

Final Transcript

Narrator: An Chau

Interviewer: Brandon Chau

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Sub-Collection: My Việt Nam Story Oral History Project at UC Irvine

Length of interview: 01:00:47

00:00:01.880 --> 00:00:22.279

Brandon Chau: This is Brandon Chau. Today is Sunday, November 6th, 2022 I'll be interviewing for the first time Mr. An Chau. This interview is taking place at our family home in West Covina, California. This interview is part of my Vietnam story Oral History project at UC Irvine, would you state and spell your name, please?

3

00:00:22.740 --> 00:00:31.170

An Chau: My name is An Chau. First name is A-N, last name is C-H-A-U.

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00:00:31.170 --> 00:00:33.300

Brandon Chau: and when and where were you born?

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00:00:33.890 --> 00:00:36.889

An Chau: In 1956 in Chợ Lớn, Vietnam

7

00:00:39.450 --> 00:00:42.950

Brandon Chau: And can you tell me a little bit about Chợ Lớn, Vietnam?

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00:00:43.780 --> 00:01:06.109

An Chau: This was economic, you know. Yeah, business. Yeah, This is the business of most of the Chinese community stayed in.

Brandon Chau: So it was like where all the Chinese people in Vietnam lived and started businesses.

An Chau: Yeah that's Chợ Lớn, yeah.

12

00:01:06.160 --> 00:01:12.449

Brandon Chau: And did your family ever have any involvement in the business area.

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00:01:12.580 --> 00:01:14.850

An Chau: Yes, in the coffee shop.

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00:01:15.550 --> 00:01:17.930

Brandon Chau: Can you tell me a little bit more about the coffee shop?

16

00:01:18.680 --> 00:01:20.479

An Chau: Um during that time, you know. I'm still as a student. So in the morning, you know, about four o'clock in the morning I wake up helping my mom and dad to open the coffee shop. And after that, I come home and get ready for school. And during the weekend, I helped out with business in the coffee shop. And at lunch time I come home, have my lunch, and have a little in the coffee shop. And after that I have to go back to school again.

00:02:00.610 --> 00:02:05.610

Brandon Chau: and how was it trying to run the coffee shop with um, mama and grandpa?

23

00:02:06.980 --> 00:02:18.480

An Chau: Oh, I was kind of busy in school and helping the coffee shop at the same time.

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00:02:19.880 --> 00:02:34.030

Brandon Chau: Was the coffee shop pretty successful in the district

An Chau: Not really, only enough to support living in a family.

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00:02:34.890 --> 00:02:35.750

Brandon Chau: Okay

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00:02:35.960 --> 00:02:50.089

Brandon Chau: And you said that you were helping run this coffee shop or like helping out around the coffee shop when you were in school. So what was it like growing up? How is it going to school?

31

00:02:51.980 --> 00:02:54.580

An Chau: You mean growing up?

32

00:02:54.860 --> 00:03:00.749

Brandon Chau: Yeah, like, How were your friends? How? What was it like going to school? Can you tell me a little bit about that?

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00:03:01.140 --> 00:03:15.950

An Chau: Yeah, I was going to school, you know, during the day, and just you know, a study.

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00:03:17.320 --> 00:03:22.900

Brandon Chau: Okay. Um, Did you have like a lot of friends when you went to school?

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00:03:23.070 --> 00:03:26.950

An Chau: Oh yeah of course, I have many friends at school and um you know weekends sometimes most of my friends have events. Sometimes I joined in and sometimes I don't because I have to help the family run the coffee shop.

41

00:03:42.620 --> 00:04:13.400

Brandon Chau: And what was it like with your teachers? What was it like going to school and learning from them?

An Chau: Very much the teachers... In our culture, when we're in school, we have to respect the teachers like a parent. We have to listen. Every little thing they were teaching us. Even we have some mistake, we get a punishment, that's normal in our culture.

43

00:04:13.400 --> 00:05:05.990

Brandon Chau: And was it any different because um, you grew up in uh Chợ Lớn? Was there any like difference from like Vietnamese kids who grew outside of it?

An Chau: A little bit different. Some kids they are unable, because their family cannot support them financially, to go to school. They have to be on the street and selling things and pick up scrap or whatever to help out their family. But for us, lucky us, we can support during the war. So with the coffee shop, my parents can support me for the school. So that's one thing that I appreciate with my life over there during that time.

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00:05:06.650 --> 00:05:12.650

Brandon Chau: So you said um, you were going to school uh during the war. Is that right?

An Chau: Yeah.

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00:05:12.700 --> 00:05:22.569

Brandon Chau: So when you were a kid, uh, did you notice anything going on? Did you see anything about the war? See anything happen or read about it?

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00:05:23.210 --> 00:06:56.520

An Chau: Yeah, During the war I can see many things happen, you know, during the war, even we live in Chợ Lớn. While I was going to school, I still remember during that time the most... in the memory that was second day of the Lunar New Year in 1968. That's where the city war started. So we cannot go out to the street in that morning. We cannot go out to the street or anywhere, any activity. We have to hide at home, under the bed, or lie on the floor to try to avoid the war and the bullets that get inside the house that can hit somebody. In that couple days, everybody stay home and you can see the war outside on the street. We can hear it. So, when the war stop, then we went out and we saw it. On some of the doors on my street, they have bullets going through because the gun fighting on both sides.

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00:06:56.520 --> 00:08:11.920

Brandon Chau: so there is fighting like outside of your home?

An Chau: Yeah outside of the home on the street. So, [asking wife for translation in English for a Vietnamese word]the alley. In the street it was different. That was a big one. They had the war outside and they go into the alleys. Our house was in the alley. When we went out, we saw it. And even, you know, after the war the fighting stopped and we went out, on the street we saw some dead bodies on the street.

Brandon Chau: Like your neighbors?

An Chau: Oh no, that was people I don't know because those people, they have the gun fighting on both sides.

Brandon Chau: So the soldiers?

An Chau: Kind of like soldiers but not really [asking wife to make sure he translated correctly]. Some of them were communists but some were local. We can't identify who is that. But both sides they had gunshots and shooting on the street.

92

00:08:11.920 --> 00:08:17.080

Brandon Chau: And you said that this is when the Communists came into the city?

An Chau: Yeah.

Brandon Chau: And what city was this?

An Chau: Chợ Lớn. I think that Chợ Lớn and Saigon are the same because the [unintelligible] the Chinese New Year affected the whole city.

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00:08:31.500 --> 00:09:34.600

Brandon Chau: And what was it like um going back to school or walking through the streets after that happened? What did you?

An Chau: Oh, no, that's the the second day of the New Year. Up until the eighth or the ninth day, we were supposed to go back to school on the eighth day of the Lunar New Year but all of the schools stopped because of the war. So nobody could go back to school until after that. So you know during that couple days, we saw so many things happen on the street. And kind of like they used something, building up like the sandbags here in the street. And they were shooting. And we saw that on the street.

Brandon Chau: So sandbags-

An Chau: Not sandbags, whatever they could pile up to lay down to fight.

106

00:09:34.600 --> 00:09:59.520

Brandon Chau: And how did you feel when all of these things were going on like when you were trying to hide in your house?

An Chau: Oh we were scared. Because you never know where the bullets went. It might head into your house or hit into your house but on the street you saw many.

114

00:09:59.520 --> 00:10:20.860

Brandon Chau: and you didn't see anything or um read about anything about the war before this, when you were going to school or in the shop?

An Chau: No we didn't see anything happen but only the second day of the new year, we saw that happen.

116

00:10:20.860 --> 00:10:30.600

Brandon Chau: So later on in the year uh, were you able to do more things like go back to school, or did you have to stop going to school completely?

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00:10:31.030 --> 00:11:19.400

An Chau: No. After that we go back to school. I forgot how many day, but more than about ten days, I believe. Until the school reopened and we got notified, we went back. So I don't know how long. But the little question you asked before, do I know anything before or after, did we see anything or feel anything... but in Vietnam, we were in the war but

not in the city. That was in the other state of the country. So, only the new year that happened in the city.

126

00:11:19.400 --> 00:11:27.650

Brandon Chau: So what was it like when you went back to school like. How was everyone feeling, or what? What did they say? Did your teachers talk about it at all?

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00:11:27.880 --> 00:11:46.730

An Chau: I forgot about that. But uh, on our students side I know we're talking about the how we hiding, you know, at home. What we were doing at home. What we were going to do to get food, eat, something like that. There's no market. Whatever food was left in Vietnam or the food prepared for the new year, we ate those.

130

00:11:47.160 --> 00:11:53.569

Brandon Chau: So there wasn't any more um food that you could buy in the market?

131

00:11:55.010 --> 00:11:57.640

An Chau: Oh no, everything was totally closed.

132

00:11:57.780 --> 00:12:03.070

Brandon Chau: How did you, Mama, and the rest of the family get food to eat?

134

00:12:03.480 --> 00:12:10.570

An Chau: Whatever we have uh at the home, you know. Because before the New Year, most people prepared food for the new year because... Lunar New year, you know, the markets close they don't open. We ate the food we prepared for the new year.

Brandon Chau: So it sounds like you guys had a lot saved up already to keep you fed for a little bit?

An Chau: Yeah.

139

00:12:38.270 --> 00:12:43.370

Brandon Chau: during the last few years of the war when you are still in school, did it get any worse like? What did you see?

141

00:12:49.710 --> 00:12:52.879

An Chau: The last of the before couple... you mean before the couple of year when I-

143

00:12:57.030 --> 00:13:46.960

Brandon Chau: Before 1975.

An Chau: Before 1975? During that couple of years- lets see. Before 1975, I was still a student and I went to school. During that time, we still have the fighting little by little.

Brandon Chau: So in your city, there were little fights between all soldiers?

An Chau: Kind of like in the city, [unintelligible] out of the state we heard the news saying where they had the fight, where they lose, the war or whatever. In the city, it's not that common.

151

00:13:46.960 --> 00:13:53.700

Brandon Chau: Did you um have any like sort of feelings when you guys heard about all of these fights every day on the news?

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00:13:54.790 --> 00:14:50.950

An Chau: We were concerned but nothing we can do. You know, nothing we can do so we keep going to school and try to study good so we stay away from the military trap. You know what I mean?

Brandon Chau: There were military traps in Saigon?

An Chau: Draft, right?

Brandon Chau: Oh there was a military draft?

An Chau: Yeah, when you up to that age you have to go unless you have the good grades as a student so you can continue to study. So I have good grades so- also my age did not reach the military draft yet.

164

00:14:51.420 --> 00:14:59.109

Brandon Chau: Who was trying to draft you? Was it the Republic, or was it the-

An Chau: The Republic. So first of all during that time and my age, I'm not going to go to the draft yet and also I got good grades as a student so i could stay in school.

165

00:15:12.800 --> 00:15:17.359

Brandon Chau: So during your last few years of school they were trying to draft you for the military?

An Chau: Like I said, with my age not yet.

166

00:15:21.690 --> 00:15:23.829

Brandon Chau: So after you left school they tried to?

An Chau: After school, that was 1995, the communists were already taking over. [Interviewee's wife intervened to correct his timing] 1975. There was no more war.

167

00:15:38.420 --> 00:15:45.639

Brandon Chau: Was there anything else that you had to do to uh avoid the draft?

169

00:15:47.430 --> 00:17:44.410

An Chau: You mean before seventy-five or after seventy five?

Brandon Chau: Yeah. You said that they were trying to draft you for the military. So you said that you got good grades so that kept you a little bit out of the uh draft. But did you have to do anything else like to avoid the draft?

An Chau: Before 75, my age was not qualified yet. After that, after 1975, the communists tried to draft. But during that time, I'm older so during the day, I have to go to the market to sell something, selling food or whatever to support my family. But at the same time, I have to go to some clinic. So, I have to pretend I have mental problems. Then, I could stay away from the draft because I'm mentally ill.

Brandon Chau: So the Viet Cong were going through the streets to try and get people to join the military?

An Chau: yeah during that time they were trying to draft and people were going to Cambodia. So uh, I try to avoid those. So I have to, you know, pretend I'm mentally ill.

189

00:17:44.410 --> 00:17:47.780

Brandon Chau: You said they were trying to get soldiers to go to Cambodia?

An Chau: Yeah, that time they were trying to draft somebody to go to the military. I tried to avoid the draft and pretend I'm mentally ill.

195

00:18:08.670 --> 00:18:15.830

Brandon Chau: And what made you decide to pretend to be mentally ill to avoid the draft?

An Chau: What do you mean?

198

00:18:16.060 --> 00:18:22.059

Brandon Chau: Like what made you uh want to stay out of the military to avoid the draft?

199

00:18:22.330 --> 00:18:29.810

An Chau: Uh in that time, you know my older brother tried to help me. They know that sooner or later at my age they were going to draft me. So he took me to the clinic. It helped me out.

202

00:18:43.970 --> 00:18:49.900

Brandon Chau: So you uh did you pretend because you didn't want to like go fight?

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00:18:50.720 --> 00:19:03.580

An Chau: No, I don't want to join the military for the fight at all especially you know, I don't have any experience with the military

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00:19:04.650 --> 00:19:05.560

Brandon Chau: Okay.

208

00:19:06.780 --> 00:19:13.910

Brandon Chau: And after 1975, when the communists took over what was it like in the city?

210

00:19:15.100 --> 00:19:16.370

An Chau: Everywhere, all of the people were talking about how to find a way to escape from Vietnam. So, I'm one of those. During that time, I go out to the street and selling food on the market to support my family. At the same time, we looked for the way to escape. I tried to save up some money so I was able to pay for the trip to escape from Vietnam.

229

00:20:07.180 --> 00:20:17.829

Brandon Chau: So you said that you had to go and sell food to support your family in the market. Was it just really bad after the war? Was everything a lot like- Was everyone a lot more poor? Was there a lot less to go around?

An Chau: Yeah. During the time, the people were poor. Not much people exciting during the business. Everybody was trying to get out from the country and find a way out.

00:20:47.940 --> 00:21:03.289

Brandon Chau: Did you ever have any interactions with the Communist soldiers like? Did you ever see them in person? Did they ever like talk to you or do anything?

An Chau: Oh yeah, they take over the country and occupy everywhere,

242

00:21:04.310 --> 00:21:18.540

Brandon Chau: Yeah, did you ever talk to them, or did they ever like to say something to you?

An Chau: Oh no. The only thing is when I sell the food in the market, they tried to give us a hard time that's it.

246

00:21:21.880 --> 00:21:24.670

Brandon Chau: And what do you mean by they tried to give you a hard time?

An Chau: Some of those foods- they did not allow me to sell because there was a shortage of supplies. So we buy and sell. They tried to make money off of it unless you pay them money and they let you get away with it.

251

00:21:48.400 --> 00:22:09.880

Brandon Chau: So, just to clarify a little bit, they were trying to take the food, to sell themselves to make money?

An Chau: Yeah, if they find out you are on the market and have a shop or you had food to sell. If they see something they don't like, they can take it away from you.

255

00:22:09.880 --> 00:22:25.240

Brandon Chau: And did that ever happen to you?

An Chau: Yeah, it happened to me. We lost some money or merchandise, what we were selling. They took it away from us.

261

00:22:25.240 --> 00:22:52.140

Brandon Chau: And you said that while you were selling the food in the market you were trying to find ways to escape Vietnam?

An Chau: At the same time, I pretended I'm mentally ill after I went to the clinic at the same time. We were doing different things like selling food on the market, go to the clinic, then I have to pretend I'm mentally ill when I go to the clinic.

266

00:22:52.140 --> 00:23:19.940

Brandon Chau: So how did you try to find out how to escape Vietnam?

An Chau: Oh, my brother-in-law had connections. We paid for people who built boats. Then we waited for the day we escape.

271

00:23:19.940 --> 00:24:05.100

Brandon Chau: So it sounds like it was a lot of as long as you knew people, and everyone like people just told you about it. You didn't like, read about it anywhere in the newspaper?

An Chau: No no, there are no newspapers for that. But those were privately- they were dealing privately. If the communists found out, you were in trouble. The people were building boats down in the countryside and when they were ready, they let you know the day and we get prepared and then we go.

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00:24:05.100 --> 00:24:08.329

Brandon Chau: How long does it take you to prepare to leave by boat?

An Chau: Before the escape day?

Brandon Chau: Yeah.

An Chau: A couple of months.

Brandon Chau: And what did you have to do to prepare?

An Chau: Uh, I don't have to do anything, but the only way thing we have to do we have to save up the money and buy gold. Then, we pay by gold.

00:24:31.040 --> 00:26:54.140

Brandon Chau: So how much money uh did it take to buy your way onto a boat?

An Chau: I remember during that time, [asking wife for translation] because you know the way [asking for more translation] about 7 or 8- so me and uncle, me and my brother-

Brandon Chau: So you and Uncle left on the same boat?

An Chau: Me and Uncle and my niece [asking for translation in Vietnamese from wife] nephew. Me, my brother, my nephew, and my brother-in-law's brother. The four of us were in the same boat.

Brandon Chau: And just for this interview, could you tell us what their names were?

An Chau: Uncle's name is Hue Chau. H-U-E first name. Last name is C-H-A-U. My nephew's name is Hoac Thanh Duc. First name is D-U-C and the middle name is T-H-A-N-H and the last name is H-O-A-C. The brother of my brother in law, his name is Ha Luong. First name is L-U-O-N-G. The last name is H-A.

316

00:26:54.140 --> 00:26:59.639

Brandon Chau: So what was it like when you had to prepare? How did it feel? And how did your family feel?

317

00:27:00.720 --> 00:27:02.509

An Chau: You mean if I skip?

318

00:27:04.390 --> 00:28:17.230

An Chau: Uh, you know one thing I feel, during that time when we left, escape by boat, you never knew your success. You could die in the ocean. Before that, we heard so many trips were unsuccessful. When they leave from Vietnam, they die in the ocean. So, we know there was a higher chance to die when we escape. Less chance to survive if you're lucky, okay? But we still need to go because we wanted freedom. So, we took that chance, that little chance, to survive. So, even- during that time we know we never had a chance to see the family again. But the family would rather let us go out to find some freedom to stay out of the communist. That was the only way so we take that chance.

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00:28:17.230 --> 00:28:24.250

Brandon Chau: So you preferred the chance for escape over living under the Communists in Vietnam?

An Chau: Yes.

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00:28:24.830 --> 00:28:31.119

Brandon Chau: And what made you want to take that chance to escape over living under the Communist?

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00:28:31.930 --> 00:29:06.950

An Chau: Because I heard about, you know, out there with the life before the [unknown word] republic. That's freedom. Under the communists during that time, there was no freedom at all. There was no future. So we decided to go. To take that chance to go. Hopefully, we were successful so we have a brighter future out there.

351

00:29:06.950 --> 00:29:13.750

Brandon Chau: And what makes you say that there was no freedom or no chance for a future in Vietnam?

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00:29:14.810 --> 00:29:19.629

An Chau: You know, one thing we know, the communists is- when they take over, everything is- no more hope during that time. So, no school and they have to start everything all over again

and we don't know what the day tomorrow is going to be. And so we heard about out there and we know about out there. Out of the country, out of the communists, they have better chance and better freedom to let you express.

367

00:30:07.620 --> 00:30:14.090

Brandon Chau: And how did your parents react when you were about to escape by boat?

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00:30:15.620 --> 00:30:56.760

An Chau: They kind of nervous, and also happy at the same time that we have the chance to go. There were many people who have no chance to go. And luckily, we have a chance because we can- able to pay for it, to leave. There are many people, they cannot afford it and also they have no chance, they have no way to find out where to go.

381

00:30:56.760 --> 00:31:01.080

Brandon Chau: Did you know, like where you would be going once you escaped by boat?

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00:31:01.580 --> 00:31:32.160

An Chau: No, we have no direction. Only thing they say, you know, when we go from the direction of South Vietnam, maybe, luckily, we will land in Malaysia. But our boat left and in a couple days, the boat died, the engine died. We just floated on the ocean.

389

00:31:32.160 --> 00:31:36.189

Brandon Chau: And did you take anything with you when you escaped?

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00:31:36.520 --> 00:31:44.620

Brandon Chau: like? What were you wearing?

An Chau: Yeah I had to take many things. My family helped me prepare so many things. Like a [unintelligible] or a knife or clothing and hiding some dollars in the clothes. And, they made gold into buttons for pants in case when I landed on the islands somewhere, we have- we starving or whatever we needed, we have something to sell or to trade for food. So, most of those items we lost in the ocean because we floated so many days in the ocean. There was no chance to survive because during that time I think we already died in the ocean. We had no chance to survive. The only thing I had left was my pants and the handkerchief my father give to me. That's it. I landed with nothing but the pants.

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00:32:54.760 --> 00:33:30.490

Brandon Chau: So just to clarify it a little bit. It was- you were given pants with a button made out of gold?

An Chau: Yeah that's before I escaped, we prepared that. We used the gold to make the button to put in the pants. The gold button, we have to [unintelligible] into black so no one can know it was gold.

418

00:33:30.490 --> 00:33:37.719

Brandon Chau: And you said that your dad gave you a handkerchief before you left?

An Chau: Yeah, I remember that morning, about five o'clock in the morning. During that day, I was still preparing to go to the market to sell the food but suddenly, we received the news. Today was the chance we had to go right away without disturbing or letting people see us. So, 5 in the morning was kind of dark and I had to grab everything and what we prepared before that so we leaving. The time I stepped out to the door, my father give me a handkerchief saying, "Oh you know, put this on yourself in case you have to wipe off your nose." During that time, we don't have Kleenex or whatever so we used handkerchief. That handkerchief is still with me right now and the pants. So 5 o'clock in the morning I left and that's it. I didn't see my father no more.

434

00:34:43.530 --> 00:34:49.130

Brandon Chau: And does the handkerchief like mean anything?

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00:34:49.190 --> 00:35:17.000

An Chau: Yes it means to me- it's the last thing I get from my father. Yeah, that's the last thing I got from my father. I still have it with me.

442

00:35:17.000 --> 00:35:22.260

Brandon Chau: So, you said that you were on the boat for a very long time?

443

00:35:22.890 --> 00:35:32.440

An Chau: Yeah. About 6 or 18 days, I have to look at my diary.

445

00:35:32.440 --> 00:35:33.930

Brandon Chau: You kept a diary?

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00:35:34.710 --> 00:35:58.190

An Chau: Not during the- That diary I was writing the whole trip. The day I escaped to the day I landed. The whole thing of what I go through. so I still have those. For many years, I didn't take a look back yet. But I look back, I have more details to tell you about that.

449

00:35:58.190 --> 00:36:05.069

Brandon Chau: And do you remember what it was like on the boat?

An Chau: Huh?

Brandon Chau: You remember what it was like on the boat on the ocean?

450

00:36:06.290 --> 00:37:17.130

An Chau: Um after the first or the second day, the boat left from [unknown village in Vietnam] and the state of [unknown state in Vietnam], that's where I was living. I remember, the third day, I believe April 22nd, in the late afternoon close to the evening, that day it's raining. So, we stay in [same village], I think more than 10, I have to look at my diary, more than 10 days. We living there for many days waiting for the chance to go down to the boats. The boat drove out to the ocean. The boat's engine died. So, you want more details I can look back to my diary and give you more details during the time I escaped.

465

00:37:17.130 --> 00:37:29.329

Brandon Chau: And do you remember anything from those days that you were on the ocean? Did you see anything happen?

467

00:37:30.380 --> 00:40:13.920

An Chau: Oh yeah, there were many things that happened. During the time I stayed in the ocean, I think we get the pirates robbing us about 36 times. I believe so, I think 36 times, I'll look at my diary again. And during that time, the girls in the boat get raped and some people still fighting to searching what- because when the pirates on the boat, they searching. My stuff was everywhere, everybody's stuff was everywhere so people still searching, fighting "this stuff belongs to me, that stuff belongs to me." I remember one of the jacket I have and Uncle have, my brother, we have the dollars inside the coat. Then, people fighting say this jacket belongs to them but actually those belong to us. But during that time, I think we- my life ends in the ocean. There was no hope to survive because we see the boat, we see the Thai airplane so they don't save us. Because during that time, they don't allow anybody to save the refugee from the ocean. So, there are a lot of stories during that time I stay in the ocean. If the airplane comes, they saw the first day and the second day- they went back the second day, they bring the food, like bread or the food. They put in the plastic bag. In the sky, they drove over, they stay far from the boat, they dropped it into the ocean. So me and some other people in the boat swimming out to reach those plastic bags and get the food back into the boat to let the people on the boat to have, to eat. So, soon as I get on the boat, everything is gone because they open up, fighting, to eat. So when I get on the boat, I don't have anything left because everybody already have one. They spread out already.

503

00:40:13.920 --> 00:40:20.819

Brandon Chau: And for the rest of the journey, was there any like food? How did everyone feed themselves?

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00:40:21.470 --> 00:43:42.700

An Chau: Okay, every time the pirate, you know the pirates right?

Brandon Chau: Yeah.

An Chau: Yeah, they come over our boat, they raping the girls and they searching, they're stealing the goods, what we have, so at the same time they give out water to drink. And some of them, they give some food to you. But most thing we need is water to survive. Without water, we cannot survive. The food, sometimes we have. Most of the time, we don't have. Only we can get the water from them and they get whatever they need from us. The goods from us, because the boat- everybody left- everybody try to escape, everybody try to hide some goods. There are many valuable stuff like for example, the good watch, the gold, the diamonds, everything. Whatever the people have. They come to rob us and they give us- they rob our good and we took the water from them. Kind of like trading. It's a long, long story during that 18 year, in the ocean. We have a lot of stories during that time. So I have to look at my diary, I can tell you more details, every single thing that happened during that time. And we have the- You know, in our boat, in the bottom of the boat, we have many five-gallon containers to keep fresh water. But when the pirates, they come over and search us, I think they think us hide something in those containers. They cut everything, they dump all of the fresh water out to the ocean. That's why we have the container we don't have no more water. The fresh water to drink. So, those empty container, everybody try to get one to hold for their body in case the boat was sinking so we can survive. Also, after a few days, the engine died. We have the spare engine but the engine, the pirates took away. They took our engine. And plus, the one who drive the boat inexperienced. The real one stay back in Vietnam try to make more money for the second boat. The one they send out is unexperienced. That's why our boat had trouble. We stayed in the ocean.

553

00:43:42.700 --> 00:43:44.999

Brandon Chau: And where did you end up landing?

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00:43:45.520 --> 00:48:37.640

An Chau: Oh, after so many incidents happened during that time, with the pirates raping us, searching us. I remember the most, one of the boats, I believe on their boat had 30 something fishermen or something like that. They had a lot of fishermen in that boat but their leader is chinese [unknown word] or Thailand. When we say pirates, actually they are fishermen from Thailand. You know, they are fishermen from Thailand. We called them pirates but actually they are fishermen from Thailand. But the last boat they had, they try to searching our good so we have nothing left but their leader don't let them do so. They say, "No" and don't let them do anything. So, luckily, that guy say, they telling us, they say, "Only me, only us can save you guys. Nobody is saving you guys this time because it's illegal to save you guys." He put the

rope to tow our boat because our boat was dying and not running at all and staying in the ocean. We only see the sky and the ocean. We don't see any borders at all during that 6 or 18 days. So, they use the rope to tow our boat for long period of time. So until we see a little bit of border, we are very happy because we know we close to the-

Brandon Chau: The land?

An Chau: Yeah the land, we were close to the land. We were very happy but that boat still towing us closer and closer so we can see the land more closer and closer. Then, they cut the rope. They said, "That's it, that's all I can help you guys towing you guys up to here. If I continue tow you guys in, if I get caught, I'm in trouble." Then he cut the rope and he turn around behind our boat, then he tried to use his boat to hit a couple time to let our boat to come closer to the land, which is still far away. But, the boat still far away but no more towing. We just out there. And many of those people including myself. I want to but i don't think is a good idea. So many of them, they jump into the ocean, they try to swim back to the land, which they were unable to because it was too far. You see the land but its too far. Doesn't mean you can swimming into it. But still have many people jump down and try to swim in. And because I'm injured, my finger during the time on the boat. The first of all. The second of all, I'm not going to jump down to swim into it. But I remember that's close to the evening also. There are many small fishing boat, the smaller ones a lot of them. They come out. They save the people from the- try to swimming into the land. They saved them up, they picked them up from the ocean. Then, they helping us to come close to the island so we jumped out of the boat. We went from the ocean, we swim a little bit and walk into the land. So after that, they try to burn the boat right away in case they try to put us back to the ocean.

633

00:48:37.640 --> 00:48:52.000

Brandon Chau: Yeah. And which country was this?

An Chau: When I first landed, I remember that was the Malaysia border.

Brandon Chau: And did you get-

An Chau: Close to Thailand

636

00:48:52.000 --> 00:49:40.360

Brandon Chau: Did you get into a camp in Malaysia?

An Chau: I landed kind of like the border of Malaysia and next to Thailand but far away from the refugee camp in Malaysia. That's why I end up there. Overnight, the people in that village took us, walk on the beach- walk into the village. We stay in the village about two or three months. We stay in that village in Malaysia.

643

00:49:40.360 --> 00:50:06.290

Brandon Chau: Do you remember the name of the village?

An Chau: Uh, I remember, let's see. [says name in Vietnamese]. That's [Vietnamese name for village] belong to Thailand. [Vietnamese name] that belongs to Thailand.

649

00:50:06.290 --> 00:50:34.220

Brandon Chau: And you said that you were only there for a couple of months so where did you go after that first camp?

An Chau: After that couple months, they send us to the camp, into the camp in Songkhla in Thailand. All this, I have to detail- I have to look into my diary.

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00:50:34.220 --> 00:50:39.530

Brandon Chau: What was it like living in the refugee camp?

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00:50:39.530 --> 00:50:41.950

An Chau: Oh in the refugee camp. It's fun, freedom at the same time the life is hard. But, it's fun and freedom at the same time.

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00:50:57.250 --> 00:51:49.260

Brandon Chau: Can you talk a little bit about like what you mean by it was like hard?

An Chau: Hard that means you don't have no money. You know, we have to receive the food daily what they give to us to eat. Sometimes there is not enough food to eat. But, that's not majorly a concern because we want the freedom. We know we have to live through those states before we know we can go to the third country.

680

00:51:49.260 --> 00:54:24.450

Brandon Chau: And what third country was this?

An Chau: You mean the camp?

Brandon Chau: The third country you were talking about.

An Chau: At that time, I tried to go to Canada. The reason is because I know the US the best, but US it takes a longer time to go and also a little bit more time to sponsor the family from Vietnam. That's why I try to wait for Canada. End up I have no option to go to Canada. Finally, I have to go to the US. I know US the best. Everybody know US the best. But, for the quick sponsor for family, during that time everybody say Canada. For the family it's quicker. That's why everybody go to Canada.

Brandon Chau: While you were waiting for the sponsors to come through, what were you doing in the camps?

An Chau: Oh during I stay in the camp. After a couple months, I start try to- because I know several different language, like Chinese and Vietnamese. The people outside, the store owner is Chinese, Thai-Chinese. They don't speak Vietnamese and I speak Chinese and Vietnamese. That's why me and my brother get a job in the two different little shops to helping them sell the stuff for the people into the camp. Because, the market is only open in the morning from 8 to 10. So, you get a job in that two hours to help the people sell something to translate from Chinese to Vietnamese or from Vietnamese to Chinese for the owner. So you get the job from them. And during that time, the life become a little bit better because we have some money to buy more food from the market.

717

00:54:24.450 --> 00:54:28.190

Brandon Chau: And how long did it take until you were able to leave the camp?

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00:54:29.510 --> 00:55:18.840

An Chau: During- Stay in Songkhla about two years. Okay about two years. And they send us after that, Americans, you know, US they pick up us. They send us to the transportation camp, which is in Bangkok. Then we stay there about 8 months, something like that. Then from there, I have to go to the Philippines. Batang in Philippines. Stay there for 8 months, something like that. Then, I come to the US.

736

00:55:18.840 --> 00:55:26.020

Brandon Chau: And do you remember um what program let you come to the US?
Or what you had to do?

738

00:55:26.070 --> 00:56:04.600

An Chau: Oh, no, because that's the US- they pick up whoever left behind from the camp. And also, you no option, the US still pick you up. That's why they pick me up from the camp. No details, I have to look back at my diary because there are so many details about the time during the stay in the camp and during the time I escape from the boat.

746

00:56:04.600 --> 01:00:12.640

Brandon Chau: And so, after the Philippines, you were allowed to come to the United States?

An Chau: Yes.

Brandon Chau: Who sponsored you?

An Chau: Supposed to be the Catholic Charities. They sponsor us. They say they have a

sponsor in the US. So, as soon as you get off from the airport, your sponsor will pick you up at the airport. But, me and my brother, we landed- I remember that's April 22nd, I believe so. So, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, it's still winter time. Then, after I landed, I go out to the airport, the gate. I thought someone was waiting to pick me and my brother from there. But, there was no one. When we walk out to the airport, I saw snow the first time I say, "Oh maybe this is snow because it's cold too. It's snow." We go back inside to the airport. Then, we walk around, no one come to pick us up. They say you put the IBM bag, they have the number on the back, they look at the number and pick you up. Me and Uncle- me and my brother, put the bag on our back, walk around the airport and no one pick us up. We saw two policemen, they come by in the airport and that time, we don't speak any English at all. We come to the policemen, we ask them for help. We pointed to the bag and number, then they know us as refugee without sponsor. Then, they ask us question, we don't know how to answer them, we don't know what they ask of us. End up, they pick me up and my brother up and bring both of us to the police station and stay in the police station for a while. Three hours? Six hours? I forgot. Yeah, we stay in the police station waiting for- they contact the Catholic Charities to send someone to pick us up. And that's why I say when I first come to the US, the first couple hours we have to stay in the police- we have to stay in the police station for a couple hours. Then, after that, they contact with the Catholic Charities. I remember at that night, when one of the gentlemen, they come to pick us up from the police station, they bring us to the motel and let us stay there. At that time, we know the guy told us up to this moment, we still have no sponsor yet and they don't even know we are here. So, me and my brother stay in the motel at that night. So, no food no nothing. Then, wait until next morning, we saw one of the American woman. They come to the motel. I remember the very first time I saw the hamburger. I believe that's the McDonald's hamburger. And they see us in the motel and they give us the hamburger and it tastes so good.

805

01:00:12.640 --> 01:00:19.150

Brandon Chau: all right. Well, is there anything that I have not asked you that you feel is important to add at this time?

An Chau: There are many, many things but I cannot remember at this moment. If I look back to the diary, I can tell you but at this moment I cannot remember so many things during that time.

811

01:00:42.640 --> 01:00:47.190

Brandon Chau: Okay, Well, thank you very much for allowing me to interview you