

4-7-1989

Interview with Many Vanh Phramratsamy (FA 83)

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TRANSCRIPTION

Name of Oral History Project: Southeast Asian Refugees in Bowling Green

Tape 1 of 2. The number of the tape being transcribed 1.

Name of narrator: Many Vanh Phramratsamy
3212 Barn Wood Avenue
Bowling Green, KY 42101

Name of principal interviewer: Nancy C. Hundley

Date of Interview: 4/7/89 Place of Interview: Bowling Green, KY

Other persons present at interview: Many Vanh's daughter Judy.

Equipment used: Cassette recorder

Tape used: Ampex Amount (side 1) all: (side 2) all.

Summary description of interview context and contents:

The interview took place in the Southeast Asian market called Firstasia. I interviewed Many Vanh an immigrant from Laos. She has lived in the U.S. for about eight years. Many Van gave information about family life and tradition in both Laos and America.

Hundley: Today I'm talking with, I can't pronounce your name. I'm sorry.

Vanh: Many Vanh [pronounces name slowly].

Hundley: Many Vanh, and we are going to be talking about her life in Laos. Today is April the seventh and the year is 1989. I need you -- This is a donor form from the Kentucky Museum and I just need you to sign right here where it says that you have given me permission to interview you and to put what we talk about in the archives.

[Pause to sign]

Hundley: Okay we have already filled out the personnel sheet and everything. Uh those aren't any good. You. Uh, You are from Laos?

Vanh: Yeah.

Hundley: Did you always live in Laos?

Vanh: What do you mean there?

Hundley: Was that the only place you lived while you were there?

Vanh: In Laos Right? Okay, what is it?
[Talks to usband to understand question] Uh hum, yeah.

Hundley: It was? Did you live in the country or a city?
was it a big place?

Vanh: Okay. I live , you know, before, you know. Okay,
Yes I live in what you say, a city.

Hundley: City?

Vanh: Yes, A city.

Hundley: How large was the city?

Vanh: Well I don't know how to say that. But, probably
small. It is not the same as American (city). Because
American like small but you know it's bigger in my country.

Hundley: Was it as big as Bowling Green?

Vanh: No, no, no.

Hundley: It was much smaller?

Vanh: Yeah, much smaller.

Hundley: How large was your family? Or is your family?

Vanh: My family?

Hundley: Your mother and your father and--

Vanh: Yeah, I have-- Okay, three (pause) I ahve four
brother and two sister.

Hundley: Two sisters?

Vanh: And probably my family has seven people in it. Big
family, Right! [laughs].

Hundley: Uh, are they all still living?

Vanh: Uh, yeah. They are still in Laos. And I help my
brother you know. He probably come here pretty soon.
Next Wednesday at 12:00.

Hundley: Really! Next Wednesday?

Vanh: Yeah, next Wednesday.

Hundley: Your brother?

Vanh: Yeah, because my brother he live in the camp and
finish school now. I am sponsor him.

Hundley: That's wonderful! When is the last time you saw him.

Vanh: Next week at twelve.

Hundley: I mean the last time?

Vanh: Last time? Okay. Last time we saw him uh-- in the camp, you know thailand.

Hundley: Thailand? You were in the camp too?

Vanh: Yeah, I live in the camp too.

Hundley: How long were you in the camp?

Vanh: Oh--It's not too long.

Hundley: Not too long?

Vanh: I was two month and after that I went to Phillipine. I study in Phillipines. And then I stay there about eight months and after that I came here.

Hundley: And Marty (Deputy) sponsored you to come here?

Vanh: Um, yeah. I, yeah I think this--The forst time I came to United, United States. I come to Columbus, Ohio forst and live there three months and then after that I came Bowling Green. Mrs. Deputy. This is my sponsor.

Hundley: What year was that? How long?

Vanh: Ah, How long? I came to the United States in 1982 in June.

Hundley: June, 1982. Okay.

Vanh: Yeah, June 1982.

Hundley: Okay and you said--your occupation in Southeast Asia. In Laos. You were a nurse?
[Commented on this in an earlier conversation while filling out the personal data sheet]

Vanh: Uh yeah, um-- I am nurse and I work in hospital. I dan't know ah at to say. What is it? I help the people like -- accident. you know. I don't know? What is ti?

Hundley: You were a trauma nurse? you helped them after they had been in accidents?

Vanh: Uhm, yeah. Right!

Hundley: In an emergency room?

Vanh: Yeah, I work, yeah in an emergency room.

Hundley: What kind of school did you go to for that?

Vanh: Well I, I don't remember.

Hundley: Was it like a college or a training center? Or did you learn at the hospital?

Vanh: No is not, is hard to say that. Let me think. A school you know, after, like go to-- what is it? I don't know what to say. (chuckles)

Hundley: You learned it after high school or in high school?

Vanh: After high school. Then go to you know, go to then studying for nurse. Something like that.

Hundley: So it's kind of like going to college?

Vanh: I don't know.

Hundley: Did you go all year long?

Vanh: You go in Laos is different than you go here. It is different than here. I don't know how to say. It hard you know. (laughs)

Hundley: We've gone over all of these questions. What did your parents do? Your mother and father? Is your father a businessman?

Vanh: Well---

Hundley: Or a farmer or--

Vanh: The last time. My father was with government. But not now he stay home.

Hundley: Uh hum.

Vanh: ANd that's it. And My-- and because he feels not too good. And now he just stay home. And my father, okay my brother he just work with government, new government. So that's it.

Hundley: They wer government employees? What part of the government were they involved with? Did they just help with the everything that goes on?

Vanh: Well, I don't know. We got just--I, my brother sent a letter for me because he, it's like he, he study like-- he in India. Finish college after that. And he work in office. I don't know. I don't know what to say.

Hundley: Was you life there a lot like it was here? I mean in the mornings did you get up and do the same things there as you do here?

Vanh: Well I think the same thing because in Laos, because I worked. I get up early too. And here its the same. I think it is the same now.

Hundley: Do you fear a lot less in the united states than you did in Laos?

Vanh: Well-- not really.

Hundley: Not really?

Vanh: Yeah, Not really. I fear like over in Laos very much.

Hundley: In Laos did you--Were you married when you were there?

Vanh: I married before I came here.

Hundley: And how long have you been married?

Vanh: Okay, I married-- maybe too long, I can--I married in 1981.

Hundley: Eighty-one?

Vanh: Yeah, Eighteen until here.

Hundley: So you were eighteen, seventeen, eighteen when you were married?

Vanh: Yeah. (laughs)

Hundley: How many Children do you have?

Vanh: I have two now.

Hundley: Two?

Vanh: And they wer born in here(USA) too. These they are United--they are Americans you know.

Hundley: They are?

Vanh: My first one she is American. My second one no, he is American too. Because his they, they are born here.

Hundley: How old are they?

Vanh: My first one is five years this month and my second one is just eight months last two, last two days.

Hundley: She's eight months old?

Vanh: Yeah.

Hundley: A little baby.

Vanh: My little boy.

Hundley: Little boy?

Vanh: Yeah my little boy. One boy and one girl.

Hundley: Do you see a difference in raising children here in the United States as the way you were raised in Laos?

Vanh: Yes it is different.

Hundley: A big difference?

Vanh: A big difference bcause see like in here too much money, In Laos-- no pay nothing in Laos. In here pay everything you know, pay everything. I think too much money.

Hundley: Too much money to have children here?

Vanh: Yes, Yes. If someone have the children in here too much money. In Laos no pay nothing.

Hundley: Are the children raised a lot different there. Taught different things in Laos than you would --than the Americans teach. Like, are you -- Are the children taught to respect older pople. I know here--

Vanh: Yeah, it is different. I think it os different.

Hundley: Are you raising your children like you were raised?

Vanh: Well I think-- No, no just learn english and I don't know.

Hundley: So ah--

Vanh: I think that my children probably just speak. They don't know how to write. They don't know how to read.

Hundley: Yeah.

Vanh: Because in here is no school in Laos(language)just--

Hundley: Do they speak Laotian?

Vanh: Yeah, Yeah, Yeah they know.

Hundley: They talk--They both know Laos and English?

Vanh: They can yeah--They can speak Laos. After that, after go home I speak Laos to them.

Hundley: That's good though. I, at least you are preserving part of their culture. Where your're from. That's a big part of their lives. Do you think that your mather would say that you children are spoiled for living in the United States?

Vanh: Yeah! [laughs out loud].

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Hundley: I tink most mothers think their grandchildren are spoiled though don't you?

Vanh: I think probably, probably, my mother, they don't how to say alot to grandchildren. Just say Laos.

Hundley: Yeah [laughing]

Hundley: Do your brothers and sisters have children? In Laos?

Vanh: No. My sister still single.

Hundley: Is she younger than you are?

Vanh: Yeah younger and I help my brother. One brother, you see he come here next Wednesday. He have family. He have one children.

Hundley: Is he going to stay with you here?

Vanh: Uh he's yeah. The first time he came here he stayed with me.

Hundley: THat will be good for him. At least he'll have some one that can communicate and help him with things. Does he speak English? Is he taking classes now?

Vanh: I'm-- I dan't know he can--I don'tknow he studied in phillipines probably he speak a lot of it. I dan't know and--

Hundley: What was your house like in Laos?

Vanh: My house?

Hundley: Yeah your home. What is it ? What is-- What kind of structure did you live in?

Vanh: My house like you know boot (wood) outside, the wood.

Hundley: Uh huh.

Vanh: You know wood?

Hundley: Wood?

Vanh: In the top. What is it? I don't know how to say.

Hundley: What is it made out of? Is it, it wasn't like the houses around here?

Vanh: No, dan't have it here. They are the same like it in the top. Like, okay, the house in Laos. Some peoples are different in the top. Some have, the peoples are the same as American have.

Hundley: An attic or second story?

Vanh: Uh hum. Something you know. And have like in Laos they have upstairs. Is hard to say. The people from Laos some people very poor. Some people like a lot of money. Some people very poor, don't have nothing.

Hundley: Like here?

Vanh: Like here. Some people have a lot of money. Some people no have money. You know own car something like that. In my country too. Some people a lot of money. Some people not have the money. Like, the farmer in my country no have a lot of money. But different in here. Like farmer, you know what I say. Like farmer in Laos is probably poor.

Hundley: Farmers?

Vanh: Yeah farmers. I think poor, already poor.

Hundley: So do they live in small huts or shacks?

Vanh: Yeah they are small or something like that. Its very poor you know. It's different here. Its not the same. Families in my country very poor. Some people a lot of money.

Hundley: Yeah. Yes.

Vanh: Have like--[very long pause].

Hundley: Was your family--

Vanh: But my family--

Hundley: How much-- Was your family poor? Did they have a lot of money? Or wer they like everybody else-- In the middle?

Vanh: No. In the middleyou know. Not a lot of money in the middle. My family is okay in the middle. It is not a lot of money. But, is okay.

Hundley: They have enough to survive? And be happy?

Vanh: Yeah. [smiles and laughs]

Hundley: What kind of house do you live in here?

Vanh: In here?

Hundley: In Bowling Green? Yeah.

Vanh: I live in apartment.

Hundley: Apartment?

Vanh: Yeah apartment.

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Hundley: Is it a big apartment? Do you have two bedrooms?

Vanh: Yeah. Two bedrooms and two bathrooms.

Hundley: Is it a lot different. Do you feel a lot different living in an apartment than you did living in a house?

Vanh: A lot of difference.

Hundley: When you lived in Laos was your house in the city? And where you lived, did you have neighbors? Like right next door?

Vanh: Yes. It was the same. We have like, neighbors too close.

Hundley: Like anywhere here in a subdivision. You have a house right next door to you.

Vanh: Yeah, yeah, yeah have some those too.

Hundley: Were you good friends? Did you have friends up and down the street that you played with when you were little?

Vanh: YEAH, YEAH!! [said with enthusiasm and a giggle]

Hundley: So it's just like--

Vanh: Yeah just like, speak Lao, say hello in the morning. Yeah that's good. Different in here. But in here (I) like neighbors. Some people good some are not too good. Yeah it is, yeah.

Hundley: So you think your neighbors were a lot friendlier there?

Vanh: [Laughs]

Hundley: Or you just knew everybody?

Vanh: Right um but-- [pauses and seems to want to say more]

Hundley: Was your family really good friends with your next door neighbors?

Vanh: Uh hum Yeah it was good.

Hundley: Your children all played together?

Vanh: Yeah Yeah!

Hundley: Did you all have bar-b-ques and things like that?

Vanh: Right, yeah.

Hundley: Do you do that here? Do you know your neighbors?

Vanh: Yeah, I know. And just my neighbor is good. And say hello like --Its hard to see my neighbor because that people go to work in the morning.

Hundley: People are all wrapped up in themselves here. I think it's hard for them to, I don't know, greet somebody every day. I try to do it though. I don't know.

Vanh; Um hum.

Hundley: What kind of holidays did you celebrate in Laos?

Vanh: Holiday?

Hundley: Holidays. Like celebrations, religious days.

Vanh: What month is it? I remember that--I dan't know how to say. Holiday like, okay different here. The holiday I go to like-- What is it like? I go tothe Buddah something like that.

Hundley: You had New Years?

Vanh: I had New Years. Okay, I have New Years in my country tomorrow.

Hundley: Tomorrow?

Vanh: Yeah, tomorrow. Saturday. Tomorrow at eight. In my country in out New Year. Okay, In Laos this month five of month five in Laos. But it is , , I count . This month April, four, right?

Hundley: Uh.

Vanh: But New Year Laos this month. Every year.

Hundley: Every year?

Vanh: Every year, April eithth.

Hundley: April eighth every year.

Vanh: Yeah every year.

Hundley: So how do you celebrate it?

Vanh: How do you say?

Hundley: In your family?

Vanh: Well, in you people the new year, people go to -- What is it ? Go to temple.

Hundley: Temple?

6-11
Vanh: Temple yeah, in the morning. Go like, think about God. And cook something, nad go to Buddah. Every family go like in here every Sunday, right. In the morning.

Hundley: We go to Sunday--

Vanh: Yeah, go to church. The same thing, and think about God and think it mean something. You know thing God help me something. The same here.

Hundley: Okay, so you go to the Temple on the New Years and you cook a big meal.

Vanh: Yeah big for--

Hundley: For your family and friends? And everybody?

Vanh: Yeah go to them, yeah then eat together.

Hundley: Are there any songs that you sing like we sing here around Christmas?

Vanh: No, No, not the same here. Just the Buddah, the Buddah, I dan't know. Just sing I don't know how to say it.

Hundley; Is it kind of like chants or--

Vanh: Just the Buddah.

Hundley: Saying prayers?

Vanh: Probably, I don't know?

Hundley: I'm not familiar with it. So I don't know. I could just, you know--

Vanh: Yeah, like. Like Americans, see when I go to church in the morning. The people no sing like this. The Buddah sing and the Buddah like this [holds hand in traditional prayer position - hands in front of forehead with head bowed slightly] Like me, I go and just sit like this [prayer gesture] and then listen to, listen.

Hundley: Oh, so you kind of meditate?

Vanh: Yeah, probably. I don't know how to say. Just listen.

Hundely: What different foods did you eat in Laos, than you eat here. We talked about that some yesterday.

Vanh: I think the same because in here, my food. Probably have the most.

Hundley: If you didn't have this store though would you have trouble eating the same foods that you did here?

Vanh: No. The last I didn't have store. The people go to another city. Go to Nashville and buy something to eat. Because have everything in there. No problem.

Hundley: In Laos did they have super markets?

Vanh: Yeah supermarkets.

Hundley; Just like the ones that they have here?

Vanh: Yeah but, the supermarkets they are different here. In here very, very nice. In Laos, very, what is it? I don't know how to say. NOT, not nice. The supermarket you know.

Hundley: Yeah.

Vanh: They have supermarkets too but not the same as here. The same here very, everything very nice.

Hundley: Was it more open like in a --

Vanh: No, just sell in the , in the , what is it? In [unable to understand word or words].

Hundley: Inside?

Vanh: Yeah inside they sell inside not the outside. Supermarkets not the same here.

Hundley: Okay, hum. Wer the prices--Did you have-- were, was the food very expensive?

Vanh: No. It was cheaper than here but probably, I think but expensive.

Hundley: I know.

Vanh: But probably. American, American money, that's good.

Hundley: Yeah.

Vanh: If you know, like, one hundred go to change my money. One hundred dollar in here go to change in my country about 40,000 in Laos money.

Hundley: That's a lot.

Vanh: A lot of money you see. I save the money. I want to go back into my country. See save the money and go to change in my country. Get [unable to hear]

Hundley: Do you prepare your food differently? How do you cook it? Do you use a wok or just--

Vanh: Yeah. I cook. I fry with wok. I cook with rice cooker.

Hundley: Uh huh.

Vanh: I cook with steamer. I eat different. I eat sticky rice, you know sweet rice.

Hundley: Uh hum.

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Vanh: Sometimes I eat Long grain rice.

Hundley: What's your favorite?

Vanh: Oh, what my favorite? My favorite. My favorite what is it? I don't know how to say favorite.

Hundley: What do you like to eat most?

Vanh: Okay. I like. I cook every day with rice cooker. So we like eat sometimes, eat sometimes.

Hundley: Yeah.

Vanh: Eat sometimes.

Hundley: Yeah.

Vanh: My favorite long grain.

Hundley: Long grain. I like long grain too.

Hundley: Let me stop this for a minute. [there was a customer in the store].

Hundley: And now we are still talking about food and the preparation of food. So you said long grain rice is your favorite.

Vanh: Yeah, long grain rice my favorite. I eat it every day.

Hundley: What kind of desserts do you like?

Vanh: Dessert? Oh well. I think I eat sometimes. I don't know what kind. I eat every kind. But I don't know what kind my favorite.

Hundley: Do you eat chocolate?

Vanh: OH NO! I don't like it.

Hundley: You don't like chocolate? I think that that's Americas' worst addiction.

Vanh: Yeah.

Hundley: Chocolate, because everybody likes chocolate.

Vanh: [Talks to Judy in Laotian telling her to leave the tape recorder alone].

Hundley: Oh she's all right.

[We both laugh]

Vanh: I think Americans like chocolate. But not me. You see. You know the people around here they don't like chocolate.

1-14
Hundley: This is Judy. What do you say? Do you like chocolate too?

Judy: Nods yes.

Hundley: You do?

Judy: Nods again.

Hundley: What kind of chocolate do you like? Do you like candy bars? Candy bars?

[No answer]

Hundley: What do you like best?

Judy: Chocolate.

Hundley: Huh? Do you Coca Cola?

Judy: Nods yes.

Hundley: You like that too. I do too.

[Laughter]

Hundley: Do you help your Mom cook?

[No answer]

Hundley: Do you help her cook? DO you help her prepare food?

[Shrugs shoulders]

[Laughter]

Vanh: I think she likes American food better.

Hundley: She likes American food better?

Vanh: Yeah. She likes American because it--Because American food you can't avoid liking it. Children like, in the can. What is it? I don't know? Like noodle, you know, noodle in the can. Like American food.

Hundley: Noodles and ravoli. Noodles in the, a can. Is that what you are saying?

Vanh: Yeah, Yeah!

Hundley: Ah spaghetios and things like that.

Vanh: Yeah right.

Hundley: I think all children like things like that.

Vanh: Like everyday, like ah-- [speaks to Judy in Laotian] I'm sorry. She's being bad.

Hundley: That's okay.

[Pause]

Did you have a garden when you were in laos? Your family did they have a Garden in your back yard?

Vanh: Yeah, Yeah.

Hundley: Grow --- you grew. What did you Grow?

Vanh: Well we would plant like, Egg Plant and Cabbage and Cauliflower, everything.
[laughs]

Hundley: Cauliflower, is that what you said? Cabbage?

Vahn: Yeah, Cabbage, Onions, Green Onions.

Hundley: Onions?

Vahn: Yeah, Onions and Ginger. Something like that, Yeah.

Hundley: Ginger. So you grew spices too.

Vahn: Yeah, spice and oh, a lot of things.
[Laughs]

Hundley: How about flowers? Did your mother and everybody plant flowers.

Vahn: Yeah, Yeah! Plant Flowers.

Hundley: In the landscape.

Vahn: Yeah, landscape. In the yard, yeah in the yard.

Hundley: I bet it was Pretty. I think all women are obesesed with flowers. I am. My mother is too.

Hundley: Where do you Buy your foof in Bowling Green? Do you buy most of it here?

Vahn: My food? Americanfood or My Country food?

Hundley: Either one like what do you buy at the grocery store? when you go beside--- Do you buy meat?

Vahn: Yeah, Oh Yeah, I go to American store a lot and buy meat or vegetables or something. And Lemons and things like Celerey.

Hundley: Does your family drink a lot of_____.

Vahn: of milk, something, yeah milk.

Hundley: Milk?

Vahn: Oh, I like it yeah milk. I like it in every meal and

Hundley: How about, ah, soft drinks? Coca Colas? And things like that.

Vahn: Ah

Hundley: Do you all drink a lot of that.

Vahn: No its not much--- sometimes.

Hundley: Sometimes?

Vahn: I think, I bought like milk, Orange juice. All the time. I love it.

Hundley: Orange juice?

Vahn: Yeah.

Hundley: I like Orange juice too. Do you get the fresh squeezed type. They've got a new type of Orange juice now that tastes just like it was fresh squeezed from _____.

Vahn: Oh no. I never buy that.

Hundley: It's good. I love Orange juice too. I drink it every day.

Hundley: What was your first trip to the grocery store here like? was it ---- Did you---- What did you expect, I mean uhm, Was it a real shock? Was it so different that you were afraid to go in? Or was it just like going into a supermarket in Laos?

Vahn: Yeah.

Hundley: So it wasn;t that big a deal.

Vahn: Yeah, big deal. Yeah, Family in Laos is easy. People buy self. In my country just pick and pay. Pick by myself and pay first. And here Pick it out by myself and go pay in the machine in line. In Laos don't have those. Don't have---let me se-----

Hundley: You dont have Cash Registers.

Vahn: No, No in Laos, No.

Hundley: So they have to figure it up in their heads.

Vahn: Yeah, Yeah, have to figure in the head, Yeah.

Hundley: That pretty wild. I don't know what the World of

America would do without Cash Registers.

Vahn: Oh, Huh.

Hundley: It would take a long time to tabulate everything.

Vahn: What kind of no----go ahead.

END OF TAPE----- Other unintelligible.