

Transcript
Oral History with David Vu

So, we ended up in Arkansas. In Fort Chaffee. And in Fort Chaffee, the policy was that they wanted people to be sponsored out of the camp by either family or church, something like that. And so, soon after we got there my parents were approached by this family, the Morrey family, who had the support of their church but they were going to be the individual sponsors for our family. So, they were a nuclear family—a father, mother, and three children. They interviewed my dad and they were like, “Well, so why are you, why did you flee? What are you trying to do in the US?” My dad went through his thing about what his beliefs are and that hopefully that they were going to be congruent with the host family. But, the host family said, “It doesn't matter what you believe because, you don't have to believe anything. We would still help you.” That was very surprising to him. That Americans would have this kind of generosity. So, we were sponsored out and live in a trailer home in the back of their house. So, they had a regular house, with, well they had a ranch, and they bought a trailer home and they put it in the back.

But the memory of that crossing and being a refugee kind of always stayed with me because I always thought, “If my parents could go through that and survive, then I can survive anything.” I hear a lot of people complain about stupid things and it's a lot of first world problems. And, it's true that you have these problems and it's true that you don't have the perspective of an immigrant, but you know, I have these stories that I grew up with. And, in the grand scheme of things, you are very, very lucky to be here.

I was kind of sleep walking, I guess, until 2016 (laughter), with the election of the 45th president. And, that really woke me up. Suddenly, everything was alternative facts, and spin, and whoever was the most outrageous, got the most attention. And all these things suddenly felt so vulnerable. And so, I really started to think, democracy doesn't occur with other people, it has to start with me participating. Basically, after the election, this place became a political hotbed of resistance (laughter). And so then, I really started looking around and being here in San Diego on the boarder, well the boarder is right there, it's 20 minutes away.

And so, I read this article. It was about the caravan. Back then it was this big thing, big political statement. All of these people were coming up from Central America. So, I decided, I'm

going to go down there, and I'm going to go see it for myself, and I'm going to see what I can do. So, one of the things was a fundraiser to help the caravan. And I really wanted to help the LGB-Trans part of the caravan because, I read about the trans people who were part of the caravan and how they were so ostracized by their own caravan. That these people were the last to get food, the last to get clothing, they were the last to get housing. Because a lot of these organizations that were religious organizations who helped them along the way and wouldn't accept them for who they are. And when I saw that, I was like, "Well, that's a lot like the Vietnamese people on the boat in Singapore where you're so desperate and you're trying to get help. Who's going to help?" I said, "Well, you know what? I can do it. I'll do something." So, we had a little fundraiser. We brought money and we brought stuff, items down there to the shelters down there. And we started to make connections, and we started to meet people. I met an attorney for this organization that helps people specifically in the LGBT community who were part of the caravan. And so, I thought about it for a while and I was like, "You know what? I've always wanted to acknowledge the generosity of that family that helped me, by helping another family, helping another group of people." And I felt like I was in a position in my life where I could do it. And so, I said, "I'm going to do it!" And, I told my parents and I was expecting them to be supportive. And they were like "Oh no! What are you doing?! Have you lost your mind?! We realized that you were American but that is beyond the pale! That is to American! You're like being indoctrinated!" I'm like "Oh my god, stop being so melodramatic." And so, they were like "Oh, just think of the things that could happen! You don't know these people and they can cause all of these problems." And I was like, "Well, didn't they do the same thing for us? Didn't this family do the same when they invited us in." (Parents) "But we were different. We were religious. We were Christian and we were..." I'm like, "Ok, well you know what? It's my decision (laughter) I'm going to go do it."

And so, the attorney said, "I know exactly the two people! I'm going to connect you." So, she gave me these two names and they were both in ICE detention. So, I started writing letters to them. I said, "I've decided to sponsor you, so tell me about yourself." And so, we had this long correspondence for about three months, that's all we had. And then we were finally able to connect through the telephone. And so, I was able to speak to them. The first person, he was not given asylum, he was waiting to get asylum. And they decided that because you have a sponsor, we will allow you to leave the ICE detention. And so, because of that he flew out here. I bought

him a ticket; he flew out here and we met for the first time in person at the airport. We wrote his name, we showed up with flowers and we're like, "Welcome!" And it was very, I have to say it was kind of scary because it was like who is this person I am welcoming into my house. And so, that happened but it turns out it was fine. He's respectable. He is studious. He's, he's a great person. And so, at the end of the day I would say it was a positive experience for me to sponsor someone. And so, I hope that it would encourage other Vietnamese people to get involved in non-Vietnamese crises that are around them. And I feel like it's a good counterpoint to a lot of people saying, "Immigrants are a drag on society." When new immigrants are helped by older immigrants then that shows you that is not the case. That shows you that the new immigrants are going to help the next immigrants at some point. And, when I was helped by that White family it was like they were immigrants too, at some point. They weren't all Native Americans who helped me (laughter). So, it's possible that we can change the story because they know that, people, when they are in a situation that where they are able to and they are willing to help people, then they will. I think that for Vietnamese people it's just like that. They are going to help people. And, I think that it's just part of the story that needs to be told.