like you've lost a lot of Vietnamese?

Nguyen: Yeah, I can't speak Vietnamese at all. Like I understand it coming out of other people's mouths, but I cannot speak it.

**00:29:17**

Q: That's so real. Do you feel like that creates any kinds of barriers and communication with family or other people?

Nguyen: Oh, definitely. Not with my close family or my cousins, who understand English because they've been in America for a large part of their life. But whenever I do travel back to

Vietnam, I can't speak with my cousins and my aunts and uncles when we're there. I feel kind of bad. The education system there in Vietnam has definitely gotten better English-wise, so I can sort of hold a English conversation with them.

**00:30:06**

Q: How often have you been able to go back to Vietnam?

Nguyen: I think I'm going over there five different times. Yeah, the most recent time was back in 2018, I'm pretty sure. Or '17.

**00:30:25**

Q: So you always go back to Ho Chi Minh?

Nguyen: Yes, yes. That's where the majority of our family is.

**00:30:30**

Q: Are there any trips that stand out to you, or they all kind of blend together in a way?

Nguyen: My second trip there—and the last trip I just took, I just took back in 2017—the second trip I took, I was really young. I think we pulled myself out of school for a month or two.

Q: That's smart, honestly. The plane tickets are cheaper.

Nguyen: I know, I know. It was just a really nice time to not care about school and hang out with family. At that time, I still retained some of my Vietnamese, but not all of it. And this last time we get to go as a whole family. It was Tom's first time to Vietnam and Janny hadn't been there in like 10 years. So it was really nice having all of them fly over and we just see all my cousins all grown up.

**00:31:42**

Q: Aside from the language barrier, what does it feel like going to Vietnam?

Nguyen: The humidness just blasting you. I mean, it is a third world country and traveling from a first world to the third world, we obviously had to make an adjustment. And the cultural shock. Like, I know I'm Vietnamese. But there's obviously a different culture over there, where they don't really have the same social norms as we do over here. That was definitely something to adjust to. I don't think I'll ever adjust to it.

**00:32:22**

Q: Are there any like particular norms that you're thinking of?

Nguyen: The markets. The meat markets. Their definition of sanitary is very different from ours. That's all I'm going to say about that. They're very loud. You know, the traffic over there.

Q: Oh my gosh, the traffic.

Nguyen: Doesn't exist. No traffic control, I mean.

**00:32:56**

Q: Yeah, I visited Ho Chi Minh, I think right before coronavirus started getting bad in Asia. So that was my first time visiting, and I really liked it. But I was wondering, because I know they have different districts and I don't know if you're familiar with the district names, since you go with family. But there's District One, which is the touristy district, and then I think all the other districts are more residential. Do you know if you go to a particular district?

Nguyen: I don't know the name of it, but it was definitely residential. I didn't see any tourists. At all. Since we're native from there, you can do everything. Well, my parents did.

**00:33:46**

Q: Do your parents ever take you back, like “this is where I did this when I was 10” or not really?

Nguyen: Yeah, they took me back to their school. They memorized all the roads there, and that's crazy, because roads there are confusing. So confusing. What was amazing was that the marketplaces, some of the people remembered them [Eric's parents] after a lot of years. And that was crazy.

**00:34:11**

Q: So you felt like the community there feels pretty strong in that sense?

Nguyen: Oh yeah, definitely. 100% strong. They retained the names for so long and like, “oh, you're that person's town,” and stuff like that.

**00:34:26**

Q: So they recognize you as well?

Nguyen: Yeah, some people are like, “Oh you've grown so much.” I'm like, I don't know you.

**00:34:37**

Q: That makes a lot of sense. That's so cool. Since you mentioned the family names a little bit, I wanted to know if there's any significance, either to your last name or to your own name. I don't know if this is something your family does, but I have a Chinese name as well as “Kathy.” So I'm just wondering if there's any kind of significances to the names in your family.

Nguyen: So there's no significance to my American name. I think we got it from a nurse, like, “Oh, you should name this child Eric.” And they were like, “Okay.” So, I mean, Eric's a pretty nice name, I guess. My last name—not [any significance] to me personally. It's a really common last name anyways. But it does hold some kind of significance because my grandfather really treasured it. And I love my grandfather so much. And my Vietnamese name. I always ask my parents. They tell me and I forget it. Yeah, I do have one. I just don't know what it is.

**00:35:56**

Q: That's so real. Let's see. Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?

Nguyen: Nope. I don't think my mom trusts me with cooking her pho or egg rolls. That's also partly because I'm lazy. I do want to cook. I do want to learn how to cook her pho.

Q: You should learn before school starts.

Nguyen: I know.

**00:36:29**

Q: I think it's a good time to learn. Because you mentioned your mom's a really good cook, are there any sort of favorite dishes you like from her?

Nguyen: I mean, pho's a classic. Bun bo hue. Spring rolls, egg rolls, classic. Com tam, that's amazing.

**00:36:51**

Q: Oh my gosh. Can you buy it here, like the rice grains?

Nguyen: Oh, yeah, yeah. I'm pretty sure, yeah.

**00:37:02**

Q: This is kind of a simplistic question, but do you prefer Vietnamese food over other cuisines or you're like, “they're all good,” or some [cuisines]?

Nguyen: No for sure. Yeah, Vietnamese food. Definitely the best. I eat favorite Asian foods, like Vietnamese food on top, Korean, Chinese, Thai, everything else. I mean, American food's great and sometimes I'll eat hot dogs. But if I had a choice between pho and hamburger? Pho, always.

**00:37:41**

Q: So in school, did you bring a cold lunch with home cooked food or did you usually eat the cafeteria food?

**00:37:48**

Nguyen: Oh no, I used to bring Vietnamese food for cold lunch. I got made fun of and I never brought Vietnamese food ever again.

**00:37:55**

Q: Ugh, yeah, that's Asian kid stories. Were there any other Vietnamese or Asian kids at your elementary schools?

Nguyen: I can't remember any Asian kid from elementary school.

**00:38:17**

Q: Wait, where'd you go again?

Nguyen: I went to Frontier Elementary.

Q: That sounds familiar, but I don't know.

Nguyen: I think there was one kid. But I'm not even sure he was Asian, now that I think about it. Oh, there actually was another Vietnamese girl. I think that's the only other Asian I can remember from elementary. Middle school, I think I was also the only Asian. Yeah, I went to North Star Charter.

**00:38:50**

Q: Okay, is it also West Ada [School District]?

Nguyen: No. It is out of district. I think I was the only Asian in North Star. Yeah—no, there was that Chinese person too. And then high school. I met a lot of Asians.

**00:39:09**

Q: I feel like Renaissance was not the worst, when it comes to the Asian population.

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It was really good. It was really comforting to have more people of my race, especially Vietnamese. There was a couple more Vietnamese people. But yeah.

**00:39:25**

Q: If you feel like you're a part of the Vietnamese community in Idaho, do you feel like it's tight? Do you feel like people see themselves as a community or more like a family-to-family thing?

Nguyen: I definitely think—there's two sides of the Vietnamese community. There's the Christian side, and then the Buddhist side.

Q: The Buddhist side?

Nguyen: Yeah. So I'm Buddhist, and we stay kind of separate but there's no greater identity for the Vietnamese community. If there is, I don't know about it, I'm not part of it. I'm very—I wouldn't say whitewashed—but I don't keep in touch with my Asian culture that much.

**00:40:13**

Q: Yeah, that's interesting, I didn't even know there was a Vietnamese Buddhist community here. How would you describe it, like is it big? Is it just a few families?

Nguyen: It's pretty big. I always see the same faces there. I wouldn't say—it's not bigger than the Christian side. There's definitely more Christian Vietnamese people than Buddhists.

**00:40:46**

Q: So has your family—both your mom and dad's side—always been Buddhist as far as you know?

Nguyen: Yes. Always been Buddhist. My mom is very dedicated to the teachings. She's donated so much money to the Buddhist group.

**00:41:06**

Q: How did that sort of look like in your upbringing, to have your mom be more devoutly Buddhist?

Nguyen: There has been times where she'd only cook vegetarian food and we had to deal with it. There were teachings that brought us up, obviously like stay peaceful, stay pacifist, stay positive. That was great to me. Those were obviously taken from Buddhist teachings.

**00:41:43**

Q: So I'm not as familiar with Buddhism, so you're gonna have to forgive any ignorance.

Nguyen: No worries.

**00:41:50**

Q: But Christians have church. Was there any kind of congregation that you would participate in?

Nguyen: Yeah, I used to, every Sunday, too, in the morning. We'd just go there and meditate with the head monk, and just do a bunch of prayer. It was actually held every single morning, but we only went on Sunday because that's like the most important prayer to do. We'd also do celebrations, like Moon Festival, Mother's Day—like separate Mother's Day from the American Mother's Day here. There's been a lot of celebrations, but lately we just haven't been going to them.

**00:42:33**

Q: Also forgive the terminology. What is the congregation space called?

Nguyen: Like where do we do it?

Q: Yeah.

Nguyen: It's called Linh Thu Buddhist Temple.

**00:42:48**

Q: Oh, okay, where is it?

Nguyen: It's on Overland and Five Mile. On Maple Grove [Court].

Q: I wonder if I've ever seen it.

Nguyen: Yeah, it's tucked behind a Sonic. Like not out in the open.

**00:43:04**

Q: That's cool. And so you mentioned a lot of festivals and holidays and traditions that you've also taken a part of. Do you want to tell me a little bit more about those?



Nguyen: Yeah. So the ones we usually attend is the Mother's Day one, and I think it was the Moon Festival. Oh, and New Year's. Mother's Day, it's to treasure our mothers. We treasure both the ones who have passed away and the ones who are alive. We celebrate how much they nurture us and made us the person we are. Moon Festival, we just light a bunch of lanterns. It's pretty cool. That's all I can remember from it. New Year's, we have a giant feast and we give out those red envelopes. That's all. Those celebrations don't really hold much significance to me as they should be.

**00:44:11**

Q: Is there a reason you feel like it's just not as significant?

Nguyen: I think it's definitely because I'm definitely more Americanized. And now, nowadays, I'm just focusing more on my academics rather than religion.

**00:44:32**

Q: Some more follow ups with that. Do you feel like the Buddhist teachings you've grown up with—do you feel like they're a part of you, or do they feel like more “It's my parents' thing”?

Nguyen: Oh, I definitely think it's more my thing now. My grandfather and my mother taught me about positivity, staying optimistic. I've definitely taken that and made it my own. I'm trying to stay positive, no matter what the situation is.

Q: In the year of 2020!

Nguyen: Right, I know right. It's really hard. It's definitely something that I've kept to my own. Staying pacifist, that type of thing. I don't want to go hunting; I don't want to hurt animals. Vegetarian? That's my mom's thing. I love my meat.

**00:45:31**

Q: I had a follow up question to something else. But I don't think I remember it, so I'll tell you when it comes back to me. Yeah, I think it'll come back to me and then I'll ask when it does. That's really gonna bother me.

**00:45:56**

Q: Anyways, I think we can kind of move—even though I feel like it's been very continuous—but we're moving to the growing up part of your life. So how would you describe your experience growing up?

Nguyen: Kind of both easy and hard. Having basically no parents, because my parents were away at work, and my grandfather and grandmother to raise me a lot of the times. At the time that didn't really affect me, because, I mean, I still saw them. But I love my grandfather and grandmother. They're great people. I think that's cool. I never really noticed that my race played a difference in how people treated me. That's something I grew cognizant of as I grew up, though.

**00:46:51**

Nguyen: Definitely from an early age, I was ingrained to only succeed at school, like only do good at school. I was kept away from sports, unless it was swimming. You know, I was forced to play the piano. Forced to do karate. Yeah, I would say it was both easy and hard. You know, it's childhood. I think it was fun.

**00:47:24**

Q: The follow up question was, earlier you mentioned you feel really Americanized. And I was wondering, what makes you say that? And do you feel like your parents are comfortable with it or do they feel less Americanized in a way?

Nguyen: I think they feel less Americanized, but they are definitely Americanized. You know, in our house, we don't have anything that screams Asian culture. I'm looking around my room. You know, I like American pop music. I dress, typically, in the American way. Not an Asian way. Not culturally Asian. I don't really have an Asian accent stereotypically associated with Asians. Also, I have a lot of American friends who are hardcore [American], hard or die.

**00:48:29**

Q: I was also wondering when your grandparents still lived in the US, were they living in your house?

Nguyen: Yes, yes, this was my grandfather's room.

**00:48:42**

Q: Wow, and now it's yours. And so this is the same house that you grew up in essentially?

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:48:51**

Q: Okay. So, there haven't really been any moves?

Nguyen: No, never. We've owned this house for a really long time. My cousins actually lived here before I was born. Yeah, both cousins, both sets of cousins. My aunt, my uncle. So it's a really good family house.

**00:49:12**

Q: So does it feel a little bit emptier or more spacious with less people around?

Nguyen: Yeah, it's really weird.

**00:49:21**

Q: Yeah, because it's pretty recent, like just a few years ago, right, that your grandparents were living here? And then I also meant to ask about your grandparents earlier. Were they also learning English at the time, or did you mostly communicate with them through—I don't know—Viet-glish? I don't know the term.

Nguyen: They never made an attempt to learn English. I mean, they knew a couple words here and there, like yes and no and hello. But yeah, they never really touched on English at all.

**00:49:56**

Q: So your communication was also always kind of like a mix of languages with them.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**00:50:07**

Q: So since you've lived in the same house and neighborhood, I was wondering if you could describe your neighborhood.

Nguyen: My neighborhood. My dad says that it's filled with Eastern Europeans. A lot of them. Because there's an Eastern European Christian church just, like, *just* down the road over here. Definitely majority are Caucasian. I haven't seen that many children around, up until quarantine started, and I saw so many children around. I just didn't know they existed.

**00:50:51**

Nguyen: I think it's not that dangerous here. We got robbed. And people tried to break in a couple times. That was like 10 years ago though.

Q: That's terrible.

Nguyen: I know. But nowadays it's not that bad. The worst thing that we get, it's like people racing in front of the streets.

**00:51:11**

Q: Oh, that's annoying.

Nguyen: Yeah, it's annoying.

**00:51:16**

Q: Sorry, the questions are getting really not linear at this point, but I think I forgot to ask this earlier. What motivated your family to move from California to Idaho?

Nguyen: I have no idea. I don't know. Maybe cheap houses? But I have no idea. I don't know why they chose Idaho.

**00:51:48**

Q: Idaho's Idaho. Let's see. Who were your friends when you were growing up?

Nguyen: Who were my friends? Elementary school, I didn't really have a group of friends I stuck with. I made one friend though, Kaie. I've been friends with him for 13 years now. I said goodbye to him yesterday, because we'll never see each other for another four years.

**00:52:20**

Q: Was he already moving to college?

Nguyen: Yeah. He's moving to Vermont, which is not that far from Connecticut.

**00:52:31**

Q: I actually have no idea how far it is. I feel like it's like a six hour drive? We do ski trips to Vermont sometimes.

Nguyen: Oh really?

Q: Yeah, but don't expect any trips these days.

**00:52:46**

Q: So he's moving. He's moving kind of early. It's July.

Nguyen: Yeah, trying to get an apartment, I'm pretty sure. Elementary school, middle school, I've had mainly Caucasian friends. Nothing really stands out. I mean, they're just friends to goof around with. In high school, I met a bunch of other minorities. Typically Asian. And they became friends that I didn't really goof around with, but rather, like I'd studied with and do homework with.

**00:53:24**

Q: You mentioned when growing up, you weren't super cognizant of being Asian, or being racially different in a way. And I'm just wondering, with those different sorts of groups of friends, if that came up in any way. Like around friends who are white, if you're like, "oh, I'm not white", or, I don't know, anything like that.

Nguyen: Elementary school, no. I never got any of that. Middle school—well, in elementary school—no, it was middle school actually—I got called out for being smart. Like "oh, you're smart because you're Asian," *okay*. Like, what does that mean? I started getting less ignorant about the stereotype surrounding Asians, like they're smart and that's about it. But I'd never been called out or hammered down about my race, ever, in middle school, even in high school. Well, actually, there's some instances where people—it's not really that good.

**00:54:42**

Q: Do you want to talk about it? I mean, you don't have to.

Nguyen: You know, the Asian man stereotype for having a small, uh, yeah, that.

**00:54:51**

Q: That's so immature.

Nguyen: Yeah, it's immature. Doing like the squinty eyes.

**00:55:00**

Q: Really? People would do that?

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Q: That's so annoying.

Nguyen: It's so stupid. Like, okay, I don't have squinty eyes, and not everyone has a [small male genitalia].

**00:55:13**

Q: Wait, so how did this happen? Like during lunch breaks, they'd just run around pulling their eyelids?

Nguyen: Maybe it was like acquaintances. Like one time I joked with this guy, and he thinks like he's my best buddy. And if it was my best buddy doing it like obviously, I'll know it's all a joke. Sure it's racially insensitive, but I'll let it pass. But this guy that thinks he can joke around with me, he'll do it. And I'm like, "It's not funny, what you're doing." It was the same thing for the Chinese middle finger. [Raises a pinky finger.]

**00:55:48**

Q: I have never heard of that.

Nguyen: Really?

**00:55:51**

Q: Yeah, I've never heard of that.

Nguyen: This thing. [Raises pinky.] People would say this is the Chinese middle finger and then they'd do it at me like I'm offended. Like, I'm not even Chinese, first of all.

**00:56:02**

Q: This happened at Renaissance!

Nguyen: Renaissance, middle school.

**00:56:08**

Q: Oh my goodness, wow.

Nguyen: Oh my favorite transgression actually, in middle school: When people don't get the difference between different Asian types, like Vietnamese, Chinese, Thai, Korean.

Q: I don't expect it [people to know the difference].

Nguyen: "Listen, are you Chinese or Asian?" I'm like, [shakes head]. This girl asked me to speak Asian. I'm like, okay.

**00:56:36**

Q: Yeah, I'm like, if I sit with my thoughts too long, all the memories of ignorance will come back.

Nguyen: In high school, I got asked a lot of people's work, which I did.

Q: Really? Wow.

Nguyen: It gave me more practice. That's why I took them.

**00:56:56**

Q: Did people pay you?

Nguyen: Nope, nope.

Q: Oh no!

Nguyen: It gave me practice. I liked it. But they came to me thinking I was smart at math, which, by the way, I am not. I suck at calculus so much. I can't wait to not take it at Yale.

Q: You don't have to take it.

**00:57:18**

Nguyen: Oh yeah. This interaction will never escape my mind but there's this friend that used to be friends with. But he's extremely sexist and racist. I didn't like him. And he still thinks we're best buds. Every now and then—this one time I was going downstairs and he was down there, like, “Yo, what up, chink.” I'm like, what? That's messed up.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry. That sucks.

**00:57:47**

Q: So with all these instances, did you ever feel like you wanted to call it out or you're just like, let it slide?

Nguyen: Whenever it was a best buddy doing it, I'd let it slide. Obviously he does not mean any ill intent at all. However, when it was some stranger, some person I'd talked to once, I think it's a transgression towards me, especially that one person called me that C-word. I didn't like it at all. I called him out for it, like, “You're not allowed to call me that. At all.”

**00:58:21**

Q: Yeah, those are really hard conversations, I think.

Nguyen: Yeah, I remember when it was people saying I have a small thing. I don't care at all. Like that's not something that's worth challenging. Because obviously if they think that, they're stupid.

**00:58:37**

Q: You mentioned some of your close friends also might just do something they might not be aware is hurtful or offensive. How do you relate to that? Or with those friends, are there other parts of them that you feel good about, or does it make you feel ill towards them?

Nguyen: I don't think there is. Most of my friends now are extremely liberal, like they really care about this BLM [Black Lives Matter] movement.

**00:59:21**

Q: I was like, the Renaissance I knew does not sound like the Renaissance you describe.

Nguyen: No, there's definitely a lot of BLM supporters there. But at Renaissance, there's conservative and liberal, and the conservative portion's very loud. My absolute bestie is half-Filipino, half-Caucasian, and whenever he makes a racial comment, he can relate to it too. He's half. Yeah, he's my best buddy. Whenever my Caucasian friends do it, yeah, I don't care. There's no part of me that believes it's ill intent, unless we're going through something at that time.

**01:00:06**

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. Are these separate friend groups or they're within the same circles of friends?

Nguyen: Yeah, friends I've been describing so far in this interview have been my goofy friends, my fun friends. The friends I study with, they're all minorities, and they don't ever make racial transgressions against me, because they're smarter than that.

**01:00:32**

Q: Could you tell me a little bit more about who's in that friend group and what they're like?

Nguyen: Yeah, there's—hold on, I'm trying to think about who would actually be part of this friend group. So there's a Latinx person, Korean person. There's also a Caucasian. Sorry, I don't want to say white, I want to say Caucasian. We just study together. They're all hard working. I



barely know them, as close, but we do interact a lot with each other, whenever it comes to schooling. Other than that, I don't really interact with them.

**01:01:23**

Q: So you feel like now that college is starting, you're probably just not going to see them? I mean, you can't see them, but I don't know, I feel like you're not going to talk to them as much compared to some of the goofier friends you described?

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah. I'm not going to interact with them that much. They're really snobby and full of themselves. One of them's going to Stanford, and the other one's going to Duke.

**01:01:50**

Q: Idaho's changed so much. That's so strange to me. Yeah, that's cool, though. It sounds like a lot of these friendships formed once you went to Renaissance. How did they happen, or do you have any sort of moments from either of these groups?

Nguyen: Well, actually, my goofy friendship group—they started in middle school. It started when I gave them food snacks or like we read the same book. I remember we read the *Percy Jackson* series together. It was really cool. We became friends over that.

**01:02:34**

Nguyen: Renaissance friends. You know when you're really smart, people just come up to you—or when people, whenever they *perceive* you as smart, rather, they'll try to make friends with you to make connections. It's really sad. People just try to go for you for your intelligence.

**01:02:56**

Q: It sounds like throughout your time in school, you feel like you've stood out for being smart?

Nguyen: Yeah, I think that's the only thing I stood out for, besides being goofy. But yeah, at Renaissance, it's a very cutthroat environment and people always target the people at the top. So it's a really unhealthy environment, and I really didn't like it at all.

**01:03:23**

Q: All. Oh, wow. Yeah, I had no idea. I feel like, I don't know, I feel like maybe Renaissance has always been that way. But I'm older than you by three years and the Renaissance I think of does not feel like that. It just kind of felt like Centennial but snobbier. But, I don't know. I think my year, I don't think anyone got into an Ivy League school from Renaissance. Yeah, I don't know. But I'm not also not that tight with anyone from Renaissance, so I just don't know.

**01:04:01**

Q: So it felt like a really cutthroat environment, just because everyone wanted to be number one.

Nguyen: Be the best, yeah. I mean, at least everyone in my class, class of 2020. I can only speak for that class. Class of 2021, from what my brother tells me, basically the same thing. But yeah, it's really cutthroat. People target you if you're doing really good. Not to brag, but I'm really, really good at chemistry. It's what I want to major in, hopefully.

Q: Oh, awesome.

**01:04:34**

Nguyen: Yeah, people throw out accusations of cheating and doing other stuff. And they try to arrange study groups without you, I remember.

Q: That's so petty!

Nguyen: They'd make study groups without me, just to try to do better than me. It's like, guys, that's not cool. Let me help you. I want to make people do good in chemistry too, because I love talking about it.

**01:05:01**

Q: Why do you think that culture is the way it is?

Nguyen: With my class, I think we're all so future oriented about college. If we saw stats that are higher than us, like, "Oh, this person got 98, I got a 96. I have to do better, or else the Ivy Leagues don't want me." Yeah, *okay*. Yeah, I think my class definitely thought stats were everything.

**01:05:38**

Q: That is so wild.

Nguyen: Oh my god, and SAT<sup>1</sup> days, when everyone's scores come out, that's all the school would be talking about.

**01:05:49**

Q: Oh gosh. How does it feel? Did you have a virtual graduation?

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<sup>1</sup> Originally stood for Standard Aptitude Test and Standard Assessment Test. Acronym no longer means anything. From Mackenzie Maxwell, "What Does SAT Stand For?", *The Classroom*, March 26, 2019, <https://www.theclassroom.com/what-does-sat-stand-4586966.html>.

Nguyen: We have a virtual one and then we got to be in person to “walk” across the stage.

**01:06:01**

Q: Oh, was it at the BSU [Taco Bell Arena]? Sort of?

Nguyen: No, it was at school, because they closed down the stadium.

**01:06:09**

Q: Wait, how many people are in your class?

Nguyen: We had like 130.

Q: Oh, okay, that makes sense.

Nguyen: Yeah.

**01:06:17**

Q: This is more of a future oriented question—but how do you feel? Are you ready to be done with the Renaissance chapter of your life? Do you feel like it was helpful in any way? What are your reflections on being there for four years?

Nguyen: Even though it was really iffy a lot of times, really negative, really cutthroat, I still love the community that was there. Definitely it’s still open, like I can speak my mind about liberal stuff and both conservative stuff and won’t get backstabbed or anything. And I’m definitely glad that my sister and brother are going there because it provides for—they have really good programs. It will help them succeed.

**01:07:09**

Nguyen: But I am done with it for now. Don't want to go back, don't want to think about it. I was actually really happy when they canceled prom, because I did not want to deal with that. I did not want to see anyone else after graduation.

Q: You're like, bye!

**01:07:26**

Nguyen: Just looking forward to being on campus at Yale.

Q: Ugh, that’s a whole other thing [COVID-related adjustments at Yale].

**01:07:37**

Q: I think we touched on a lot of the questions I wanted to ask, but just going back to some growing up questions. And also, I know we're an hour into the interview, so if you're tired or need a break, just let me know.

Nguyen: I'll do 10 minutes.

Q: You'll take a 10 minute break?

Nguyen: No, I'll do one in 10 minutes.

**01:07:58**

Q: Okay. Sounds good. So I guess just some other things about growing up. What sorts of activities do you remember doing when you were, I don't know, 10 or so?

Nguyen: Okay. Piano was definitely a big one. I stayed in piano, I want to say, like four years. Hated it. I hate piano so much. I thought it was a waste of time. I also did tang soo do, which is basically karate. I did that, and I got up to a red belt. That was really fun. I liked it. But once school started getting tougher, I abandoned it.

**01:08:45**

Nguyen: I also did swimming. I hated that. I'm really good at swimming. All these activities, my mom forced me to do, but I never wanted them to do. Activities? Oh, I did a lot of video games. That's the one thing I enjoyed. My mom didn't like that at all.

**01:09:04**

Q: What games?

Nguyen: We started off with a plug-in play console, Power Rangers and Spiderman. We got a Wii. Played Super Smash Bros Brawl, some Mario games. Yeah, Xbox 360, that was great, a lot of memories on there. And then gaming has evolved to on the computer PC. Yeah, I think those are the only activities I remember ever doing.

**01:09:41**

Q: And then jumping forward a few years—did you ever do any extracurriculars at Renaissance?

Nguyen: Yeah, I did a lot of voluntary stuff like baking, this bicycle project. I was part of NHS [National Honor Society], GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance], TSA [Technology Student Association].

What else did I do? I can't think of all my extracurriculars—oh! I did something called Idaho Science and Aerospace Scholars. It was really fun. I loved it.

**01:10:18**

Q: I think my little brother did that. He's a year older than you.

Nguyen: So fun. What else did I do? I'm looking around my room trying to get an idea. I did work over the summer, if that counts as extracurricular. I worked at a bakery and a lemonade stand. It was very fun.

**01:10:39**

Q: That's so cool. So you like baking?

Nguyen: Yes, I love baking pies. Because that's the only thing I know how to bake.

**01:10:51**

Q: That's really cool. So was it through a bakery, or it's your own thing?

Nguyen: Through a bakery, yes. Janny and Tom had the job before me. They let me—they brought me along.

**01:11:04**

Q: Out of all those sorts of things you did outside of school, were there any that were your favorite sort of activities?

Nguyen: Oh yeah, the Idaho Science and Aerospace Scholar program. It was like an online class for the winter semester. And then we got to go to—I call it space camp, because it was just space camp. Yeah, I just got to meet people from all over Idaho. It was really nice. It was really fun.

**01:11:30**

Q: Oh, that's awesome. I think my little brother did the same thing. I don't know. Let me see, I felt like, if you wanted to take a break, this might be a good stopping place, because I think then we can just dive into the rest of the questions.

Nguyen: I will be back in 5 minutes.

Q: I will figure out how to pause the recording.

[INTERRUPTION]

**01:11:53**

Q: So I think where we were talking earlier, we were talking a little bit about your high school and your interests. And I think you mentioned chemistry was one of your favorite subjects. I was just wondering, what other subjects did you like, and also why did you like them, chemistry included?

Nguyen: Yeah, chemistry, I love how it was how atoms interacted. I'm a really STEM [science, technology, engineering, mathematics]-oriented person. But the teacher was also amazing. He was really funny. It was being really sciencey. It was awesome. I was really good at pre-calc. I liked it too. It was really fun. But when calculus came around, it was not that good. A class I really loved was anthropology.

**01:12:51**

Q: Oh my gosh, they have that? I am so shook.

Nguyen: Yeah, I'm planning to major in it—double major in biochemistry and anthropology. But the teacher was amazing. And the life skills they taught us through that class was amazing. I just like looking at different cultures and how they view the world. That was amazing. So, classes I didn't like was literature and English language.

**01:13:21**

Q: Really!

Nguyen: Yeah, I can't, I can't. Apparently I'm—okay—I'm really good at writing. I don't know how, but I can get really good grades. But whenever it comes to like analyzing pieces, I just suck so much. I'm so bad. I really like government. I had it in sophomore year. The fact that I really want to become governor—let's say president—

Q: Goodbye Butch Otter [former governor of Idaho].

Nguyen: Oh, and foreign language was the worst.

**01:14:00**

Q: What did you take?

Nguyen: I took Mandarin.

**01:14:04**

Q: I forgot Renaissance offers it.

Nguyen: The teacher's amazing.

Q: Wait, I think I know the teacher.

Nguyen: Mr. Li?

Q: I think so. Yeah.

**01:14:17**

Q: So you feel like you walked out, not knowing any Mandarin.

Nguyen: Yeah, I've forgotten all of it. But I am planning to take it at Yale.

**01:14:27**

Q: Our Chinese department is really, really good. Yeah.

Nguyen: Okay, that's good, that's good.

Q: I think you'll like it. Also, I'm pretty sure they're very lenient with their grading.

**01:14:49**

Q: What do I want to talk about? You can answer it how you want, but do you see yourself as Asian American or Vietnamese American or just Vietnamese or just American. Is there any way you see or categorize yourself?

Nguyen: It depends on who I'm interacting with. Like if I'm interacting with other Asians, I'll identify as Vietnamese American, just distinguish the type of Asian I am. Whenever I'm interacting directly with Caucasian people, I'll say I'm Asian American. Most of the time I won't distinguish what type of Asian I am, because mostly I don't think it's important information, unless they ask for it. Most of the time, I think they're ignorant of the type of Asian too. Just because of my horrible experiences from middle school.

**01:15:50**

Q: Are there any sorts of traditions—whether it's Vietnamese-inflected or not—any traditions or customs that you've been practicing at home that you anticipate bringing with you to college? Or some that you're intending on dropping?

Nguyen: What traditions did I do? I used to always in the morning light an incense stick for my grandfather and for Buddha. I stopped that recently. I don't know why I dropped it. I just did. But I can't recall any Asian traditions—well, I'll take over food though. Imma learn pho, other traditional food, and take it with me. [Unclear.] And cook.

**01:16:48**

Q: Again, answer how you want to. But if you plan on having kids or think you might have kids, what sorts of traditions would you want to pass on? Would you want them to only marry or prefer for them to marry a Vietnamese American person? If you have thoughts about it, which I know it's really far off.

Nguyen: Yeah, no worries. I don't know if I'm gonna have kids. It's whatever the wife wants. Like, if she doesn't want kids, then she doesn't want kids. I'll be like, okay. Traditions I'll pass on to them: obviously, I want to set up—like in our house, we have a little prayer altar dedicated to my grandfather. I want to set one of those up for him. Obviously the tradition of hardworking and academic wise. I think it's really important to get the most out of your education. And I don't care who they date, because right now I'm not allowed to date any other person but Asian people. My dad won't let me. But it's only me.

**01:18:03**

Q: So your parents want you to date only Asians or only people who are Vietnamese?

Nguyen: They prefer Vietnamese. But like, as long it's Asian. But this rule is only on me. And on my sister, I'm pretty sure. Not on my little brother, who's dating a Caucasian girl, who's a fourth Indian, but it doesn't show. He gets to go with.

**01:18:29**

Q: Why do you think that is?

Nguyen: I don't know. I think they grew up with the stereotype that Caucasians and any other race is not as hardworking as Asians. So they view it as I put myself in danger if I dated anyone else but their own race.

**01:18:52**

Q: Going to college, do you anticipate yourself breaking certain rules of your parents?

Nguyen: Oh, no. Dating in college is something I don't know about.

**01:19:08**



Q: Yeah. Zoom University is also its own thing.

Nguyen: I know right. Maybe. I'll see when the time comes.

**01:19:20**

Q: Yeah, definitely. I will say this is an aside, but I had a lot of culture shock going to Yale.

Nguyen: Really?

**01:19:29**

Q: Yeah, it's a very different lifestyle than what I was used to.

Nguyen: That's good to know. I love culture shock.

Q: You're ready for something new.

**01:19:43**

Q: Let's see, these are also some broader questions. But how do you see your place in America? And you can define that how you want.

Nguyen: My place in America. Well, my ultimate goal in life is to do something really noteworthy. I really want to—this is far off—but I want to cure cancer. Cancer has taken away so much from my family, and I think it's my personal vendetta against it.

**01:20:19**

Nguyen: Hopefully, not live up to the stereotype of a model immigrant, or how does it go—

Q: Model minority.

Nguyen: Yeah, model minority. Yeah, but not live up to it or prove that it's right. We're good, hard-working citizens. One of my great goals is just to relieve my parents of their debt that they have.

**01:20:56**

Nguyen: My place in America. That's a really good question. Hopefully, make it a better place, both scientifically and socially.

**01:21:11**

Q: You were mentioning that cancer has been personally really difficult in your family. Is it with your grandpa and other family members?

Nguyen: Yeah, my grandfather had lung cancer. My aunt, who died two weeks ago, leukemia. My uncle, I think, also had lung cancer. My dog had lung cancer. Especially lung cancer, I think I'll start with that. I'm hoping to get into research at Yale, focusing on cancer.

**01:21:50**

Q: Yeah, I mean, also, I don't know about the current state of Yale's cancer research. I'm sure you know more, but I feel like a lot of really important cancer discoveries took place at Yale, as well. Like, I think they took the use of mustard gas and used that to develop the first chemotherapies and that was at Yale School of Medicine.

Nguyen: Oh wow, I didn't know that.

**01:22:16**

Q: You mentioned it already, but maybe if there's anything you want to add since you brought up the model minority—do you think it's accurate? Do you see it reflected in your own life or are they things that you disagree with or anything like that? Like, what are your takes on the model minority?

Nguyen: Um, yeah, I think—first of all, I don't think there should be any labels for minority, anything like that. I don't think there should be rankings of minorities who, you know. That's kind of messed up in giving a definition to that. However, I do believe that all Asians have been at least really hard working. We tried to not do anything that gets in law enforcement's way. Or you know, we've never done anything bad. By “we”, I mean the people that I know. I really wish it wasn't a ranking, like by saying “model minority”, there's a ranking of minorities, and I think that's quite messed up.

**01:23:38**

Q: Yeah. Do you feel like you've benefited from it in any way?

Nguyen: Oh yeah, no, like people call me smart. And that's part of the model minority. Yeah, people don't assume that it's me if there's a bad thing going on. They'll assume any other race.

Q: Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense.

**01:24:09**

Q: I think I'm in the “looking forward” section of my question notes, so things are going to be about present day and onwards. So I think—again, these are all kind of contentious topics, so answer with whatever feels comfortable. But obviously there's a lot of protests going on in the country, and you mentioned a lot of your friends are really involved in the sort of the debates that are taking place. Has that been significant to you in any way?

Nguyen: Has the movement been significant to me? I think it's really important that this movement succeeds in order for racial equality. Myself, I'm not really active in the movement. I'm just not really active when it comes to social movements. I believe in them, I support them, but I know I'm not active and I do feel bad sometimes, doing nothing. It's like almost supporting the other side, which I don't see, because I don't support the other side at all.

**01:25:30**

Nguyen: I'm all for, like the—I forget what it was called—“Yellow Peril for” something like that [“Black Lives”]. That's great. That's great to see. But I also think it's kind of odd that most of the time, Asians are left out of this racial equality movement you see going on. Like six years ago, we had almost the same movement going on after another unarmed Black teenager was killed. We had almost the same kind of outcry come out. And no references of Asians came out during that time. I think it's really interesting to see Asians getting called out this time. It's really nice.

**01:26:11**

Q: Makes sense. You also mentioned—it sounds like some of your friends can come from pretty different political leanings and ideologies. Do you feel like you have to navigate between those, or what is it like for you to be friends on a bipartisan sort of way?

Nguyen: It's kind of hard to navigate. Because of my friends, I'm pretty much middle ground between the two parties. Yeah, whenever I'm with my conservative friends, I'll be more conservative, because I'm not one to invoke argument at all. Whenever I'm with my liberal friends, I'll be a little bit more liberal, but again not to invoke argument. Yeah, that's how I act around them politically.

**01:27:14**

Q: Yeah. And then another current issue is obviously COVID-19. And so I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about how it's affected your life and—yeah, we can start with that.

Nguyen: Yeah. So, definitely near the beginning, there was that “Asians have it” stereotype, like “Asians are more likely to have it” or something like that, I don't know. I think it was really messed up, but I hated seeing that. It was like, okay, viruses are not racist, all right? They'll target anything in their path.

**01:27:49**

Nguyen: And at school, people would joke around and say, “Oh, watch out. He's Asian, he has COVID.” Like, okay.

Q: Really? At school?

Nguyen: Yeah. It was messed up.

**01:28:03**

Nguyen: They really do the Asian stereotype. And whenever I saw [President] Trump in the news saying “Chinese virus” or he said, I don't know, I need to fact check this, but he said “kung flu.”<sup>2</sup> That’s messed up.

Q: Oh yeah, he did.

Nguyen: He did? That’s all...just call it coronavirus. It's COVID-19. It has a science name, call it its science name. Yeah, that pissed me off a lot. But yeah. That’s my experience with COVID, personally.

**01:28:34**

Q: Yeah, we are all living in this moment, but just because this is also a public record, maybe talking a little bit about how it affected your time in school, upcoming college plans, things like that.

Nguyen: Oh yeah, how did it affect? School was shut down and we had no school for three weeks, almost four weeks. We moved on to online school. The only classes we were required to complete online were our college classes, our dual enrollment classes. So any other class I had, it was not my duty to do. So yeah, I only had, like, two college classes to do. That was really nice.

**01:29:24**

Nguyen: I found out that whenever Bulldog Days [Yale’s admitted student weekend] were cancelled or Visatas [Harvard’s admitted student weekend] was cancelled for Harvard, it was really saddening to not visit them at all. It made that choice for college a lot harder.

Q: Wow, that is really hard.

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<sup>2</sup> BBC, “President Trump calls coronavirus 'kung flu',” June 24, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-53173436/president-trump-calls-coronavirus-kung-flu>.

Nguyen: But I think I made the right choice with Yale. For sure.

**01:29:51**

Nguyen: I'm in the FSY [First-Year Scholars] program for Yale. Usually it's online, I mean, not online—on campus. But now it's online.

**01:30:00**

Q: Oh, so you're doing FSY right now.

Nguyen: Yeah, it's really fun.

Q: Are you taking, like, English 114?

Nguyen: Yeah, yeah.

**01:30:06**

Q: Which one are you taking? Sorry, this is just for me.

Nguyen: I'm doing "Gossip, Scandal, Celebrity".

Q: Oh sounds cool. Is that the only class you're taking?

Nguyen: Yeah. I'm doing a math course in the next three weeks.

Q: Like Math 120? Math 1—I don't remember.

Nguyen: I think it's like—I don't remember. It's a half-credit course, so.

**01:30:33**

Q: Oh, that's so annoying. Although I'm sure you'll get lab credit, since you're interested in chemistry.

**01:30:44**

Q: Yeah, so, how are you liking the English class?

Nguyen: It's pretty difficult. I haven't done analytical writing for English in a while.

Q: Oh yeah, 114 is a pretty hard class.

Nguyen: For our last year of English for Renaissance, we barely did any analytical writing. Because in IB [International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme]—I was in the IB program—we did more improvisational. I don't know how to describe it. But it was not analysis writing, like deep analysis writing. So it's pretty hard right now and I haven't looked at it yet, but we have a reading homework. And I have a group chat, like people in the class, complaining about it already. I'm not excited. I have an essay due too.

**01:31:36**

Q: Yeah, oh my gosh. I think it's like four essays, right?

Nguyen: Yeah. Three. Yeah.

**01:31:45**

Q: Who's your professor?

Nguyen: Her name is Margaret Delly.

Q: Oh, I don't know her. But that's cool.

**01:31:54**

Q: Also, this is kind of jumping back to previous topics, but I was also wondering, do your parents or siblings engage in current issues or national politics or local politics in any way?

Nguyen: No, not at all. I was the one to get my parents to finally get registered to vote. Up to then, they never voted, ever. It's a civil duty to vote.

**01:32:20**

Q: When was that?

Nguyen: I think I got them to do it last year, I think was the first time they voted. Lilly, my little sister, she's on Tik Tok a lot. She sees a lot of political stuff on there, and sometimes she'll bring it up with me. None of them are really active in it.

**01:32:45**

Q: Yeah, so, maybe I'll pause the recording real quick.

[INTERRUPTION]

**01:32:53**

Q: Okay, so I'll just ask that question. So your parents are US citizens.

Nguyen: Yes, they are.

Q: And, do you know when they became US citizens?

Nguyen: No idea. I would venture to say they had a citizenship before I was born.

Q: Yeah, parent things. Okay, but they weren't registered to vote until last year.

**01:33:31**

Q: I think we're also coming down to the last couple of questions. These are all good. Okay. How is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?

Nguyen: It's definitely a lot darker, more negative, now that I'm less ignorant about the world's problems. When I was a child, like I said, race wasn't the thing for me. I never knew that races were a thing. Nowadays, I think it's almost like the defining factor of a person. When it comes to other people and how they judge you, race will be their number one go-to thing to know how to judge people. Yeah, the world's more negative, now that I'm more in tune with the news and see all the horrible crap that's going on.

**01:34:26**

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. What accomplishments are you most proud of?

Nguyen: Obviously, getting into Yale. [Gestures to his Yale cap.] Yeah, no. It's been so long since application stuff. And finally to see it pay off, it's so nice to see.

**01:34:48**

Q: When'd you find out? Did you just find out everything in April?

Nguyen: Yeah, so, the day after Ivy Day [the day when college decisions are announced by Ivy League universities].

**01:34:56**

Q: Wow that's so exciting. That's awesome. Yeah, I guess, like maybe tell me a little bit more. What does it feel like to be going to Yale soon?

Nguyen: I think it's every Asian American kid's dream to make their parents proud. And going to Yale, going to go to this amazing school, I think I made them proud that I'm going to Yale. It's so true. Being with people from all over the country, all over the world, such intelligent people, hopefully to better myself, make cool friends or future presidents and stuff.

**01:35:39**

Q: Yeah, definitely. I think it is something to be proud of. This is maybe a related question, maybe not, but what is the most important or meaningful event or experience in your life? Which I think is a hard question. What is the happiest moment in your life thus far?

Nguyen: Probably getting accepted into Yale. That's the only thing that can come to mind right now. Like I couldn't sit down that day at all. I was just too happy and too hyped that I got into amazing colleges. But yeah, I can't think of any other moment.

**01:36:24**

Q: Yeah. Makes sense, I guess, is there anything that you're nervous about starting kind of this new journey of your life?

Nguyen: Yeah, I'm really nervous about making friends, going to a new place.

Q: Ugh, with COVID!

Nguyen: I'm also scared about if it's online, it's super hard to make friends, especially with people you don't know. It's good that we're doing it in the fall. That way, I make friends, we establish contact, we can probably do Zoom hangouts in the spring semester. Yeah, that's really the only thing I'm fearing, besides the difficulty of the classes, which...Yale classes.

Q: You know, some classes are not that hard, I will tell you that. Just have to choose carefully.

**01:37:16**

Q: I guess you've also talked about your future goals. You've talked about wanting to cure cancer. So some of these questions, it sounds like you've already answered, and it's cool, but what are your dreams and visions for your future? And also what is one thing you want people to remember about you?

Nguyen: So dreams and goals. Yeah. Like I said, cure cancer. That's a really long term goal. Financially provide for my family. Short term goal, now I'm looking to med school or grad school. I don't know which yet.



Q: You don't have to know!

**01:37:59**

Nguyen: What was the other question? Oh, what do I want people to remember about me? I don't know. Probably a positive attitude. I really want them [loved ones] to remember—I want them to be happy, so don't ever be sad if I'm gone. If I do cure cancer, remember me.

Q: I'm sure no one will forget.

**01:38:31**

Q: Oh, okay. Well, that brings me to the end of my questions. So I just wanted to ask a final question. Is there anything you want to add that you felt like we haven't covered?

Nguyen: Let's see. I think—no. Not really. I'm trying to think of stuff, but I think we touched on a lot of topics.

**01:39:02**

Q: That's awesome. So I'm going to stop recording and I really hope it recorded well.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Eric Nguyen
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	2
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	July 20, 2020

**00:00:03**

Q: Today is July 20, 2020, and I'm doing a follow up interview with Eric Nguyen. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer, and we're just going to follow up on the last interview we had.

**00:00:17**

Q: So first question. Growing up, did you ever feel represented in textbooks or in media?

Nguyen: I don't think so. Ever. First of all, in history textbooks, they barely ever touched upon Asian history, ever. And if it did, it would be touching on Chinese history, never anything Vietnamese-related. Unless it was the Vietnam War, which, in that case, it covered the American perspective.

**00:00:53**

Nguyen: In the media, I can't recall any news stories concerning Asians. At all, now that I think about it. During my childhood. I didn't really pay attention to the news. But in terms of school textbooks and stuff, I don't think so. At least from the perspective of a Vietnamese American, I've never seen my perspective portrayed in the textbook.

**00:01:25**

Q: Yeah, you mentioned you also sometimes learned about Chinese American history. What did you learn about that? And would you say you learned a lot or what was that experience like?

Nguyen: Well, in middle school, we learned about ancient Chinese history, like the dynasties and everything. But when we really learned about it was, when the Transcontinental Railroad was being built, a lot of workers on the west side of the world were Chinese Americans. And what we learned about them was very, very, very brief, but they were very cheap workers, cheap labor,

basically. And they'd have—how do you say?—conflict with the other workers, Irish Americans. But that's what I remember from it.

**00:02:29**

Q: Did you ever learn any Asian American history in an Idaho context?

Nguyen: I don't think so. Ever. Which is kind of sad, because, you know, I'm part of that history. But I don't remember learning anything in terms of Asians in Idaho.

**00:02:48**

Q: And then you also mentioned the Vietnam War being portrayed from an American perspective. So, do you have any sort of reflections on how you learned about the Vietnam War, and what that experience was like for you?

Nguyen: Yeah, so we learned it through the textbook and, you know, I was the target of many stares whenever reading or looking at a documentary. They're like, “Oh, that's you [points finger].” That's kind of racist, but whatever.

**00:03:23**

Nguyen: I remember this one argument I had with this one kid, and we were arguing, “Oh, north versus south, which side was on the side of Americans?” This guy was saying it was the north side siding with the Americans, I was saying it was the South—correct me if I'm wrong. It's the South. I know I'm right.

**00:03:44**

Nguyen: He was saying, “My grandfather fought in the war, so I should know.” I'm like, “Well, my grandfather also fought in the war. So I know.” You know, it [learning about the American War in Vietnam] was kind of traditional in the sense that we read the textbook, watched the documentary. That's how I learned about it.

**00:04:07**

Q: Another question I had was, Idaho's a very Mormon state. So I was wondering, do you feel like you've had a particular kind of experience interacting with Mormons, or if you have any impressions about living in a very Mormon area?

Nguyen: Yeah, living in a very Mormon state. I mean, Mormons are very conservative in their religious beliefs. They restrict a lot of what their followers can and cannot do. You know, I don't really care about what they do, as long as they don't infringe onto my abilities and my freedom.

Honestly, I've never really had that many conflicts with Mormons. Or at all. But yeah, I don't know what else I want to say.

**00:05:12**

Q: And then I think this is the last question, but in your interview you talked about the way that gender and race intersect for you. And I'm wondering if there's any follow-ups you want to add, either about gender identity and sexuality—if any of those play a role in your life that you haven't touched on yet?

Nguyen: Let's see, race and gender. Well, in terms of being Asian and a male, obviously that puts you in a role of head of family—not right now, but whenever my father passes away, that'll put me in the position of head of the family, which means I have to be supportive of the family. I'm the backbone of it. That's the expectation that the male patriarch [sic].

**00:06:14**

Nguyen: When it comes to expectations, I guess, you can't really show emotions as a male. Also, on top of that, I've never seen my father cry. I've seen him cry twice my whole entire life. And then that goes back to the expectations of males, not to show any emotion in terms of tears and sadness. I guess that's it. I don't know what else I said in the other interview.

**00:06:56**

Q: Yeah, you're good. Oh, maybe a small follow-up, just for fun. I know things are really weird with COVID, but are there things like activities and extracurriculars that you're wanting to do once you get to campus?

Nguyen: Well, there's that fashion show I wanted to do, like participate in fashion. I'm really big into fashion. I love it! And they had this catwalk thing and you design your own stuff. It's models and everything. I want to do that.

**00:07:23**

Nguyen: Research, of course, undergraduate research. That's a big thing. Honestly, community service, helping the community in any way, shape, or form, like education ways. I did a lot of volunteering in high school in terms of education in science and doing experiments for these kids and make them learn about science. And that was really amazing, really fun, and I hope to carry that out in New Haven and expand education in lower income areas. That's one of my main goals.

**00:08:02**

Nguyen: Since I'm pre-med—I think I'm pre-med—I can do volunteering for the hospital, you know, typical volunteering stuff you see for a pre-med. I'm hoping to do a sport, actually. I really want to do—I'm not a professional, like I'm not going to do a collegiate sport—I think it's intramural. Yeah, just for fun, maybe volleyball or swimming or anything. I want to try something though.

**00:08:29**

Q: I hope all of those things are available to do. Is there a particular reason why you're interested in fashion or do you know when that interest started for you?

Nguyen: Well, first of all, start with Janny and Tom—those are my cousins. They dress really up to date, really—I don't know how to describe it. But I really liked their fashion sense. I was like, “Wow, I should get into fashion too.” Wearing a good outfit boosts my self confidence. Right, so it definitely helps my self esteem, which is really nice. I want to say it started probably freshman year of high school. At that time, it was button-ups—but a good fashion sense of button-ups. It wasn't tacky or anything like that. Now, I think it's more hipster-like. More up to date.

**00:09:40**

Q: Yeah, awesome. Anyways, those are all my follow-up questions. So between the last interview, especially since you had a chance to look at the transcript, and this one, is there anything you feel like you want to say that hasn't been covered or you would just want to have final words or anything?

Nguyen: I don't think so. I think we've covered pretty much everything that there is to be living Asian American in Idaho. So, yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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