

**Pham Vy [or Vy Pham]  
Narrator**

**Sarah Mason  
Interviewer**

**July 7, 1979  
Minneapolis, Minnesota**

Sarah Mason           **-SM**

Pham Vy               **-PV**

**SM:** I'm talking to Pham Van Vy in Minneapolis, Minnesota on July 7, 1979. This is an interview conducted under the auspices of the Minnesota Historical Society, and the interviewer is Sarah Mason. Could we begin with your childhood, your family, what your family's work was, and your parents, etcetera?

**PV:** My parents lived in North Vietnam. I have a brother but he died very soon. And I'm an only child.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** In my family.

**SM:** What town was that or city?

**PV:** This is the town named Sept Pagodes.

**SM:** How would you spell that?

**PV:** Spell . . .

**SM:** In English? [Chuckles]

**PV:** Sept, it's seven.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** Seven Pagodas.

**SM:** Oh. I see. Yes, in the French, *sept*.

**PV:** That the French gave that name.

**SM:** Oh, I see. And what work did your father do?

**PV:** My father is a mayor.

**SM:** He was the mayor of the town. I see. That was an elected position or appointed?

**PV:** Ah . . . yes. In the village he is elected.

**SM:** I see. Well, that's interesting. And did your mother work outside of the home or mainly in . . .?

**PV:** My mother is [unclear] keeper, running the house.

**SM:** Yes. So what year were you born there?

**PV:** I was born in 1932.

**SM:** 1932. And you spent all your childhood in the town?

**PV:** Yes, I spent all of my childhood in my town. I studied at the French school.

**SM:** Studied in French school. That was right in that town then?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Was this a big town or a little town?

**PV:** [Sighs] Ah . . . not too big.

**SM:** Not too big.

**PV:** But just . . .

**SM:** What was the main work of the town? Was it farming or . . .?

**PV:** [Sighs] In the town . . . around the town was many, many villagers who's main working is agriculture.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And that town is like . . . in the town it's commercial.

**SM:** Yes, with shops and the school and . . . Was there a pagoda then, the sept, seventh pagoda was in the town?

**PV:** Yes, that . . . when the French came in, then they have seven pagodas, I think.

**SM:** Oh. I see.

**PV:** And they take that name . . . named that town.

**SM:** They had seven in the town? Seven were in the town or this was the seventh?

**PV:** Yes. Yes. Yes, in the town.

**SM:** Oh. So most of the town then . . . most of the people were Buddhist or . . .?

**PV:** Yes, the majority of people living in the town was Buddhism.

**SM:** I see. Would you have an idea of the population of the town? Was it a lot of them? To have seven pagodas, that seems like it would a lot of people.

**PV:** Yes. In all the town about twenty thousand.

**SM:** Twenty thousand? So that was a large . . .

**PV:** But it's the point of . . . historical [unclear].

**SM:** It was historical. Oh.

**PV:** Because about two miles from the town is the temple of the very famous general named Tran Hung Dao. T-R-A-N, H-U-N-G, and D-A-O.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** He's one of the famous generals in Vietnam leading the resistance against Chinese.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And he defeated the Chinese army, to get independence for our country.

**SM:** I see. This was a man?

**PV:** A man.

**SM:** A man, yes. I see. Oh, so that was a big important temple then.

**PV:** Oh, yes. That's one of the very big temples in Vietnam.

**SM:** Yes. Tourists would come . . . ?

**PV:** Almost everybody knows about that.

**SM:** I see. Yes.

**PV:** Like in the United States if you're talking about Washington or Lincoln or something like that.

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** In Vietnam when you're talking about Tran Hung Dao, everybody knows who.

**SM:** I see. What . . . what period of time was that resistance?

**PV:** [Sighs] Oh, I don't remember exactly. [Chuckles]

**SM:** Yes. Well, that's . . .

**PV:** But long, long ago.

**SM:** Yes. So it was a very old temple in your childhood.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. And then in high school, did you attend high school in this town, too?

**PV:** No, I finished my elementary school at that town and I went to another town about twenty miles from my town to study in high school.

**SM:** I see. You lived at the school, too?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes. What was that town then?

**PV:** That is . . . the name is Bac Minh. B-A-C, M-I-N-H.

**SM:** [Unclear] Yes. So that was a bigger town then?

**PV:** That is a very big city.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** Not far from Hanoi.

**SM:** I see. So let's see, what year was this now? This seems to be in the 1940s sometime when you went to high school.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. And then you joined the Resistance after high school then?

**PV:** I joined the Resistance in 1946.

**SM:** I see. This was right after you finished high school?

**PV:** Not yet.

**SM:** Not yet finished high school then. I see. And this was the Resistance against the French?

**PV:** French colony, yes.

**SM:** Yes. Do you want to talk a little bit about that? I mean, what it was like for a young boy to join the Resistance and . . .?

**PV:** Yes. I . . . my country had been dominated by France for a hundred years and many, many times we resisted against France. This is the only time we get independent, after the Second World War.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** But in 1946 the British army came to South Vietnam to . . . how do you say? Disarm the [unclear] Japanese.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And they brought with them the French army, too.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And they tried to re-occupy our country again. And we had to resist them.

**SM:** I see. So the Vietnamese put up a resistance right away then.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. What happened?

**PV:** We were fighting and then . . . until 1954. We won the war after Dien Bien Phu defeated the French. In the international conference in Geneva, they reached an agreement to cut our country in two parts, North and South.

**SM:** Was there a lot of anger about that among the Vietnamese?

**PV:** Yes, because when the French left North Vietnam and moved to the South, then the North is completely taken over by the Communists then.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** During the [unclear] the Communists, they really prepared for that there.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And then when the Communists were in power, about a million people from North Vietnam left their hometowns and moved to the South, because they didn't want to live with the Communists.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And I also followed that last of people, and went South in 1955.

**SM:** Well, were a large number of those people Catholic people?

**PV:** Yes, most of them were Catholic. But also have the Buddhist people, too.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** But the time for the people who can choose to go to the South Vietnam, this is the . . . according to the Geneva agreement, we have about . . . about a hundred eighty days, I think.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** To choose to go to the South or stay in the North with the new regime.

**SM:** I see. There was a period in which you were allowed to choose.

**PV:** Yes, to go.

**SM:** Go freely.

**PV:** But the Communists did really not respect that agreement.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** They tried to prohibit that to people.

**SM:** Tried to what?

**PV:** To stop the people who want to go.

**SM:** Oh! I see.

**PV:** And why then only about a million people. If really free to go, I think many people choose to go.

**SM:** About a million people went, you said?

**PV:** Who went to the South in 1954. And myself, I went to the South in 1955.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** I [unclear] stay over the hope of a year to know exactly what Communist means to us.

**SM:** Oh, I see. Yes. So you hadn't decided right away to go.

**PV:** Yes. When I learned that the Communists, they work only for the international movement of Communists, not for Vietnam . . .

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And only interested in people who belong to the Communist Party.

**SM:** I see. They were tied in with the Chinese Communists or . . . ?

**PV:** At that time they were tied to Chinese Communists, yes. Because of the support from Chinese Communists, from Russia, and . . .

**SM:** Oh, from both countries.

**PV:** Yes, to win the war.

**SM:** I see. Were they particularly harsh towards Catholics or was that just a rumor?

**PV:** It was very hard for them, for Catholics, yes.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Because the Communists considered the religious as . . . as [unclear] or something like that.

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** They poison people.

**SM:** I see. So . . .

**PV:** Not only for the Catholic, even the Buddhists or . . .

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** But the Catholic was the one of the many forces who were very united.

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** And organized. And during the war in the North Vietnam, the Catholic community really was fighting against Communists.

**SM:** I see. I see.

**PV:** And when the Communists won the war, it really reprised all the people then.

**SM:** Oh, I see. So they were really enemies, the two groups.

**PV:** Oh, yes.

**SM:** They were carrying out reprisals against the Catholics. Would they . . . ?

**PV:** Yes. Against many people, but especially Catholics.

**SM:** I see. Would they imprison them or just kill them or . . . ?

**PV:** Oh, some of the leaders have been killed. Many people have been imprisoned. And I think they gave a priority to those people.

**SM:** Yes. I see.

**PV:** Or you may say like a second citizen or something like that.

**SM:** Like what?

**PV:** A second citizen.

**SM:** Oh. Yes, second class citizens.



**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. So you went . . . you left in 1955 and that was with your wife and child?

**PV:** One child.

**SM:** One child.

**PV:** My mother, my wife and my first child.

**SM:** Oh, your mother went, too.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Was your father still living then?

**PV:** My father had died.

**SM:** He had died. I see. So you just left your home and went to the South. And how did you find work and shelter when you got to the South?

**PV:** South Vietnam is also our country. And I have a little education, some experience, it's not hard for me to find a job anywhere in Vietnam.

**SM:** I see. Yes. So did you begin to work in the rubber plantations right away or . . .?

**PV:** No, I was first working for our government to [unclear] to the people who came from the North.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And at that time we had a department for the resettling of the people from North Vietnam who went South.

**SM:** I see. Yes. Was this under Diem?

**PV:** Under President Diem, yes.

**SM:** What was your position or job?

**PV:** Officer.

**SM:** Officer. Yes.

**PV:** And I worked only a few months. One of....

[Telephone rings – briefly interrupts conversation]

**SM:** Was your family Catholic or were there many Catholics in your village or mostly Buddhist? Or in your town, I guess.

**PV:** In my town it was not many. The majority is the Buddhism.

**SM:** I see. Yes.

**PV:** My family is not Catholic.

**SM:** I see. First you joined the Resistance against the French. But then did you later join the French against the Communists?

**PV:** I . . . then in 1949 I . . . back home.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And when in back home I have to join the army, the French army.

**SM:** Oh, you had to join the French army, in 1949.

**PV:** Yes. I joined the French army in . . . 1953.

**SM:** Oh, I see. Okay. 1953. I see. And that was to fight the Communists?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. But first you were in the Vietnamese resistance against the French.

**PV:** Yes. Yes.

**SM:** I see. And was that a kind of guerrilla fighting or . . . ?

**PV:** No, because I found out that the resistance movement had been dominated by the Communists.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And the fighting for the international movement is not for our country.

**SM:** I see. I see.

**PV:** And at that time our country had been given by [unclear] you know, he is the . . . working with the French, but we have . . . are literally independent.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And at that time it was the Vietnamese army, we have a Vietnamese army. It's beside the French army.

**SM:** I see. Oh, so you joined the Vietnamese army under the French. I see.

**PV:** Yes, the officers, they were trained by the French.

**SM:** I see. And that was in the period of Bao Dai's [unclear]?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. But that just lasted to 1954, was it? Oh, yes, and then the Geneva conference.

**PV:** Yes, and then [unclear] American [unclear] in July 1954.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** At that time, the French moved to the South.

**SM:** I see. When we did . . . I guess we did get down to South Vietnam when you were working for the government for a few months.

**PV:** Yes. Yes.

**SM:** Then you began to work somewhere else?

**PV:** And I went to work for Michelin plantation, rubber plantation.

**SM:** Michelin?

**PV:** Michelin.

**SM:** How would you spell that?

**PV:** M-I-C-H-E-L-I-N.

**SM:** I see. And that's a French . . .?

**PV:** Yes, that's a French company.

**SM:** Yes. I see. Were most of the plantations owned by French then, the rubber plantations?

**PV:** Yes. Almost . . . the big plantations are owned by French.

**SM:** I see. But some were owned by Vietnamese at that time?

**PV:** Very small plantations.

**SM:** Very small ones. And you started out just as a worker then?

**PV:** No, I started as a foreman.

**SM:** Oh. You started as a foreman.

**PV:** And I was directing a group of twenty-four people.

**SM:** I see. Well, had you had any experience with labor unions before or were there any under the French?

**PV:** No. No. No.

**SM:** No. When did you first get interested in them?

**PV:** I . . . you know, I had been in the Resistance against the French before, and when I worked in the plantation I found out that the plantation workers had been exploited by the owner.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And including myself. And at that time we . . . our country was already independent under President Diem. And we organized workers for . . . the first for asking to promote the worker, the working conditions, wages, and housing. And I started working with the labor movement in 1955, too. Later, later in 1955.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** But when I started working with the labor union I already was promoted to a supervisor.

**SM:** I see. And the French were still there in . . .

**PV:** The French owner was still there. The French army had . . . still there, too.

**SM:** Oh. The French army was there and the French owners were still there.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** But actually, Vietnam was not under French rule at that time.

**PV:** No.

**SM:** Yes. Why was the French army still there?

**PV:** Because they moved from the North to the South.

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** And at that time the Emperor Bao Dai was in France. And we haven't . . . the President Diem at that time is the Prime Minister under the Emperor Bao Dai.

**SM:** He was what?

**PV:** Prime Minister.

**SM:** Oh. Yes. I see.

**PV:** And in 1956 he organized a referendum to let the people choose between him and Bao Dai.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** Yes, and the majority of people in South Vietnam chose him.

**SM:** Chose him.

**PV:** And he became the first President of South Vietnam.

**SM:** I see. That was 1956?

**PV:** Yes. October 1956.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** He became the first President of the Republic of Vietnam.

**SM:** I see. And so when you began these labor unions under Diem, those were the first ones in Vietnam, is that correct?

**PV:** Yes, the labor movement in Vietnam has been organized [unclear] Vietnam since 1949.

**SM:** Oh, since 1949.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** These were under the French then.

**PV:** Yes, even under the French. Yes. All the organized.

**SM:** Were they very effective?

**PV:** Oh, very effective.

**SM:** Yes. In bringing better wages?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes. So you had had some knowledge of the labor movement or you . . . ?

**PV:** Yes, I heard about it.

**SM:** You heard about it.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** In the Resistance?

**PV:** No. No. When I was living in North Vietnam.

**SM:** Oh. Did you . . . did you have any idea you would become so involved with it then?

**PV:** No.

**SM:** Or you were just interested in . . . ?

**PV:** When I had some idea of that was when I started working for that rubber plantation.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Yes. Before, not.

**SM:** Yes. So that's when you became really involved.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** When you were at the plantation. Well, it seems like a reasonable place to become involved.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Well, could you talk just a little bit about your way of organizing the workers and how it might differ from American labor organization?

**PV:** Yes. We organized a worker's union, we think the way to promote workers or to protect the interest to workers exploited by the owner is to . . . not different with the American labor movement.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** But the philosophy is a little different, and in the way we organize is also different. There for different, you may see very clear, that in the United States that when you organize the worker in a factory, if the labor union gets more than fifty percent of votes and the workers vote for labor, then that union will be representing a hundred percent of the factory.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And no other union can go in to organize a little union to compete with it. But in Vietnam you have to organize the workers . . . even in the same factory sometimes you have two unions.

**SM:** Oh, I see. So it's not a closed [unclear].

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And the way they collect dues in Vietnam, we have to go to see every worker to collect that due, but here you have a system of check offs for them.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And the due automatically is reduced on your check, and we don't have that system.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** That's different.

**SM:** Well, do you think there are some advantages to your method of going around to collect?

**PV:** Yes. They have some advantages and also some disadvantages. For example, in America, everybody has to pay dues.

**SM:** Yes. [Chuckles]

**PV:** That's automatically. But in Vietnam, if our officer who's going to collect the due, he has to go to meet the worker every month to collect the due.

**SM:** Right.

**PV:** And sometimes we cannot collect [unclear].

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Some workers don't . . . this month may not pay. [Chuckles] Something like that.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** But we have some advantage that the labor union really . . . related to the worker every month. To collect information through . . . I say to collect also their desire, what they want the union to do for them.

**SM:** I see. So when you'd go, you would stay and talk with the people.

**PV:** Yes, and they ask the question, "What did you do this month?" Or, "What will you do next month?" And this is a true way of communication. You know.

**SM:** I see. So the worker has a chance to ask the union rep . . .

**PV:** Yes. And every month, you know, like the officer comes to collect the dues and they have to go to the member's home.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** To ask them, okay, this month you will . . . to pay the dues and the worker can ask any question if you want, you know.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Or what the dues, are you going to do with my money or what we are going to do next month or if they have a problem they can . . . and that officer will then take note and then bring it back to the labor union. And also, that officer can inform this member of the activity of the labor union.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** You know, in close communication with him.

**SM:** Right. So the man who is going around to collect the dues, he wouldn't be paid by that money?



**PV:** No.

**SM:** Is he paid . . . ?

**PV:** This is . . . no.

**SM:** So he's not paid?

**PV:** This is . . . he's one of the elected officers.

**SM:** Ah ha.

**PV:** For example, every local section union.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** I mean, at one plantation, like my plantation, about five thousand workers.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And they have twenty-one villages.

**SM:** That the workers live in?

**PV:** Yes. And we organized every village and we call these a section. And each section has at least five officers elected by those members living in that village.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And also those workers, they're working with the plantation.

**SM:** Oh, also some that didn't work there?

**PV:** Yes, they . . .

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** Here's also the worker. The officer is also a worker working with the plantation.

**SM:** Yes. I see.

**PV:** Yes, he's not . . . he's not paid by the labor union, really, the union has not enough money to pay the full time worker.

**SM:** He works on his own time then?

**PV:** Yes, he works after working hours, because in the village, they have about two to three hundred people living in that then.

**SM:** I see. And this is not a village that is owned by the plantation?

**PV:** The village is owned by the plantation, too.

**SM:** It is owned by the plantation.

**PV:** The houses built by the plantation.

**SM:** I see. So everyone in the village worked in the plantation.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Did they all have jobs, all the time?

**PV:** Yes. Who have been living in that village, have jobs and everything.

**SM:** Yes. I see.

**PV:** Because when you don't have a job you have to . . . out.

**SM:** You have to leave.

**PV:** Because this is owned by the plantation.

**SM:** I see. Okay. Were the houses pretty adequate or not so good or . . . ?

**PV:** Oh, yes. We . . . we were fighting for changes, many, many times.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And when we reached a collective agreement with the plantation owner the house has been [unclear] and repaired and very adequate.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** If you compare with the people who were living out of plantations.

**SM:** So they got good housing out of that.

**PV:** Yes. And they have free housing, free . . . medical care.

**SM:** Yes. Schools?

**PV:** School is free. The school was built by the plantation. The equipment is provided by the plantation. And all of the teachers from the government, government sent a teacher [unclear].

**SM:** I see. I see. So were there any other unions besides the one you were working for that organized these workers?

**PV:** We . . . in the plantations we had about seventy thousand workers.

**SM:** Yes. This is all the plantations.

**PV:** Yes. And our federation had about . . . ninety percent of the members belonged to our federation.

**SM:** Oh. Yes. What was the name of your federation?

**PV:** This was the National Federation of Plantation Workers.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And we also had another union organized helping by government.

**SM:** Helped by the government?

**PV:** Yes, the government helping to organize another union in there. They have very few members.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Very, very few.

**SM:** And was this National Federation of Plantation Workers then affiliated with an international group?

**PV:** Yes. We are affiliated with the . . . the International Plantation Workers. We just looked at that in Geneva.

**SM:** I see. So this would be plantation workers in other countries.

**PV:** Oh, yes. All of the countries have a Plantation [Workers Union] . . . except Communist countries.

**SM:** Oh. Well, have you an idea of how many people that might include or how many countries? Would it be mostly Southeast Asia?

**PV:** The international members of the union?

**SM:** Yes. Yes.

**PV:** They have about three million members, I think.

**SM:** Oh. I see. Is that in Asia and other parts of the world?

**PV:** Now it is all five continents.

**SM:** Everywhere.

**PV:** From federations from Brazil or also Sweden and India and every country in the world.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Have a Plantation, tea plantation, rubber plantation . . .

**SM:** All kinds.

**PV:** Yes, coffee plantations.

**SM:** Africa, any from those African countries?

**PV:** No, I don't . . . I don't think . . .

**SM:** They were just getting independence then maybe.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. Well, I think you mentioned when we talked before that American union members came over to offer some kind of assistance or advice or . . . ?

**PV:** That . . . you know, in my federation . . . within the country we have a confederation of labor.

**SM:** Oh. I see.

**PV:** And that confederation had organized for the national confederation of labor who every national federation affiliates to that.

**SM:** I see. It was called a National Federation . . . Vietnamese . . .

**PV:** Vietnamese Confederation of Labor.

**SM:** Vietnamese Confederation of Labor. And so all the unions . . .

**PV:** All of the national unions and the union council affiliated to that confederation. Like AFL-CIO here, they have many different federations, affiliate or not.

**SM:** Yes. Yes.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Well, all the unions in Vietnam though would affiliate with this?

**PV:** Well, not all.

**SM:** Not all.

**PV:** Well, some unions, they organized another confederation.

**SM:** Okay. What was that called?

**PV:** [Sighs] That was called . . .

**SM:** It's hard to translate the names.

**PV:** Oh, yes.

**SM:** Even if you have it in French or . . .

**PV:** Yes, it's [unclear]. The [unclear] worker farmer confederation or something like that.

**SM:** Workers?

**PV:** Worker Farmer Confederation.

**SM:** Was this a smaller confederation?

**PV:** Yes, Free Worker Farmer Confederation.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Yes, they have a few union affiliate to that.

**SM:** I see. So the Vietnamese confederation of labor was the biggest.

**PV:** One of the biggest, yes. We have a [unclear] for eighty thousand members.

**SM:** Oh. [Unclear].

**PV:** Yes. And another confederation had about ten thousand members in it.

**SM:** I see. The Free Workers Farmers had ten thousand?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes. Well, this Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, that was not only plantation workers?

**PV:** Oh, no.

**SM:** That would be . . .

**PV:** They would have plantations to one of the federations. We have a Vietnamese Confederation have the national federation of fishermen working.

**SM:** Fishermen?

**PV:** Fisherman.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And the federation of the bank workers.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Federation of Transportation.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And the Federation of textile workers.

**SM:** [Unclear]?

**PV:** Textile.

**SM:** Textile.

**PV:** The federation of railroad workers.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** The federation . . . farmers' federation.

**SM:** Oh. Yes.

**PV:** And many, many council . . . union council who were industrialized.

**SM:** I see. So they would be factory workers and . . .

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. So that was a [unclear].

**PV:** And we also have a national petroleum workers union, too.

**SM:** Yes. I see. So that was a really broad spectrum there.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. When was the first strike called by the plantation [unclear]?

**PV:** The plantation had it first time in 1956.

**SM:** 1956.

**PV:** We called a general strike for every plantation.

**SM:** In Vietnam?

**PV:** In Vietnam, because at that time we don't have any pieces of floor to protect plantation workers.

**SM:** I see. That was the first call to strike.

**PV:** We have some type of code for our [unclear] that only protects farmer.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** And the plantation worker it just [unclear] industrialize. One part is working at a plantation another [unclear] working in factory and . . . and they can . . . are welcome to workers not affected.

**SM:** I see. So some plantation workers were considered agricultural and some were considered industrial?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. But there was a law to protect the farmers earlier?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Oh. That's really different from here, because farmers have not really been unionized.

**PV:** Oh, because in America a farmer is a very big farm and . . .

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And but in Vietnam when we called federation of farmer it means the worker who's working in the farm.

**SM:** Oh. Like the migrant workers here [unclear].

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. Oh, to protect farm workers.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. So in 1956 they struck to get . . . the plantation workers struck because they wanted a law to protect them?

**PV:** They wanted some . . . the first one is that to want to . . . how do you say? To ameliorate the conditions, the working conditions, wages, and . . . and gain the respect of all from owner.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Because the plantation worker before is never respected by the owner. Like a slave.

**SM:** Oh. So they wanted bargaining rights then.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And the second general strike is in 1959, I think. That is the time we . . . we bargaining for a collective agreement. We begin to negotiate with the plantation owner in 1958. We take two years and nothing . . . we cannot reach the agreement.

**SM:** Hmmm.



**PV:** And we have to call a general strike again, too.

**SM:** So that was the second general strike.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Of the plantation owners. Of workers, excuse me.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** What would happen when they would go on strike? Just simply the work stopped? Did it . . . ?

**PV:** The work stopped. The police came in, [unclear] people put in jail.

**SM:** How many people were put in jail?

**PV:** In 1956, after the [unclear] after we win . . .

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Then over a thousand of our officers had been in jail by the government.

**SM:** Oh. After you won they imprisoned them.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Oh. A thousand officers.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Were you one of them?

**PV:** No. Not . . .

**SM:** And how long did they keep them in jail then?

**PV:** Some went one year, some went two years, some went ten years.

**SM:** Oh. [Sighs] That's terrible.

**PV:** Someone died in jail, never came back.

**SM:** And then in 1959 again they imprisoned people after it was settled?

**PV:** Some. Some directly, not . . . not immediately. When we called a strike, many officers had been arrested.

**SM:** I see. As many as a thousand again?

**PV:** No, not like that.

**SM:** Yes. What would you say? Five hundred or less?

**PV:** No. About forty or fifty.

**SM:** Oh. But it was always the officers that were arrested though? But you were not arrested?

**PV:** No, I just go down to the police several times, it was. But not really arrested.

**SM:** Oh. Yes. You had to go to the police station?

**PV:** In 1956 I had to go to the police station forty-five days.

**SM:** [Sighs] Oh.

**PV:** Eight o'clock in the morning to three to five in the afternoon, then would answer the questions. Forty-five days, consecutive days, that means every day.

**SM:** Oh. But in 1959 did you have to do the same thing?

**PV:** No. In 1959, no.

**SM:** I see. So and you did accomplish some amelioration of the conditions?

**PV:** Yes. When we reached a collective agreement, in 1960, in the relations between the owner and worker is going very well.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** We respect each other and we review that convention every year.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And if we have something wrong, we correct it.

**SM:** So that was working very well then by 1960.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. And did you have a legal right to strike then or just collective agreement and . . . ?

**PV:** And no, even in the labor law we have a right to go on strike.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** But the procedure makes the . . . it takes a long, long time to . . .

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And sometimes we go on strike before that.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** And [chuckles] and the government put us in jail because we violate the law. And the government . . . their own way . . . to them that labor union have a invented by Communists.

**SM:** Oh. I see. But it wasn't true or . . . ?

**PV:** Oh, sometimes . . .

**SM:** A few.

**PV:** Sometimes very few officers have been contact with Communist [unclear]. But the majority not.

**SM:** I see. I see. Was there another big strike then in the 1960s or . . . ?

**PV:** In 1964 we have a general strike for every union.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** That's that Vietnamese confederation leading that . . .

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** To again the government, not owners. Because that time the General [unclear] he took power in 1964 and he tried to destroy the labor union.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** He's the one dictator, I think.

**SM:** Was Diem in favor of destroying the unions or . . . ?

**PV:** No. Not . . . no government in favor [unclear] but the President Diem, it . . . he have a little respect for that labor union.

**SM:** How do spell Diem?

**PV:** D-I-E-M.

**SM:** Oh, is that the brother of the president or . . . ?

**PV:** That's the president.

**SM:** Oh, it is the president.

**PV:** Yes, he's the president.

**SM:** I see. I see. And was that successful then, the . . .

**PV:** Oh, yes. It was successful because the government had to recognize the labor union have a role in the society.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And the labor union is very hard [unclear] in Vietnam because our country is a continuously have the war.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And almost every year we have a martial law.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And with martial law they prohibit that any action who can interfere with the economic development or army operation or something like that. Based on that it's easy to put the labor union in jail.

[Telephone rings – brief interruption]

**SM:** So this strike in 1964, that was called to get recognition from the government?

**PV:** That was . . . again the government because the government at that time, General [unclear] declared martial law and he said . . . Vietnam will no longer . . . don't need the . . . don't need to have a labor union. And he tried to . . . how do you say . . . to expunge the labor leaders out of the country.

**SM:** He wanted to expel them?

**PV:** Yes. That . . . that really he wanted to destroy labor unions, he wanted that.

**SM:** I see. And this was president....

[Recording interruption]

**SM:** Between 1965 or 1964 and the time when you left, which was 1975, is that right?

**PV:** Yes. I left Vietnam in 1975.

**SM:** Yes. In that ten years then, what were some of the important developments in labor unions?

**PV:** The labor unions in Vietnam during that ten years, we were [unclear] to have collective agreements for [unclear] workers union.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And we got the . . . we organized a cooperative for the farmers, because during that time we helped the government to give the land to . . . [unclear] land to the [unclear].

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** That means the distribution of the land from the land owner to the farmer who will share owner and then about a million farmers in Vietnam become the owners of the land.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** Instead of the few . . . fewer land owners.

**SM:** I see. So the unions brought this about, or the confederation of plantation workers.

**PV:** Yes. It is the idea of the confederation; we work with the government and also with other governments like the United States to get help. The government of the United States helping the government of Vietnam to pay the land owners.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And we get that land distributed to the farmers.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** We called it the peace green revolution.

**SM:** Peace growing?

**PV:** Green.

**SM:** Peace . . . oh.

**PV:** Green revolution.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And somewhere the green revolution has the . . . is the war among farmers and land owners.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** But in Vietnam at that time we have the government pay it.

**SM:** I see. So that was a peaceful . . .

**PV:** Yes, very peaceful. And that transferred the title to the land owners and the government gets the land and this they give to the farmers.

**SM:** I see. And then you were . . . organized cooperatives to help them . . . to seed and . . .

**PV:** Help them to . . . first of all we organized cooperatives to get the capital for the farmers because the farmers had nothing on hand when they get the land.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And we have to help them the capital, the seed and also we organized more cooperatives to buy the tractor for them.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** That means we, the labor union, tried to mechanize agriculture in Vietnam.

**SM:** I see. Oh, that was [unclear].

**PV:** And at that time also we get help from AFL-CIO.

**SM:** Ah ha.

**PV:** They send their [unclear] to Vietnam. They also helped with financial.

**SM:** I see. This was in . . . all throughout that decade, or . . .?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes. I see. So both the United States government and labor unions were involved in . . .

**PV:** Yes, helped . . . it helping for . . .

**SM:** I see. Well, that's interesting.

**PV:** Yes. The AFL-CIO have an institute who were located in our headquarters.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And the name is the American Free Labor Institute. Have a director, assistant director, and a few [unclear].

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** They have one [unclear for labor education, one [unclear] about cooperative.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And then they were working together with us for many years.

**SM:** I see. Well, it's too bad they had to all end it. But that was a pretty interesting connection there. And they sent . . . they sent this kind of help to other countries, too, or . . .?

**PV:** Oh, yes. Not only Vietnam, the . . . AFL-CIO have American Free Labor Institute in Africa, in Europe, and in Asia. In Asia they're helping the labor union in the Philippines, Malaysia, in Pakistan, in India, in Sri Lanka, in Thailand, in Indonesia, that mean . . . no . . . oh, not everywhere you know.

**SM:** I see. So this isn't at the request of the American government then? This is more of an international labor [unclear]?

**PV:** No, I think AFL-CIO is not working on that because the government requested it; they are free to do it.

**SM:** Yes. Right. But the government is probably in favor of it.

**PV:** Maybe, I don't know. I don't know what . . . that didn't . . .

**SM:** But that had nothing to do with it.

**PV:** Yes. [Chuckles] That . . . I don't know . . .

**SM:** I guess I shouldn't say in favor, but the government [unclear].

**PV:** But you know the labor union in the war.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** They very solidarity together. And one labor union in this country help another country. It's very normal.

**SM:** So that's always been part of the labor organizations.

**PV:** Yes. And in the world they have three different organizations for labor.

**SM:** I see. And they're all . . . Are they all part of the international labor organization or not?

**PV:** They . . . the main one is named World Confederation of Labor.

**SM:** World Confederation of Labor.

**PV:** The name that has been changed before they call international . . . before they call international Christian federation trust union.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Yes. And then several years ago they changed to World confederation of labor.

**SM:** I see. This isn't the one you connected with is it?

**PV:** Yes, that's the one.

**SM:** Oh, it is the one.

**PV:** We are affiliated.

**SM:** Oh [unclear].

**PV:** And another union . . . another international called IFCTU, that international . . .

**SM:** International?

**PV:** IFCTU . . . International Federated . . . no, not federation. International Free Conservation Trade Union.

**SM:** I see. Yes. That's a different one.

**PV:** Yes. That, the organization, we . . . the AFL-CIO has been affiliated.



**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And this is one of bigger.

**SM:** That's bigger?

**PV:** Yes. Another organization they call International Federation of Trade Union. And this is the Communist organization.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** The only the . . . member of the Communists can be only.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And between the union who affiliate the same international the one we help [unclear].

**SM:** I see. Yes.

**PV:** For example, Vietnam, sometimes we help another country in Asia to organize the labor union, too. We send our [unclear] to help them to organize seminars, organize . . . how to organize labor union. We send expertise to Thailand, to Singapore, to Malaysia sometimes.

**SM:** I see. And then in the summers you went to Geneva to the international labor organizer . . . ?

**PV:** Oh, that's the International Labor Organization. That is not only the workers labor union. This is the international of tripartite organization.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** Government, management, and worker.

**SM:** Oh, I see.

**PV:** This is . . . then this is the organization who funding by government.

**SM:** Is that under United Nations?

**PV:** Yes. Yes.

**SM:** I see. I see; that's tripartite.

**PV:** Yes, I think . . .

**SM:** And it's funded by the UN then.

**PV:** Yes, by the UN. Yes.

**SM:** And you went to a number of those seminars [unclear]?

**PV:** Many years I have . . . I have . . . I am a delegate, a worker delegate from Vietnam.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And the management can send a representative [unclear] a delegate [unclear].

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And the government send a representative from the government, representative. And in that conference it took place in Geneva every year and then they discussed about the interests of workers. The relation between government and management and worker, how to improve that.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And they produced some kind of guiding law for the country who . . .

**SM:** For each country?

**PV:** For everyone, for every country in the world.

**SM:** For everyone everywhere. Okay.

**PV:** And many convention for example convention for free organization, convention for collective agreement, and a convention for worker management relations. And after they produced the conventions like that, every country who signed or who ratified that convention had to respect that, had to follow it.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And this is not . . . not only with the organization for labor but for government and for the management.

**SM:** I see. I see.

**PV:** And that is the place for every . . . every organization in the world belong to labor or belong to management or government, can expect their view and can convince other people to accept their view.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And then they ratify the convention on it.

**SM:** I see. Do the Communist countries send delegates to this?

**PV:** Yes. Every country in the world sends delegates.

**SM:** Every country.

**PV:** Every country who is member of the United Nations.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Have a member in that.

**SM:** Oh, so they . . .

**PV:** That's one of the bigger organizations in the United Nations.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** That every country have a represent on that and . . . and also their own desk organization in the United Nations, too.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** I think that organization had been organized in 1919, something like that.

**SM:** Oh. Hmm. Well, could you give us some idea of what kind of involvement in labor disputes you've had here in the United States, since you came in 1975?

**PV:** I came here in 1975, and in 1976 we had a worker conflict in California. In the Poultry Federation. Poultry?

**SM:** Poultry, yes. Poultry Federation?

**PV:** Yes, that's called International Poultry Federation.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Yes, it's located in California. And one of the organizations who are affiliated to AFL-CIO.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** I went there though for fifteen days as the consultant. And the second time I went I think in 1977. I asking by AFL-CIO to go to New Orleans, Louisiana for one month to help the garment international workers union there. Garment?

**SM:** Yes. Garment.

**PV:** To organize the labor union in New Orleans.

**SM:** Oh, to organize the union.

**PV:** Yes. After asked me [unclear] asked the national organizer.

**SM:** You were the national organizer?

**PV:** My title is national organizer.

**SM:** I see. And they were successful? You were successful in organizing that?

**PV:** I think I helped them a lot.

**SM:** Yes. What were . . .? Just to backtrack a minute. What were some of your positions in the labor unions in Vietnam?

**PV:** In Vietnam I am a general secretary of my federation of plantation workers.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** I am a member of board executive of Vietnamese Confederation of Labor in charge of organizing, planning, from . . . 1963 to 1973, I think.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And I became commissioner in charge of international affairs in 1973. But before that, I had been involved [or informed] about international relations. And I became vice president of brotherhood of Asian trade union—that means the labor union in Asia.

**SM:** Brotherhood of . . . what was it called?

**PV:** Brotherhood of Asian Trade Union.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Trade unionist [unclear] like that.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And this . . . this is the labor union for whole of Asia.

**SM:** All Asia. I see. Yes. I see. And so then to get back to the United States, after you went to New Orleans, have you done some other things?

**PV:** No I spent there one month and then I go back to study because I am studying at the University in . . . early summer I'll have some time with that.

**SM:** You study here at the University?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. And you're planning to do that next fall [unclear]?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** I plan to finish my degree one year from now . . . or two years from now.

**SM:** And that's in social work, you said?

**PV:** Yes, and I plan to go into social work.

**SM:** I see. You mentioned when I talked to you the other day, you'd been out to Washington. What were you doing there?

**PV:** Oh, I went to Washington on June 18<sup>th</sup> to attend a conference called the Coalition Meeting . . . this is the organization have been organized two years ago, I think.

**SM:** It's called a Coalition?

**PV:** Coalition Committee.

**SM:** Coalition Committee. Yes. For refugees?

**PV:** For refugees.

**SM:** And that's a national [unclear]?

**PV:** I think so, yes. And there are many states who are involved of helping refugees have representative there, you know.

**SM:** I see. So each state . . .

**PV:** And that time especially we met with the Senator Kennedy and then Congressional [unclear] and Congressional Hoffman and others. And also the . . .

**SM:** Hoffman?

**PV:** Representatives of the AFL-CIO. One of the vice presidents come to give speech support the refugees.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And that Coalition Committee is the study on the refugee situation. It's very . . . very dangerous in Southeast Asia because the government of Malaysia and Indonesia and Thailand announced that they're going to not allow the boat people to land on their land.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And I'm sure they're going to tow back to the sea the boat who has been . . . on their shore.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And then also announced that then they will just shoot them who intend to land on the land.

**SM:** Right.

**PV:** And the [unclear] thing we heard from Senator Kennedy and talking about his bill, he presented to the Senate a bill for . . . to make another law for the refugees as a whole, you know. Not only for Southeast Asia but many parts of the world, when it happens, with refugees.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Yes. For example, you have a law here about immigration in 1952 is the very limit that the portion of people come in to another country come in to this country.

**SM:** Right.

**PV:** And I think this bill Senator Kennedy will make a clear and easier . . . that means change a little the law.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** To allow about fifty thousand a year, something like that.

**SM:** I see. Well, now, since 1952 we have the 1965 immigration law, too.

**PV:** Yes, I don't know about that.

**SM:** Oh, okay. [Chuckles]

**PV:** It's Senator Kennedy that was talking about that.

**SM:** Yes. Oh, yes.

**PV:** 1952 and that.

**SM:** Oh, he was talking about that.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. Okay. Well, would this be in terms of making the status of these refugees better? Because now we have a rather . . .

**PV:** Yes, and also help the refugees to be settled in this country.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** In the period of time, for example, in that period they're talking about helping refugees for two years. Since they come here they can get cost assistance or medical assistance, but after two years they can receive a social service if they need it.

**SM:** Yes. I see. So after two years they would get social services then.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** After [unclear]. I see.

**PV:** And also they make a review of the situation with refugees who came here in 1975. And they were talking about ninety-five percent of them have been employed.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And they've become contributive, productive, not . . . more than what they get before when they came here, you know, they contribute more now.

**SM:** I see. So ninety-five percent, that's pretty good.

**PV:** And yes, in Minnesota the refugees who came in 1975 now only two percent receive public assistance.

**SM:** That's very good, isn't it?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Hmmm. How did you happen to choose Minnesota, to come to Minnesota?

**PV:** Oh. [Sighs]

**SM:** [Chuckles]

**PV:** I came to Minnesota because first of all I know someone here.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And the second thing, when I lost my country, I . . . I wanted to choose somewhere completely new for me.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Not . . . not have a good friend or some organization can help me, I wanted to . . . to restart my life again with new people, a new land. And the cold weather, I don't like the cold weather. But really, the cold weather helps to freeze my thinking to the past. I just . . . have to be fighting against the weather, not that I fight other people to survive. Instead of living somewhere having to . . . to fighting on people, here you have six months you're fighting against weather. And then, later on, I found out that the people here are very warm.

**SM:** [Chuckles]

**PV:** Oh, yes.

**SM:** But you didn't know that when you came?

**PV:** Oh, no. I don't know. But when I [started] living here I found out that.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Many . . . oh, some of our people have been resettled here and they moved to the warm . . .

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Somewhere warm weather. But I have stayed here, I think, I plan to . . . to consider this state as my hometown.

**SM:** That's good.

**PV:** I don't have a hometown now.



**SM:** It's lucky for Minnesota that you came here.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Well, is there anything that I have not asked that would be important to add to this?

**PV:** I don't know what other things [unclear] my life has been [unclear]. And I may ask that besides the labor movement I have been nominated by President [unclear] and later President [unclear] to be a member of economic and social of our country.

**SM:** Oh, to the advisors?

**PV:** Yes, some kind of advisor for government.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** In terms of economic and social.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And in 1968 I also was running a social organization who contributed by seven different political organizations to help the people to resettle, too, after the Tet Offensive, the Viet Cong Offensive.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And I was directing about eighteen hundred social workers.

**SM:** Directed . . . what was that?

**PV:** Eighteen hundred social workers.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** To work in the program for two years.

**SM:** I see. And this was under the . . . ?

**PV:** We called that this the New Life Committee.

**SM:** New Light?

**PV:** New Life, yes, I think so.

**SM:** New Life?

**PV:** Life, yes.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Build for the people a new life.

**SM:** Oh, yes. This was under the Vietnamese government?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. That was after the Tet Offensive then.

**PV:** Yes, after 1968, the Tet Offensive. And that program was running for two years and very successful to help the people.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** To rebuild their house, to set up the social center, to help them to rebuild their life, really.

**SM:** Yes. Did more people then move further South after that Tet Offensive or was it just [unclear] destruction of . . . ?

**PV:** No, this is . . . the people in . . . even in the city have destroyed by the war because at that time the war is into the city.

**SM:** Yes, in the Southern part of Vietnam.

**PV:** Yes, and even Saigon and the surrounding have been destroyed in many, many areas. And then that Committee was not only helping the people who have been affected by the war, but at the same time helping the poor people.

**SM:** Oh, that were already poor?

**PV:** Yes, already poor. And we say we have built up like . . . as I mentioned, the social center, in that social center we have nurses, a teacher who can teach the adults to be [unclear]. We have also like a kindergarten to help the little kids to study.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** We have a child care to help the poor people. They can put their child in the center in the daytime and they can go to work.

**SM:** Yes. This was all in Saigon then?

**PV:** Yes, in Saigon starting and then in every big city.

**SM:** And in . . . oh, all the provincial capitals there.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Was there quite a lot of destruction in the provincial capitals?

**PV:** [Unclear].

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see. Well, that was a very important program then at that time.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Oh, yes. I see. Do you ever think you may . . . ?

**PV:** That program is paid by . . . by the private and also by government, you know.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** All of eighteen hundred officers who were working with me have pay full time. Like a social worker full time for two years. And go out and working, we grow our program how to help the people and they go into the village and into the very poor area and working on that.

**SM:** I see. Do you think you'll continue in social work then in Minnesota?

**PV:** I hope in here.

**SM:** Or in labor or . . . you'll just see what comes along, I suppose or . . . ?

**PV:** Oh, yes.

**SM:** Would you have time to explain a little bit about that poultry union strike in California?

**PV:** Oh, then that kind of problems like that, that . . . that factory have about seven hundred workers working over there. The majority of them is Mexican people.

**SM:** Yes. Do you know the name of that company?

**PV:** I don't remember.

**SM:** Yes. It doesn't matter.

**PV:** The [unclear] and that factory in the . . . located in Los Angeles.

**SM:** In Los Angeles. Yes.

**PV:** And they have two hundred workers from Asia.

**SM:** Oh, they did? Wait . . . how many were there altogether now?

**PV:** Seven hundred.

**SM:** Seven hundred, okay.

**PV:** But two hundred workers from Asia and about a hundred white workers, working in the office or plant or something like that. But the majority of them are Mexican.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And the majority of them don't speak English.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And that local union decided to go on strike. And international federation of poultry workers union helped them and then also paid them for that.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** But it stayed too long. And at the same time the Mexican radical movement in Los Angeles, they went demonstration to the federal government building.

**SM:** They did a demonstration?

**PV:** Yes. They . . .

**SM:** What was that? Was it Cesar Chavez or some of those?

**PV:** They complained about Vietnamese refugees.

**SM:** [Gasps]

**PV:** They said the government of the United States brings the refugees to here to compete jobs with them and they are more priority than Mexican or something like that.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And they have the people, but there they don't know exactly what is happening in the plan, and they call on AFL-CIO national in Washington. It sent someone who knows about labor unions can go down to look into that situation.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And then the AFL-CIO called on me and asked me to go over there.

**SM:** I see. So you have a lot of connections with the AFL-CIO from your Vietnamese days?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** I know many of the leaders. I met President [unclear] many, many times. Many different officers in the central, again . . .

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Working with me in Vietnam or in the international conference or somewhere in the world we met then.

**SM:** Oh, yes.

**PV:** And I go down and I look into that situation. And I met with the Mexican organization, to explain to them that we do not come here because we don't have a job in Vietnam. We are refugees because our country has been taken over by the Communists. We just made it clear with those whom can understand that. And the second thing I found out was that there was not Vietnamese working in that plant. They have about two Vietnamese, a few Cambodians, and then . . . but more of them are Chinese.

**SM:** Oh . . . Who was the leader of that?

**PV:** The Chinese who were living in San Francisco and they were brought it in by a pastor, I think. He's working for the Church of Christ.

**SM:** Oh. Okay.

**PV:** And then we're going . . . I'm going to meet with that pastor and talking with him about [unclear] labor of the union because whenever the union . . . when they go on strike, other people cannot work, you know. That you destroy their efforts to negotiate with the owner.

**SM:** Oh, these were brought in to break the strike?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And then the Mexicans think this is the Vietnamese and they think that the Vietnamese come here and make a lot of trouble.

**SM:** Oh. Well, there were some Asian workers working there all the time?

**PV:** They have [unclear].

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Some working at that time, but when they go on strike, another two hundred Chinese come in working.

**SM:** Oh.

**PV:** And they think the federal government brought two hundred Vietnamese refugees in to break that strike.

**SM:** I see. I see.

**PV:** And also I found out that even the Mexicans, the majority of them working there . . . but most of them were illegal immigrants.

**SM:** [Chuckles] Oh, I see.

**PV:** And I talked with the leader. I said, "Hey, you know, it's not Vietnamese who are going to compete with you or the Vietnamese who break the strike. But you have a problem. You have many illegal immigrants working in that plant there."

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** If you make noise, you don't think other people can't make noise, too?

**SM:** [Chuckles] Right. They were in a precarious position.

**PV:** Yes. And I . . . and I also found out that a little bit [unclear] that local union by some radical movement Mexican [unclear] by the politics.

**SM:** Yes. But do you know if that was the Cesar Chavez movement, the farmworkers union?

**PV:** I don't know.

**SM:** Oh. Yes. You don't know.

**PV:** I don't know what. But it seems to me that some radical movement was involved in that strike.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And I explained to them . . .

**SM:** But it could be someone else [unclear].

**PV:** I explained to the director of the union over there, he's a vice president of the international corporate union. And I also went to the mediator, the federal mediator, to talk with the mediator.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** To give them what information I have to help them to solve that problem.

**SM:** I see. Well, the hundred whites that you mentioned, were they brought in to break the strike or were they already workers?

**PV:** No, no, no. They go on strike.

**SM:** They were regular workers.

**PV:** Yes, they were on strike and then . . . seven hundred [unclear] were working all there. They go on strike.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** They have also about fifty or . . . I don't know . . . I don't know exactly the number, but the Asian people, you know, yellow people.

**SM:** They were the ones brought in.

**PV:** And when they go on strike for two months, the two hundred people, the yellow like me come in working.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And they think this is Vietnamese.

**SM:** Okay.

**PV:** Okay, they make noise around [unclear] that again, the government and . . . well, they will not negotiate with the government, the plantation owners and then all the poultry owners, because they think that the factory owner brought the refugees with the help from the government to break the strike.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** The regular workers were mostly Mexican and some white.

**PV:** Some white, some yellow.

**SM:** Yes. And a few yellow.

**PV:** Asian, yes.

**SM:** But just a very few?

**PV:** Yes, fifty or sixty, something like that.

**SM:** Oh. I see.

**PV:** But when they went to . . . went on strike, and then they found out every day [the company will] have another two hundred Asian people come in working.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And they increased them day after day then.

**SM:** Oh, they increased from two hundred into more?

**PV:** Yes, then day after day they increased, and the transportation was by bus from the church, something like that. And they think that it is the federal government that did it.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** That brought the Vietnamese come in and . . .

**SM:** Yes. So there were more than two hundred brought in all in all.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes. I see. That's a very interesting situation then. And then you were [unclear].



**PV:** Yes, when I went to meet with the leader of the Mexicans, when I went to the plant to meet with the workers to know where they come from, and after I collected all the information, I gave all the information to the federal.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** The mediator and also to the federation.

**SM:** Yes. So it actually wasn't very many Vietnamese at all.

**PV:** No. Just a few.

**SM:** Yes. So [unclear].

**PV:** But anyhow . . . anyhow, I helped to clarify that bad impression from Mexican and also helping the federation to know exactly what happened over there. And because most of the workers don't speak English.

**SM:** I see. Yes.

**PV:** And they . . . even the officer from the federation comes in and has a meeting and they talk Spanish together and . . . and after that they vote. [Chuckles] So nobody knows, and that's the thing. I don't speak Spanish but I can speak English with some [unclear]. I tried to sit down with them and plan, you know.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** [Unclear] a plan when they were on one side. We talked and we discussed and found out what happened.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** So it was settled by a federal mediator?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes. I see. Well, that was very important.

**PV:** And after every information I have, we meet with the federation, federal mediator and we try to find a solution to solve that problem.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And I went back because I had to go back to school.

**SM:** I see. Oh, you were going to school already then, too.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** But now you want to go back and finish?

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And I have found from a friend over there, he said that after that, after [unclear] clarified we knew where to go, exactly, they renegotiated with the plantation owner and the agreement and work.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** Yes. And I think I put my . . . a little help on that.

**SM:** I think so. Very much probably. Yes. Here in Minnesota, are you a member of that MAAP organization? The Minnesota Asian American Project.

**PV:** Yes, I am one of the board directors.

**SM:** Oh, you're on the board of directors.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Some of the other people, Frank Tsai and Belen Andrada told me they knew you there.

**PV:** Oh, yes.

**SM:** Yes. I see. That seems to be an interesting organization. Since it's pan-Asian.

**PV:** We . . . what we plan to do is to we make and set up like an Asian center.

**SM:** Yes. That sounds . . .

**PV:** Or whatever council and [unclear] and also the commercial, the products of Asia. And to have some kind of . . . some [unclear] for tourist [unclear].

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** Even to introduce to the Minnesotan people that [unclear] something in Asia somewhere.

**SM:** Right.

**PV:** But now we have over ten thousand Asians living here now.

**SM:** Yes. That's . . . I think it's going to be a very sizeable number before we're finished. It's . . . I think it would be a very much more mixed state, which would be very nice.

**PV:** Yes.

**SM:** Maybe before we finish, you could just say a little bit about your own family here. What they are doing and . . .

**PV:** My family . . . I have my mother.

**SM:** Oh, your mother is here, too.

**PV:** And my . . .

**SM:** Perhaps you could start with when you left. Did they all come together on the [unclear]?

**PV:** Yes. We . . . I have nine children, my wife, and my mother. We left Saigon on April 29<sup>th</sup>, in the evening.

**SM:** That was 1975.

**PV:** 1975, by boat.

**SM:** I see. The whole family came.

**PV:** Whole family. And we spent about two days, I think, and were pick up by the American ship.

**SM:** Picked up by American ship?

**PV:** American ship. It's very crowded, about seven thousand on that ship, you know, going to [unclear] Bay, in Philippines. And they transferred for us to Guam, my plan to Guam to for job [unclear, I stay at for job [unclear] for over four months.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And I get to Minnesota on October 5, 1975.

**SM:** I see.

**PV:** And then nine of my children now, three of them study at university. One daughter studies at Augsburg College.

**SM:** Yes.

**PV:** And three others study at high school in Southwest High School. Two in elementary school, in [unclear] school in Northeast Minneapolis.

**SM:** [Unclear] School in North Minneapolis?

**PV:** In Northeast.

**SM:** Northeast.

**PV:** All of them did very well.

**SM:** I see. Well, that sounds like a very nice family. I hope they all like Minnesota. [Chuckles] Well, thank you very much for your information. It was very nice of you to give me this much time.

**PV:** You're welcome.

**SM:** Thank you.

Asians in Minnesota Oral History Project  
Minnesota Historical Society