

Lisalan Thai
Narrator

Phước Thị Minh Trần
Interviewer

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Eagan, Minnesota

Phước Thị Minh Trần **- PT**
Lisalan Thai **- LT**

PT: My name is Phước Thị Minh Trần. I'm going to be conducting this interview. Today is Wednesday, December 22, 2010. I'm with Ms. Lisalan Thai at her home in Eagan, Minnesota.

PT: Good morning Ms. Lisa!

LT: Good morning. How are you?

PT: Good. Thank you. How about yourself?

LT: I'm doing fine. Thank you.

PT: Thank you very much for accepting my invitation and giving this interview. First I would like to know if you have any questions for me regarding this interview?

LT: Not yet, Ms. Phuoc.

PT: What is your full name?

LT: My name is Lisalan Thai. Spelled L-I-S-A-L-A-N. The last name spelled T, like Tom. H-A-I.

PT: I would like to start the interview with your childhood, your parents, your siblings. Where were you born and when?

LT: I was born in Đà Lạt, the central of Vietnam and I was born on June 21st, 1955.

PT: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

LT: I have 2 sisters and 2 brothers and myself and we lost one of each; so now I still have one of each. And the older brother lives in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota and the older sister lives in Sydney, Australia. I am the youngest one in the family. My mom passed away when I was 2

years old and my dad passed away when I was fourteen. We were---[I was] very lucky that my dad sent me to the boarding school when I was 7 years old and then when my dad passed away, I was continuing to stay at the boarding school for education.

PT: Who was the most influential person to you as a child?

LT: It was my dad. He was very good looking. He was a very kind and generous man. And he loves his children and he loves his family and when my mom passed away, he never remarried again and he gave up, just seemed like he devoted all his life, the remaining life to his children and the family.

PT: As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?

LT: When I was 6 or 7 years old and I remember that I always wanted to be a lawyer. To be a lawyer, not to make money, but to help people who need help, but they can't afford to pay the lawyer's fee.

PT: How old were you when you left Việt Nam?

LT: I left Vietnam when I was 20 years old in 1975. I was married then, I was in Đà Lạt with my family and my son. My son at that time, he was about 6 month old.

PT: Yes. When and where did you get married?

LT: I got married in 1973. I remember November 3rd in 1973 in Đà Lạt. My ex-husband, he was a captain in the army. He had a sister living in Đà Lạt and my father knew his sister for a long time. My ex-husband, he was the youngest in the family, so his sister or him must keep their eyes on me when I was 2 years old. He---I must be very cute also so he wanted to propose to me when I was 16 years old but my family said, "No, no, I have to finish high school first before I get married." But finally we got married when I was 18 years old, when I finished the high school over there.

PT: What memories did you have when you left Việt Nam?

LT: I was terrified. I was in Đà Lạt at that time. Before---I think in February or in March, we lost Đà Lạt in March, March 30, 1975. In Vietnam, the culture is that the elders, they treated men and boys before us, so my ex-husband's family, my husband's brothers, siblings, they have--each of them has boys and my husband and I, we had a boy...so one of my in-laws was working for U.S embassy so we were able to leave before , before March. Because my husband, my ex-husband, he still stayed in Đà Lạt so I decided to stay with my ex-husband and with my family. But finally we, my son and I, we flew to Saigon. After, after the fall of Đà Lạt, my ex-husband refused to join my son and I to go back to Saigon because he felt like he still had his duties to his soldiers, so we didn't hear from him for a couple weeks. We thought he got killed

somewhere; so we were very, very worried... I believe that our family, his family were very worried. We lost sleep and we didn't even eat and we just stared in the front door and hopefully that he showed up at the front door in any minutes. But thank God that finally, that one day, I just kept looking out at the front gate of the house and (cries) he, he... did show up at the door in Saigon (more cries) then we left Đà Lạt, oh no, we left Saigon on April 29 in 1975.

PT: Why did you decide to leave Việt Nam and how?

LT: My son and I, we supposed to leave Vietnam with my in-laws in February, but I chose to wait for my ex-husband. On April 29, we had a nephew who came to our home and he said, "The US government has 5 ships parked on the sea near Bến Bạch Đằng [Port Bạch Đằng in Saigon].

PT: How far was it from your home to Bến Bạch Đằng and how did you get there?

LT: I don't remember how far from Phan Thanh Giản [Street name in Saigon] to Bến Bạch Đằng, I would say about 15 minutes by motorcycle. It was very crowded on the streets because people was everywhere, they---we didn't know what was going on, we didn't even know that Saigon will fall to the Communists, so we have, we have to travel all of us about 15 of us and we didn't know how we were able to get on to the motorcycles- I remember it was Honda, to Bến Bạch Đằng. When we got to Bến Bạch Đằng, my family among others, got into the ferry. It was very dark, it was very frightening, the captain had to wait for the ferry to get full of people before he decided to leave Bến Bạch Đằng and it was very dark, the sea was very rough. He allowed the children and mothers to get into his small boat, which was pulling the ferry to the big ship. When we got to the big ship, it was not many people on the ship. I would say about 500 of us, but we didn't leave where we are at that time because the captain said that we had to wait for all the ships to leave at the same time but along the sea, there were many fishermen [who were] able to get on the ship because they were fishing nearby. We started with 500 people but ended up to 5000 people on each ship.

PT: Where did you first arrive when you left Vietnam?

LT: It took us about 3, 4 days to arrive to Guam. During those days, the sea was very rough. My son and I were very sick; Steven was born premature; we brought very little of hot water to mix it with his milk [I] ended up to use the sea water. It made him very sick, he had diarrhea about 30 times a day; he was lifeless, he couldn't move his arms or his body. I was praying so hard for my son's health and also it was raining every day, my son and I were very wet and cold. I wished to see the land; hopefully the doctors can save my son's life.

PT: How long did you stay in Guam?

LT: It has been so long ago, so I didn't really remember exactly how long. But I remember when we got there, we took my son to the hospital and he recovered after maybe a week or two. Probably we stayed there maybe less than a month.

PT: Did you send your son to the hospital when you first arrived to Guam?

LT: Yes, as soon as we got here. The nurses, the doctors took my son to a hospital and all I remember that he was very sick, I was very sick myself and I was very worried, but all I worried about was my son, I didn't think much about myself so...we stayed. My son stayed at the hospital I think at least for a couple weeks. When he was in full recovery, then we went back to the camp where all of us had the physical check-up.

PT: How long did you stay in Guam?

LT: I think it's about total like a month.

PT: A month?

LT: A month. Approximately about a month then we all left, we went to another camp, and I don't remember where before we went to camp Pendleton in California.

PT: What did you do in the camp?

LT: Not much. Then we were at Guam, I spent most of the time in the hospital with my son and when we went to the second camp, all we did, we're just walking around. I had to take care of my son myself, he was still not really healthy yet, and at that time he was about 8 months old not much to do there, not many people were there from the beginning and after we stayed there for a couple months, there just seem like that we had thousands of people came all over other camps before we arrived to U.S.

PT: Did you learn English there too?

LT: I didn't really remember. But I remember that, in Vietnam, we had to learn ...the second language and the third language when we were in senior high, so myself I took English that was my second language. So I know some English then, but I don't remember that we learned English at the camp at that time.

PT: Where was Camp Pendleton?

LT: It was in California. I don't remember exactly where, but I remember that it was in California.

PT: How long did you stay there?

LT: We stayed there until August, I think, sometime in August. Then we left camp Pendleton to...Minnesota around August 5th.

PT: Why did you decide to come to Minnesota?

LT: Well. Oh I forget to tell you that when we got to arrive to camp Pendleton, one of my ex-husband's brothers and his family were waiting for us at camp Pendleton. They left Vietnam in February that I was supposed to leave with them then, so they were waiting for us at camp Pendleton. I was very young, I was about 21 years old and so I had to obey all of their decisions, so we had, we had that kind of a large family. My ex had 4 brothers; one of the brothers and his wife and also a son wanted to go back to Paris because they graduated as a doctor's degree in pharmacy from France. The rest of us had to find someone who could sponsor a large family like us. I have asked them to choose a warmer state, but we ended up to Minnesota because four Catholic churches were willing to sponsor all of us.

PT: When did you arrive in Minnesota?

LT: We were arrived in Minnesota on August 5, in 1975.

PT: Would you please tell me more about your first day coming to Minnesota?

LT: We were in the airplane, we were so worried, we didn't know what to expect, when we arrived to the airport and honestly that we were shaking because we, oh my gosh, what happened to us next. When we arrived to the airport, we saw a big white man with blond hair. He looked very much like a happy Buddha; he gave us a beautiful smile that we called a honest smile and I told my ex that, "Oh thank God, we were in the good hands." So he took us to his car and ...went back to his home. He had a very small home...I have to say like 3 bedrooms home, one and a half story home with one bath and one car garage. So when we got into his house, his beautiful wife her name is Mrs. Mary Moore and his name is Mr. Moore and she was so beautiful, she was--- she had a beautiful smile on her face and whatever she said, I don't think that I remember what she said. She told us. She gave us, she showed the picture of her family, so she had 12 children and her and her husband did live in this house, this small house. So first thing she said, I remember she said, "You want some pie?" because she made delicious pie; so each of us, we were so hungry, so she served us turkey, mash potatoes, and pie.

PT: It was so yummy, right?

LT: Well, we were so hungry so it was delicious, but you know she was a good cook, so nothing is better than home cooking meal. So I don't remember what time we got there. So she said, "Go to bed, go to bed." So we went to bed and then we got up in the morning and she gave us a bag of cereals and back in Vietnam, we didn't eat cereals so we didn't know what is that for and she

said, “Breakfast, breakfast” so (laughs) we ate breakfast and it was the first time we ate cereals and milk for breakfast.

PT: Wow! Like in our tradition, in our country, we eat xôi [sticky rice] or bánh mì [bread], wow!

LT: We eat soup. Here we have that and then when she...in the evening, she served us...she baked ham, turkey, and chicken and she gave us a very thin piece of meat and my ex-husband and his nephew, they were big guys so they they, you know, they ate a lot, but with the portion that she gave us, it was not enough for them, but we got by. So we stayed there, at their house for three days then they found us an apartment, not too far from their house, which was in Highland Park and we moved to our apartment after three days staying in their home.

PT: Are you still in contact with this family?

LT: Yes, they, Mr. Moore he passed away and Mrs. Moore, she has Alzheimer’s. After we stayed in our apartment, we stayed close to them, we had a very good relationship for a year and then we moved to Richfield, where the rest of our family were. So we can live nearby my in-law. By the way I forgot to mention to you that there were two wonderful sisters in St Therese Catholic Church in Saint Paul, Miss Eleanor and Miss Bernice Herron want to adopt my family, but they were concerned about adopting due to possible medical complications and costs. So they decided to speak to the priest Father Joseph Strepp. He, too, was very interested to the sisters’ idea. The Herrons wanted to be at the airport when my family arrived but they---but that summer, they had decided to go to Florida looking for a warmer place to live when they retired. It was why they sent Moore to pick us up. Finally we met them a few days later. Then we have met Uncle Doc, their older brother who also lived in Saint Paul. He loved to play with my son Steven. Two sisters and Uncle Doc were never been married, they have no children, but they have only nieces and only nephews who were their oldest sister’s children. They were the most generous, caring, and loving people that I ever known. After a few years, I got to know them. I had decided to ask for their permission if I could call them “Mother”. They gave me a big hug and said, “Oh yes, honey!” My tears were rolling down on my face and my body was shaking with the happiness. My birth mother passed away when I was two years old, so I never had a mom. But I know that she is always on Heaven and looking down on me. She is my Angel. Unfortunately my Uncle Doc passed away in the eighties, after they moved to Florida in 1980. My mother Eleanor also passed away in 1998. Now my mom Bernice is still living in Sun City [Center], Tampa in a retirement home. Now she is 95 years old. My mom Bernice Herron also wrote a book called “Dearest Folks” in 2006 about their experiences in the World War II. She also wrote about the story, about the adoption of my family in 1975. Would it be included in my book, Mrs. Phuoc?

PT: Of course and I love to read it too.

LT: Thank you!

PT: Thank you! Do you still have a good relationship with your mom since she moved to Florida?

LT: Oh yes, Mrs. Phuoc. I try to call my mom couple times a week. If she doesn't hear from me then, she calls me and I try to visit her at least a couple times a year. Actually I just took my first 4 months old grandson and my daughter and her husband to see my mom Bernice last month. She was so thrilled to see her first great grandson. Oh Mrs. Phuoc, I forgot to mention that after my divorce, my two moms gave me money every month so I can go back to school. I am very grateful for their kindness and their generosity.

PT: Good. I can see it. Is it okay to talk a little bit about your divorce?

LT: Oh of course, Mrs. Phuoc. What do you want to know?

PT: About when and what happened?

LT: Okay. After we separated, after my daughter was born in 1981 and then the final divorce was in 1985.

PT: What was her name?

LT: Her name is Linh Van Cao and later on when she was 25 years old, she changed to Linh Nouvel Thai; she decided that she would like to take after my last name instead of her father's last name.

PT: Good! At that time who got the custody of the children?

LT: Mrs. Phuoc, in 1985, I remember that I had the custody of both of the children, but they were able to see their dad whenever they wanted for a while. I believe that for some reasons the judge ordered that my husband was able to visit them one hour a month with the supervision of their aunt.

PT: How is their relationship with their father?

LT: My children have not seen their dad for a long time. Especially Steven, he had not been introduced with his dad. I don't think he has seen his dad for years. Linh, she has tried to contact her father, but for some reasons that her father had nothing to do with her. But recently, when she has her son, her first son, she tried to e-mail him and sent him pictures of the beautiful baby and hopefully that...her dad could take a look of that beautiful pictures and hope that their relationship will get better from now on. But so far he has his own family in Việt Nam.

PT: Oh, he lives in Việt Nam now?

LT: Yes Mrs. Phuoc. He moved back to Việt Nam. I have to say 4 or 5 years ago after he took the retirement.

PT: You mention about his own family in Việt Nam. Did he remarry in Việt Nam?

LT: I don't really know, Mrs. Phuoc. He moved back to Vietnam 4, 5 years ago. After he divorced one of his wives here, wife # 2 here, then he got remarried with the wife #3, and then I heard he got divorced again and now he lived in Việt Nam, either with the 4th wife or with the girlfriend in Việt Nam.

PT: What a lucky man! Does he have any children with all his wives or girlfriends?

LT: Mrs. Phuoc, I don't think that he has any children with other wives, but he had a daughter, her name is Diễm Trần.

PT: How old is she now and who raises her?

LT: She is about 44 years old and she was raised by his older sister.

PT: Do you know of her when you got married with you ex and where is she now?

LT: I heard that he had a daughter with his girlfriend before I married him, but I never met her before... When I was married, when I married his dad, she was about 10 years old. She---now she lives in Minnesota ... When my family left Vietnam in 1980, I had requested my family to bring her and my three sisters-in-law to come to the United States. Now the older sister had passed away, so she still lives in Savage, Minnesota with her children and her husband.

PT: Do your children know Diễm?

LT: Yes, ma'am. I think that Diễm, at one time, when Diễm was very young, Diễm has told my children that she is their half-sister, and especially my daughter was very thrilled that she found out that she had a sister. They don't have a relationship... Their relationship was not close. I wish that they were. But I think that Diễm, that she is very...--- she feels that she was neglected by her father. So I just want her to know that I always love her and we always love her and I want her to know that she had not forgotten.

PT: Wow! You're so wonderful. How is the relationship between Diễm and her father?

LT: You know that she calls her father as an uncle, because when the older sister raises Diễm just somehow that my ex-husband never claimed that she is his daughter; it's kind of sad, even I know that, but it's kind of very sad, so I don't think that they have father-daughter relationship, but they do have relationship like an uncle and a niece. But especially my children, they had never forgotten that they do have a sister. Even they are half-sister, but from my heart, I consider

she like my own daughter and I wish that we have a closer relationship and so. From now on, I think we should try harder.

PT: Good. What did you find most rewarding about being a single parent?

LT: Well. I am very lucky Mrs. Phuoc as a single mom to raise two wonderful children. They haven't given me trouble at all. Steven graduated from Hamline University and Linh started at Saint Thomas University and she graduated from U of Minnesota. They both have very successful careers. I'm playing both roles as a mother and a father as well.

PT: Are your children married?

LT: Steven, he is ---he was born in 1974, so now he is 36 years old and he is still single. He lives about 10 minutes away from me and Linh, she is married and she has a boy, her first boy and she moved out from my home two months ago.

PT: How did you find out that you were going to be a grandmother for the first time?

LT: You know, one Saturday I was in my office working, she came to my office, she sat by me and she's kind of sad, she's kind of sad, and she started crying. I asked her why and what's wrong and she said she doesn't know if she has good news for me or she has bad news for me, because she just wants to have a child before she turns in thirty. So she was, now she is 29, so she has...yes, she is still not 29 yet. She told me that she was pregnant, a couple months pregnant and she doesn't know how I react and I said, "That's wonderful, that is a good news." I gave her a hug and I said, "I love it" and we both cried and that was the best moment in my life.

PT: Wow, a very touching moment, right?

LT: Yes, yes, we were. We both were very happy, very, very happy.

PT: So what is his name?

LT: His name is Evan Thai Jerome Hay, H-A-Y. He took, I think Linh picked out Evan's name, Thai is my last name, Jerome is Evan's great grandfather on his father's mother's side and Hay, that is Evan's grandfather family name.

PT: So her husband is a Caucasian?

LT: Yes, he is Jewish. His mom is Jewish and his dad is Scotland and Irish.

PT: Wow!

LT: Now baby Evan, you know, he's mixed, Vietnamese, some French and Irish and Scotland and Jewish.

PT: (laughs) Wow, like an international family.

LT: Yes ma'am, yes ma'am, yes ma'am, yes ma'am. He is a very cute boy.

PT: Yes, I met him before, I agree. Lovely handsome boy too.

LT: He is very handsome and he has a happy face, he always smiles. The first thing when he sees me. I taught him to call me "Bà Ngoại", which means Grandma on the mother's side.

PT: Do you speak Vietnamese with him?

LT: Yes, Mrs. Phuoc. I'm trying to speak Vietnamese to him because I made easily a mistake when I raised my children on my own. I was too busy working, making a living so I can give my children a good life, especially with no father, so I was always working and I worked 24 hours a day so I had no time to teach my children, my language so they, Steven, he is about 7 years old than Linh. So he always took care of his sister, came home and took care of Linh, and I always worked and came home about 10, 11 or midnight, so I have no time to teach my children to learn Vietnamese. So now Linh's husband, his name is Zachary Hay, he has agreed for me to teach my grandson Vietnamese, so he can speak the---his mother's language.

PT: Wow! It's wonderful.

LT: Yes, thank you!

PT: What is your first job in the United States?

LT: Mrs. Phuoc, it will refresh my memory. My first job was in J.C. Penney. I remember they paid me \$1, I think \$2.48 cents and I was making curtains, like window treatments and Mrs. Phuoc, I never sew before in my life, so they made me sitting on the sewing machine and sew , sewing heavy curtains and they paid me \$2.48 cents and I remember the supervisor, a young supervisor, he thinks that I did a good job so he gave me a raise, 1 penny /an hour, \$2.49 cents after a month, but I quit after three months because I couldn't do it.

PT: Too hard for you to do it or what?

LT: Yes, ma'am. Because the curtains, the window treatments...the fabrics were very heavy, very heavy, very heavy fabrics. At that time, in 1970, when they had the style, that people like the heavy fabrics so it was very hard, I broke so many needles and I got in trouble with the manager and she yelled at me all the time so I chose to quit the job.

PT: Wow. Did you go to school at that time or not?

LT: No ma'am, no. At first when we came here, we were supposed to go back to school, my ex-husband and I, but the churches, they thought that we were rich, we had money with us, so they

decided that well we had to go to work, make a living because we didn't go to welfare or Medicare, we didn't have healthcare at all, we didn't have money so and my husband, he liked to drink beers, so at that time here, you know, oh, you have money to buy beers, otherwise if you don't have money, how can you buy beers, so they thought we were rich, so they said, "No, we can't go to school, so we had to go to work."

PT: You mentioned earlier that your mom paid for you for school so when did you go back to school?

LT: So...I ---you know after my first job, then I got a job in Control Data and they paid me \$3.50 an hour in 1976 or so. It was a very good pay check then so I started at the assembly. I worked there for a while, then I signed up...to go to school and you have to get a B for them to pay; the company paid me for some school time when I was working for them. When I got laid off in 1985 at the same time I got divorced, my divorce was final so my mom, Miss Herron has paid me, has helped me to pay \$400 a month to pay for food and she paid for my education. She liked me to be in cosmetology so she paid for me to go there and she paid for. I think that whatever money she gave, I had some money left, so I went back to Normandale school and I finished my two years there. I finished a year or two years in cosmetology school and then I opened my first business, a Vietnamese restaurant with my partner, with my lady partner and then during that time, I believe in 1980, 1987, 1988 or so, I went to St Thomas College but you know I was very sad because of a single mom with two children running a business, running a restaurant and went back to school part-time. I wish that I finished where I started, so I quitted St Thomas, I still have like maybe 3 more credits to graduate my four years because I was able to transfer most of my credits from Normandale school to St Thomas, but I made much money at my business so I didn't finish my college.

PT: Do you still have the restaurant now?

LT: No ma'am. After 7 years I sold my restaurant then I moved my children to Sydney, Australia to reunite with my sister in Australia so but my children and I, we stayed there for six months and we were supposed to come back to America to study here so then she can sponsor us to go back to Sydney, but my children they would like to stay in the United States so they can go to school here. They like it here better than Sydney, Australia.

PT: Tell me more about your sister in Australia?

LT: Yes, my sister, she is older than me; anyways she is older than me. She left Vietnam in 1980. She built a boat; the first boat that she sent my sisters-in-law, 3 of my ex-sisters-in-law with my ex-husband's daughter, my two nephew and niece to escape Vietnam first and then after she knew they had a successful trip to, I believe, I believe to Philippines, maybe, I forgot. Then she and her husband built a second boat so they can escape Vietnam with...among other family members. So when they escaped Vietnam, she did bring my older brother and his family along.

When they came to the camp, I'm sorry I forgot where they were at the camp, and then she decided to move to Australia. I believe that because telling the truth, she didn't like my ex-husband, I'm sorry to say that, so she decided to move to Australia to be away from my ex-husband, ... she and her husband and some of their children as well and at that time I believe she had, she just had a little girl too. So she lived in Australia and she is still living in Australia.

PT: So did you go to visit her?

LT: Yes, Mrs. Phuoc. I visited her twice already for the last 30 years and I am planning to go to visit her again in February with my grandson, my daughter and also with her husband.

PT: Wow, a family trip, right, to Australia.

LT: Yes, my sister is a wonderful lady. She is very generous, very, very generous and caring. She is a loving person and her husband as well. They're retired now, so they do a lot of charity work in Australia and also in Vietnam and I believe in China, Hong Kong too. So... the last time she visited us in America, it was two years ago... I'm looking forward to seeing her again in February.

PT: How old is she?

LT: She is older than me. She is 60 years old, yes, yes; she is 60 years old and she feels very healthy, in good shape, very strong.

PT: How many children does she have?

LT: She's married with a man, a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful man. He was married before and he had 4 children. So she helped him to raise his children and together they have one daughter and that daughter she got married 5 years ago with the architect in Sydney. My niece, she is also a very famous architect as well, commercial. She just has a baby girl, her name is Cailee and she is 3 weeks older than my baby Evan, so she must be 5 and a half months old now.

PT: Wow, so you'll have a baby reunion.

LT: Yes, that's why my daughter Linh, she loves to have Evan to meet his second cousin.

PT: I know that you're very successful in the real estate career profession. How did you decide in your career?

LT: Yes, Mrs. Phuoc. When I came back for my first visit to Australia, I was about to open another business in the U.S. and go back to finish my degree. But I was very fortunate to meet one of my professor's wife who was manager of the real estate company. She told me that I like to sell she has a job for me. So I said, "What kind of sale?" and she said, "Sell real estate." and I said, "How can I start?" and she said that I have to go to the real estate school. Then I said, "I

would think about it.” And she said, “No Lisa, don’t think about it. If you keep thinking about it, you may change your mind.” And I said, “Okay, then just sign me up and I’ll start right now.” But I have to wait for when the school there has real estate classes open. I don’t remember much about it. But she kept calling me, she kept calling me, she encouraged me and she believed in me and I don’t know how and why she believes in me and she kept saying that she knew that I’ll become very successful in real estate. So often I passed all the tests went to school and passed all the tests. We have to take, I remember, we have to pass the state test, we have to take the international test, we have to take few tests and it was very difficult and it wasn’t easy, I think that it is more difficult than you take the test from college. But anyway when I passed all of that, she signed me up working for the Edina Realty. At the time so ---it wasn’t easy at all. We have to make “cold calls” they said, they have a list of the names and phone numbers of the people in those areas, in the areas so we have to make phone calls at night and we have to call between 7-9 p.m. We can’t call during the day because people are still working. We can’t call after 9 o’clock because people have to go to bed and I remember then my first call; when I picked up the phone and dialed the number and I prayed, “Don’t pick up the phone, don’t pick up the phone, don’t pick up the phone.” Because I was that they’ll say no and I was afraid of rejection. So my first sale, my first listing, it was the gentleman, the white man, he was a cop for Minneapolis. He has a house in Spring Lake Park, Minnesota. He wanted to sell his home so he can move to Eagan to marry his girlfriend and I sold his house in the winter time, I don’t remember how long it took, but I sold my first listing, was so happy and I came back to my office and she said, “ See Lisa, you did it.” And I have to say thank you for Edina Realty that has trained me well and I have to say thank you to my co-workers. Most of them, they were older than me and they were very supportive, they were very caring and loving people and also my boss and I have to say thank you to my mom and she was very, very supportive as well. She called me all the time to see how I am doing. When I sell my first house, I have to say thank you to my children, especially my children, they were so understanding and they---many days, they didn’t have mom because mom stayed in her office and worked 24 hours a day. I remember that Linh she was a very sad girl, she was very sad, every time I came home she drew a, a picture of the dollar bill and she put it on my pillow and she said that I love money more than I love her. But I told her that if I don’t work, she doesn’t have food to eat, she doesn’t have money to buy books I can’t at that time, she went to school to learn piano lessons. I paid for my son’s karate lessons, I paid for my daughter’s dance school. It was very, very expensive. I told her if I don’t have a job, if I don’t work, then they don’t have the opportunity to learn all of those. So she didn’t understand until many years later. I did pay for her college, and I paid for my son’s college, and I’m still paying for my son’s college, and I paid for my college even I am not graduated yet and I just paid that off not too long ago. So I have to say again thank you to my children and they didn’t give me any trouble at all even they’re by themselves. Nobody, babysitted them, nobody looked after them, they were by themselves. So I just want them to know that I love them very, very much and [cries] we make it and, and we did it.

PT: Wow! You're a wonderful mom and they're lovely children. Now all of them live with you or they have their own house?

LT: Ma'am, my son did move out from the house in the year of 2004 because when he got a good job, I encouraged him to buy a house for himself. Number 1: He can be independent. Number 2: He has been paying too much to uncle Sam because he makes quite, you know good income. So finally I did help him to purchase a nice condo on the Mississippi River in Saint Paul. He moved out in 2004 and Linh, after college, she moved to California, she wanted to be an actress, and after she moved to California about 5 years, she was very lonely, homesick, she cried all the time and ...I moved her back here. It has been 3 years now and she lives nearby her brother, she used to live nearby her brother Steven and then she moved back home last year in September when she found out that she was pregnant of her first child and she stayed with me and I took care of them until a month or two months ago she moved out with her husband and her baby.

LT: She got married last year.

PT: Last year?

LT: Yes

PT: Good. Did your ex attend her wedding?

LT: No ma'am, she had a very small wedding they don't have a good relationship. My ex and my children, they don't have a good relationship, so we didn't expect that he would come.

PT: How about your ex in-law?

LT: My ex in-law, the lady that I loved the most is the oldest sister. She passed away 5 years ago. She was our blanket. She loved us, she cared for us. Until today I still talk to her daughter. She has a daughter. Her daughter is about 67 years old. She is still calling "Mợ" and "Con" that means very respectful. I never, I never lost my name in that family. Most of them are still very respecting me and we still have a good relationship with them and I always encourage my children to respect my ex-husband's family and to love them because they are always very good to my children and even to me.

PT: Lisa, can you tell me more about your brother who lives in Brooklyn Park?

LT: Yes, yes Mrs. Phuoc. My brother, he is the older brother. He is about 10 years older than me. He and his wife live in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. He has 7 children, but one passed away in Vietnam, so he still has 2 boys and 4 girls. All of them are married, he has 5 grand children. One moved to Georgia and the rest of them are still living in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

PT: What accomplishments are you most proud of?

LT: Yes, Mrs. Phuoc. I think that [is] my children---my children---they are very good children because they have no father and it seems like they grow up by themselves, without the father and mommy is working all the time and they grow up with no trouble at all. Steven, my son, he is just a wonderful, wonderful young man. He loves his mom, he is very shy, he doesn't talk much and he is a funny guy. People meet him, love him. He's very kind, very sensitive, he is a good listener so, and my daughter, she is a very good young lady as well. So I think that is the most important thing that I achieve in my life beside my career and I have given my children a good life. I think, even I know that they are missing something in their life because their life may not be complete because without a father, But I consider that is very good. I gave them the education, I gave them the foundation, I gave them the wings so now they have to learn how to fly and I think most parts are very good, I think life is very good, it 's not perfect, but I think our life is wonderful.

PT: Good! How about what advices do you have for your children and baby Evan?

LT: What are the advices? You know [sigh] the young children now, they have more opportunities than us when we were in our time... We had to work hard to support our family. Now, children now, they have us, hopefully they will listen to us so they can have a better life, they can... they won't make the same mistake that we made when we were younger. I would give advice to my children to listen to your parents, listen to people that they know the most even they need to work to support the family, but you know they have me to be there for them they have me to babysit their children if they need it, which I didn't have it before. So I would like my children to be patient with their children, be kind and generous, teach their children to become a better, better person than we were and I advise my children to love and care for others; I would like my children to respect elders, look down and don't look up, don't ever, ever look down on people; but if you look down on people, they would know what kind a life they have, they would appreciate their life more than they think that they don't they wish they have a better life.

PT: Good. How do you define American Dream?

LT: Ma'am, American Dream, yes. I'm very thankful that our country was fallen to the Communists because you remember, Mrs. Phuoc, back in Vietnam, they don't treat women they're supposed to like in America. Did you remember that? Women back in Vietnam, we were a slave to the men. The men can marry whoever they like; they were married but they can go out there and have girlfriends here and there. They didn't treat women like they should treat like here in America. You know women here, not because we are 50/50, but men here, they respect us, we have more opportunities, we can go to school if we like, we have a job, we you know [can] become somebody here. A lot of women here make more money than men, that doesn't mean that we are better than men, no we are not. Myself, I still think that the man is a foundation in our family and always men have to be the foundation in our family. I still respect men. I think American Dream is just more for, more for women and children. I like that so in America, if you

are willing to work hard, you will achieve your dream and I have to say most of us often achieve our dreams in America.

PT: Good! What was the hardest choice you ever had to make? Do you feel like you made the right choice?

LT: I do, I have made a lot of mistakes, Mrs. Phuoc. Because you know, Mrs. Phuoc, when you grew up with no parents and you go elsewhere to go to school and you know [after I] graduated from High School, I got married and you got married to a wonderful family, but not to a wonderful husband. So whatever I went through, it was a lot and I have made so many mistakes. I did admit that I made mistake when I raised my children. I was not the best mother because I worked all the time and I didn't, I put my clients, my customers first before I put my children, so it was a mistake. I made and I always kick myself on that, we all make mistakes but so many mistakes that I made I don't remember what. But the most mistake that I made was with my children. I was not there for them because I was so busy working and I thought that I worked hard and made good money so I can give them a nice house to live, buy them a car, pay for their education. I think that it was enough, but deep down that I don't think it was enough for them, I think they need love from their parents and it was just sad that I, my husband and I, we got divorced, so my children don't have a complete family, but you know a lot of time my son Steven asked me, "Mom, what was the life we would have if we still live with dad?" They don't think that they would have the same life if I [was] still married to their dad because their dad, he is not...he doesn't care much about education. He always advises people, "Oh, you don't have to go to school." I remember that I came here and I wanted to go to school, I wanted to go back to school and he said, "Why do you need to go back to school, you just need a job, you make good money and you can buy a house." So education is not important with my husband, my ex-husband. But to me, I want my children to have a good education. But with me, you know, fortunately, I was very lucky that I have some education and I got in the good career of my choice with others, with the help from others, buy I'm very lucky. Other than that, it is very tough to live in America to achieve your American Dream with no education.

PT: I agree. Describe a time and a place when you remember feeling truly at peace and happy.

LT: Yes, the only time I'm able to think is when I was by myself, I feel so lucky to be here in America, Mrs. Phuoc. Even we have to work very hard to survive in America, but we are very fortunate than others who are still living in Vietnam and other countries. Most people dream of coming to America for a better life and for a better education so that is very lucky of us that we are, have the opportunity to live here in America and also I'm very, very, very happy when after I'm able to spend some times with my grandson Evan. He is just so cute, Mrs. Phuoc. He's just, he's just--he is such a beautiful baby and he has a very beautiful smile. He smiles more than he cries, so it makes me happy.

PT: Wow! A happy baby, right?

LT: Yes maa'm, yes maa'm.

PT: How often do you see your grandson?

LT: Well, I try to babysit him couple times, at least a couple times a week. I just don't want to make the same mistake that I made before, Mrs. Phuoc is that when my children were young and I didn't have time for them, so I have to make time for my grandson; and when I babysit my grandson, I shut off my phone if I could and I just spend my time with my grandson alone because that's his time. So sometimes a couple times a week, sometimes 3, 4 times a week.

PT: Now your children are growing up so what did you do beside work?

LT: Ma'am, you know, I always have a dream that when I become successful, when I have my children growing up, I have to give back to the community and I have been for many years. I, beside work--- people need me to help buy or sell their home or their business, I help people that need help, such as they need advices, a lot of them because of language barrier, so they do need advices, they need counseling or people need money, or people especially elders, so I do a lot of charity work and I wish that I'm able to do more and will continue to do it if I can, so now my children are mov[ing] out, they have their life, their own life now, they do have their own family now, I will put my time, number 1, I have to put more time to see my baby first, my grandson first and then I would like to devote my time or even my life to the community that who aware of that need help, I would like to be there.

PT: Wow! Wonderful!

LT: Thank you.

PT: Do you want your children follow your footstep like helping others, doing charity work?

LT: Yes ma'am. I would like my children to follow you know my guidance, to help others. I always told them but I don't know if they will do or what you and I would do for people or not because young people here, you know, sometimes you can't tell them what to do, but my daughter once in a while, she did help me to go to do volunteer work, but she loves animals and she oh gosh, she wishes that she has a lot of money, she can buy a big, huge building and she can adopt all the animals Linh, she does, now she has a young baby and it's hard for her to do it because she has to work and to support her family, but yes ma'am, she---I would like them to or at least to help others, little by little. But I know that in the future someday we are no longer here in this world, they'll follow our steps to help others, that is very important.

PT: Good. I see you're a good role model for your children and others, you know in the community.

LT: Ma'am, we're very lucky to be here. We have so much opportunities here than others so especially myself, I am very lucky, I consider myself very lucky so it's time for me to give it back as much as I can.

PT: What do you value in Vietnamese culture?

LT: Ma'am, Vietnamese culture [is] just like Asian culture that we respect elders, number one, and we are very family oriented, we are very close to our family no matter what. I always teach my children; I still do that don't ever forget that culture. It's very valuable to preserve our culture, no matter who you are, where you are.

PT: You have any advices for younger generation?

LT: Yes, just one important advice, Mrs. Phuoc.

PT: What is it?

LT: Yes, because the young generation now, they should aware that you have to give and take and you don't have to take. You give, you give it to whoever really needs it.

PT: Wonderful!

LT: Because young people are, I don't say all young people, but I just want them know that because they live here, they were born here and they were born from here, they don't know how their parents' life was. A lot of them want to take and they don't want to give it back, so just give, give to people who really needs it and when you give, you may need a lot, but you don't take a lot.

PT: Do you have anything else you would like to share with the readers?

LT: Mrs. Phuoc, do you think this is long enough? If I'm sitting here and share with you the rest of my life, I think that will take another month to finish it.

PT: Wow. So thank you very, very much for giving this interview and I wish you success in your career.

LT: Thank you again Mrs. Phuoc for giving me the opportunity to share the story of my life.

PT: Very welcome.