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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Bac Eaton
Conducted by Ann Mallett
Date: December 19, 2012
Transcribed by Hailey Stewart**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

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1 Ann Mallett: This is December 19, 2012; and we are interviewing Bac Thi Phang
2 Eaton. It is now about 10:34 AM, and we're going to begin our oral history interview.
3 How would you describe your life in Vietnam from your earliest memories?

4 (Editor's Note: There will be ongoing feedback issues throughout the first part of
5 the interview.)

6 Bac Eaton: It's really hard, but we don't the know the difference because
7 everybody grows up the same, so we don't really understand it as a hard life until we can
8 to America, and we can see the difference.

9 AM: So, what were some of the biggest differences you noticed?

10 BE: We see the Americans living their lives free, and every night we don't have
11 to have to go underneath the house in the hole to duck from the bullets. You know, that's
12 great; you can sleep all night without worrying about that. They shoot with each other
13 and we—they get trade bullets, and they kill children, women, animals; so, when we hear
14 the gunfire, we have to go underneath the house, and they have the hole. We stay there
15 until they're quiet. Sometimes, some have a couple of time, and sometimes it goes on the
16 whole week with nothing, but sometimes it's very often.

17 AM: So, you're talking about the safety because there's not the fighting going on,
18 and by the shooting you meant Viet Cong, Viet Minh?

1 BE: Viet Minh and the South Vietnam. They're shooting each other.
2 AM: Right, so you're talking about the fight between the South Vietnamese and
3 the Viet Minh.
4 BE: Yes.
5 AM: And then later Viet Cong. How about the French soldiers, did you also have
6 that going?
7 BE: Mm-mm. When I grew up, the French soldiers were no longer there, but
8 when my grandmother and my mom grew up, they were.
9 AM: So, your family experienced that?
10 BE: Yes.
11 AM: When and where were you born?
12 BE: I was born in 18 of June 1953 in An Ngai, Vietnam.
13 AM: And who is in your family growing up?
14 BE: My mom was a third wife, so I didn't really have a father, so I grew up with
15 my grandmother, my mom, my older sister, and my younger sister and brother.
16 AM: So, your father and grandfather had been killed from the fighting?
17 BE: No, my mom was a third wife and so he was not there much. He ran and hid,
18 and he met my mom; so, he went home, and he'd run all the time because they kept
19 fighting, him and soldiers. I grew up without a father. My grandmother is my father and
20 mother, really.
21 AM: They must be very strong women. You're very lucky to have them.
22 BE: Yes.
23 AM: So, if you have no personal recollection of the French, what did your mother
24 and your grandmother tell you about them?
25 BE: The story that's stuck in my head was when my grandmother and all her
26 children ran when the men fought and gone, so all the women and children and they hide
27 in the hole. When French soldiers came by and they dug it up, and my grandmother looks
28 so dirty and ugly and old, and they see a bunch of women and small children; so, they say
29 they have some fun. They took a gun, and they drew it on my grandma's temple, and they
30 shoot up the air. My grandmother, "Oh my god, we're dying," and then she realized
31 they're just playing, they left—they took off. But, at that point in time, my grandmother

1 had already burned out because they took five of her children including an eighteen-year-
2 old girl, a seventeen-year-old boy, and three of her older sons; and went across the river
3 and chopped their heads off. When they chopped their heads off of everybody else, and
4 then they saw my aunt who was a beautiful eighteen-year-old. They asked if she wants to
5 be their wife, so they don't chop her head off and spare her. She says, "You burn house,
6 you kill my brother, and I do not do such things, so go ahead and kill me," so they chop
7 her head. There're some survivors. Later on, they came home, and they tell my
8 grandmother that story, and therefore my family. My grandmother's children.

9 AM: (Microphone feedback). A lot of strength and perseverance over adversity.
10 Sorry.

11 BE: No, it's alright I get you.

12 AM: So, what are some of your happy memories as a child growing up? What are
13 some of your happiest memories?

14 BE: We were very poor, but we were a family together. We go to the field, and
15 we clean the rice, and we worked together. My grandmother—the new year came, and
16 she did not have any money to buy new clothes. We have a set of new clothes every year,
17 and she didn't have money that year, so she took her old wedding dress outside and she
18 cut it and she made each of us one flower out of it, and though it's really, really back ago
19 I never forgot that.

20 AM: Right, because she made it for you.

21 BE: Yeah, she cut it up and made it.

22 AM: From the heart. That's neat. So, did you have special traditions at the new
23 year that you did with your family?

24 BE: Yes.

25 AM: What are some of the special traditions?

26 BE: Every new year, you become one year old; so, it's everybody's birthday. On
27 the first day of the new year, you get to wear new clothes and you get to run around and
28 enjoy with some little money that you gamble with. You can eat sticky rice cakes. But,
29 when I worked for American Navy, I was in the sick bay and this five-year-old girl, she'd
30 run around and play on the new year day and then the bullet went to her head and struck
31 it there. Her family—she's still alive and everything, because the bullet didn't get in

1 there, and they didn't do anything to the M16 bullet. The doctor takes a picture and says
2 they can't do anything for her. Just her bring her home and feed her and do whatever they
3 can because she will die soon, because they can't take the bullet out. I remember that the
4 new year. I think 1969—1969, yeah, that new year. But new year is a good time and bad
5 time, you know. Good time you don't have to run and hide; they don't shoot it. But, the
6 new year of 1968, when I didn't come home for new year's because I worked out in the
7 field, and then a lot of work was going on and a lot of VC (Viet Cong) going for me to
8 become the VC. They come to make, but I'm able to take off and go home and have
9 nothing to do with that; and I went to work for the Americans.

10 AM: Wow, so how did you get away?

11 BE: We pretended—we tricked them. We said we'd go home to say goodbye to
12 our families, and then I'd run.

13 AM: So, did you have to go to a different city?

14 BE: Then, I went to work for the Americans.

15 AM: In Saigon?

16 BE: No, in my village.

17 AM: Ok.

18 BE: They have the YRBM21 ship or boat there, and my friend had a sampan, and
19 she would let me bring the watermelon and all that stuff. We'd try to catch some trash
20 that the Americans poured out onto the river, but we also have some fruit to sell. Then,
21 EOD (Explosive Ordinance Disposal) American GI (Government Issue) met them. He
22 saw mostly the boys, but he saw that the sampan had two girls. My hair was really long
23 and flowed on the wind, and he saw that, and he came, and he took my boat, and he
24 pulled it into the EOD little bay there and he gave me a lot of food and everything, and he
25 asked where my house is. Later on, he sent the translator into my village looking for my
26 name, and then he gave me a job there, and he was really kind too. He carried a little
27 piece—he saw my house. We can see the sun out of the roof and almost fell down, so he
28 carried a little piece of plywood, everything he can find, and give it to us so could build a
29 house later. That American GI named Danny—Dan; and that's how I started working for
30 the American Navy.

1 AM: Wow, because that was a big thing to help you rebuild the house after it was
2 burned down. So, how big was the house when it got rebuilt?

3 BE: Well, it's a two room bamboo hut, but at least it had no more rain coming in
4 because then if it rained, we'd have to have a piece of plastic to cover my grandmother,
5 because she's old and we don't want her to get sick.

6 AM: Mm-hmm. What was your grandmother's name?

7 BE: Qua, Q-U-A, but everybody called her Ba-Ba, because she's number three,
8 you know.

9 AM: And your mother?

10 BE: My mother's name is Tien. That's money. My name was Bac; Qua, that
11 means a lot, and my mom's named Tien. That's a lot of money and silver. But when—
12 I'm getting lost here, oh no.

13 AM: It's ok.

14 BE: But, when her children wound up Bac, Beo, Lon, because while pregnant
15 with my younger sister my mom found out my father was having an affair, so instead of
16 the name the was a lot of money saving, we wind up with betrayed name. Bac, Beo, Lon,
17 that's big betray; turned out that way. The name, you know, was intentionally a lot of
18 money saving, and then when my mom caught my father, so my name Bac, and my sister
19 Bell, and my baby brother Dem Lang; so, it becomes big betrayed.

20 AM: Very creative. Was your grandmother originally from South Vietnam?

21 BE: South Vietnam. She lived there her all her life and life before that, and
22 everything. She was a really good catholic.

23 AM: And so, you have a lot of good, and some painful things also happened on
24 Lunar New Year or Tet, but you had a lot of good memories too.

25 BE: Yes.

26 AM: And so, what exactly was your job? You mentioned that you worked with
27 the Americans; what was your job?

28 BE: I worked for the EOD Navy. You know, they have a little boat there, and I
29 clean and wash their clothes, wash their sheets, and do the housekeeping there; and after
30 a while, the EOD team were leaving so I got to move up to work with Dr. Carlin on the
31 sick bay, to help and to translate. To get medicine for the people, we'd set up the medivac

1 under the tree and somebody yells, and I translate and give out the medicine for the
2 doctor and the nurse, and I do that. Later on, I helped with the sick bay when people
3 bring the sick people. One time a lady had a baby, but her water already broke and dry
4 out, and she was dying but the doctor was able to save the baby and I held the baby on
5 my arm. It's really nice.

6 AM: That would be a very tough job, but very rewarding too when you got to
7 help someone. So, when you went to do medicine, you did like vaccines and also treated
8 some people who were sick too?

9 BE: Normally, vaccines we don't; but we treat people who were sick with
10 wounds, a lot of injuries; you know, we'd help out the women and all that.

11 AM: Right, so that was a good thing that you got to help people.

12 BE: Yeah. One time there were ten or twelve people. The war was going on and
13 they brought ten or twelve people who on, and all the bloody—they put them in the sick
14 bay. Then, we wrapped them up and sent them to the hospital.

15 AM: Wow. The other major holiday, because I always describe Tet like
16 Christmas, New Years, Thanksgiving, and Fourth of July all in one; is how I kind of
17 describe it, because it's a very big thing.

18 BE: We do have the Christmas, and Christmas was really sweet too. We can go to
19 midnight church, and so that's really neat and they sell all kinds of fruits, so we got to eat
20 good.

21 AM: Right, because your grandmother was Catholic, so you got to do both. But,
22 for people who don't understand this—that's how I always describe, because it's a very
23 important holiday.

24 BE: Right, because if you are not Catholic you don't have Christmas, because the
25 Buddha, but we Catholics we have Christmas and New Years both. We got to—
26 Christmas we don't have new clothes, but we got to eat good food.

27 AM: Good, I'm glad. So, what was your favorite? Your favorite food to eat at that
28 point?

29 BE: We got—they call them That, and sweet sticky rice cakes with some meat
30 inside, and that was our favorite. We got to eat at Christmas time and at New Years' time.

31 AM: Did you like the watermelon sweets too?

1 BE: Yeah, so we eat a lot of fruit.

2 AM: Another major holiday is the mid-Autumn Moon Festival.

3 BE: That's for the Buddha and for the other people separate, and city people they
4 do the moon thingy, but in my village they don't.

5 AM: So, what did you think of the Geneva Accords of 1954, because we've
6 talked a little bit about what your family thought of the French, and some of your
7 childhood memories and holidays, but this is kind of pivotal to the things that happened
8 after in your childhood—the Geneva Accords of 1954; and so, what are your thoughts on
9 that? That split the country.

10 BE: Oh, ok. I was just a year old, so I don't remember very much except in 1963
11 they built the Bay Camp right where our land—the Catholics give us some land to work
12 with, and in 1963 they came, and they took that land to build the Bay Camp. They paid
13 my mother only 8,000 PFs for her cucumber and other things, but the land belonged to
14 the church, so they don't get anything from the land. I was sad we lost that land. We no
15 longer were able—my mom was no longer able to feed her kids, and so we wind up
16 really, really hungry sometimes because of that.

17 AM: Wow, so it had a major impact. What did you think of Ngo Dinh Diem?
18 Forgive my pronunciations. The ruler of South Vietnam.

19 BE: Oh, Ngo Dinh Diem. In 1963—they threw him overboard, and I heard a lot of
20 things that he was ok, but that no one knew that his sister-in-law did a lot of crazy things.
21 I was too young to know about that. In our village, people don't talk about politics like
22 that, and so I didn't really know; but I heard, that the Ngo Dinh Diem knew the sister-in-
23 law was really the one who created a lot of drama.

24 AM: And after the land was taken back, and you were saying it was difficult for
25 your family during this period; what did your mom do to help your family survive? What
26 kinds of things did you guys do?

27 BE: Well, we—I have an older sister, and later on when they set up the Bay Camp
28 and everything. One GI there liked my older sister and wanted to marry her, so he had the
29 cooker for the kitchen of all the GI—it was a lot of people. Then, they let my mom and
30 my sister leave in the car, so they can get the lap over and we were ready to pay, and we
31 ate out of that, and so it helped.

1 AM: And for your family how did you see the political situation when you were a
2 little in 1964, and the relationship between North and South Vietnam?

3 BE: At that point in time, you know, it actually—we moved to where a land and
4 go into the lot of the church, so at that point in time we don't have to go down underneath
5 the house that often, so kind of free from contempt for a while, because the Bay Camp
6 have a lot of GIs so the VC didn't come and shoot them as much because they shoot
7 back; so, we kind of have a free time there. I got to go to school, and you know, I got to
8 go to the third-grade school, and I know how to read and write at that point in time, and
9 those times in 1964 were really good. The Bay Camp were helping people around here to
10 not have VC shooting anymore. But, as a normal little girl growing up, I don't think
11 much about politics or anything. I do often see the people get shot and die, but we believe
12 if our is up it's up, because if God wants us to die, we die. I don't remember thinking
13 anything other than that.

14 AM: What did you think of Ho Chi Minh?

15 BE: I don't really know him, and study him that much; but, from what I gather he
16 really—nothing that I see is bad about him. He came through America and tried to a
17 peace, free a country to be better. But he couldn't get what he'd done and actually, he
18 devoted his life for his people. I don't think he is bad now that I look back, but at that
19 point in time, I really don't—everybody—I saw Americans who would talk really bad
20 about Ho Chi Minh, and so we did hate him like everybody else did at that point in time.

21 AM: I know the Vietnam War is very complicated and has a lot of different
22 aspects that caused it, but how do you perceive the causes of the Vietnam War; what do
23 you think caused it?

24 BE: The cause of the war was, I really believe, and everybody would think—
25 they're starving. They don't have good crop, they don't have a good land to grow crop,
26 they have to do something. If they don't conquer the south, they will be hungry, and so
27 because of that they will fight. You know, Ho Chi Minh, if he had to take thirteen-year-
28 old girl and boy to go fight, they fight, because they believe if they don't fight, they will
29 die from starvation. So, that's what I think. I don't know if that's true or not. Ho Chi
30 Minh—no matter what he had to win. If he ran out of old people, he'd take young; if he

1 ran out of young, he'd take children. There from 1968 New Year Tet in that big war, he
2 sent a lot of thirteen-year-old girls and boys to conquer the south, but he lost.

3 AM: You're talking about the major Tet offensive with the US embassy, which
4 the US eventually took back, but that we lost because of the New Year truces there was
5 less troops, because like you said normally the fighting would stop for the holidays.

6 BE: He took children if he had to; he did.

7 AM: Like you said, they felt like survival was their cause. What do you think of
8 the US involvement in Vietnam?

9 BE: Not because I'm married to an American. When I was about nineteen, there
10 were a group of people like My Lai and all that; that general group, but from what I grew
11 up and I saw the American come to my village. More come to the children and women,
12 and hopeful to a lot of people there. If it were not for the Americans, my family of nine
13 people would not survive until now, because they really truly helped me until I met my
14 husband. At the end of it, I worked for Americans, and I did it really well, but there are
15 three Vietnamese guys, and because I don't want to sleep with them, they tried to throw
16 me out in the river; and Lieutenant Ring walked out and I called him to helped, and he
17 helped me—he saved me at that point in time. Then, it was time for me to quit work,
18 because he doesn't want to endanger my life there, so I came home and when I came
19 home, I have to run and hide from VC, because I'm no longer—you know, I'm a traitor
20 because I didn't want to join them, and I followed the Americans. So, I don't want my
21 family to be hungry, and I saw my husband. He had a girlfriend, but the girlfriend said,
22 "Give me some money, and I will go away," and he did. She had only fifteen and he gave
23 her twenty-five, and I saw that, and I said, "Sam, I love you." He said, "Oh shit."
24 Because, I say, "You give me the money so I can buy two cows, so each year they have
25 two babies so I can feed my family, and you do whatever. You're done with me, you go
26 home, you throw me away; that's fine." But he took the money, and he gave me 40,000
27 PFs. I go home and buy to cows and that's how I sell myself because I lost my job from
28 the Vietnamese guys wanting to sleep with me and I don't have anything to do with them.
29 They think I was an American spy, so they try to throw me down in the river and Dr.
30 Ring saw me—he saved me. Otherwise, I'm doing pretty good. But I sold myself to Sam,
31 because two cows only are a down payment for trouble, but he was really kind to my

1 family, and he takes care of me. My baby, Maria, was born; he went back, and he's not
2 supposed, but he sneaked back to see her, and we have to take her into town, and he's a
3 good guy. To me, in my eyes, I see the Americans as nothing but hope. South Vietnam
4 and everybody from village, and a lot of Vietnamese people when Americans took off to
5 go home, they all cried, and they all really missed the Americans because they got to live
6 a free life for a while.

7 AM: Well, I'm glad it was Sam. Oh, my goodness, you had a lot of experiences,
8 good and bad, but I'm glad predominantly that it was good for you; and with the My Lai,
9 you were talking about the My Lai Massacre, right?

10 BE: Yeah. There are some people that do not have anything to do with it, but
11 there are a lot of young Americans; they intend to help so many people. Like my
12 husband, the old lady; the sampan knocked her down in the river. He jumped off and
13 saved her, and good thing he's alive. I saw that. When they came for the medicine, and
14 one time, Sam, my husband, had to jump off and save the old woman down the river.

15 AM: You chose a good guy. You chose wisely.

16 BE: Yeah, because there's a thousand guys in there, and some of them would
17 marry me, but I don't have anything to do with them. I would just try to pick one good
18 one, so I did.

19 AM: And like you said, he went against orders and went against the laws to come
20 back for you and your daughter.

21 BE: Yes. I didn't want to come to America, because I want to live with my
22 family, and he said, "If you don't come, I will take Maria and Lisa both," we have two
23 children, "and I will send them to my mom, and I'll stay here to die with you." So, I
24 stopped that. My husband, you know, he and I do what I have to because I was so sure
25 when VC come, we will die, because if we stayed there—so I said, "Ok, let's go." I
26 didn't want to go; he hit me blue and black because I tried to jump off the truck. I didn't
27 want to go to America. I didn't want to leave my family.

28 AM: It was your home, and your family, and everything you knew.

29 BE: At that point in time, my English was not that good.

30 AM: But you think he was also afraid what would happen to you and your kids
31 being Asian American.

1 BE: Yeah, he wanted Maria and Lisa to be taken care of, rather than sit there and
2 die with me. At that point in time, one lady, she's rich and she bring a big box of gold to
3 say, "Dump her and take me. I'll give you all this gold." Sam, he said, "I came here for
4 my wife and kids, thank you." There are a lot of great things about Sam.

5 AM: I'm that you guys love each other, and that it worked out.

6 BE: We do; we care a lot for each other.

7 AM: And so, what do you think of the US sending ground forces to South
8 Vietnam in 1965?

9 BE: I really don't know if that helped or hurt a lot, but because—what I look at
10 for what it's done for my family, so I think it helped a lot, but just like President George
11 Bush, to send the people to go over in Iran and Iraq, because what Americans believe is if
12 we don't do something than Americans are not safe either so we've got to believe in that.
13 What the leader the believed—and then they sent the GI and GI did their job, because
14 they are soldiers, so they have to do their duty, just like chores, because they came over
15 here, they bombed us, so we have to do something. But, for Vietnam at that point in time,
16 I think the government believed the same thing. If we don't do something and have the
17 communists, like China and Russia, and they're ganging up on us; we're too late, so
18 we've got to do something.

19 AM: And in your history, you've had a tentative relationship with China for over
20 a thousand years.

21 BE: Yeah, but we fight with them a lot.

22 AM: So, what do you think of the US bombing North Vietnam?

23 BE: I don't think it's bad for them to bomb North Vietnam, because they want to
24 win the war, and to win the war you have to do so many unpleasant things. Like my
25 father-in-law went to bomb the German country, and the towns and all that stuff; so, to
26 try to win the war you have to do it.

27 AM: What do you remember most about the war?

28 BE: The good memory or the bad memory?

29 AM: Let's do the good one first.

1 BE: (Laughs). The good one is, we got to run around, and a helicopter came—
2 American helicopter came. We all ran and stood on the pad, so they gave us some gum
3 and some food, and that was fun. You know, that's really nice.

4 AM: To see the big helicopter and to interact with the soldiers who give you gum.
5 That's good. So, did they ever let you guys ride a little bit?

6 BE: No, they would give us some food to eat in secret and all kinds of stuff, and
7 we'd have a ball.

8 AM: Good, I'm glad to hear that. So, that's what you remember most of the good
9 part, how about the other part?

10 BE: The bad part, I see a lot of my cousins and my family get killed and being
11 brought home in the body bag. My older sister's husband is missing in action; has three
12 children that I will take care of. Me and her went to look for his body. There was one
13 truck of the dead men.

14 AM: Filled? With bodies?

15 BE: Filled with the truck, and we went over there to look for a loved one, and
16 everybody would do that. And, after work, man, my body was bloody from top to toe and
17 my sister was looking. That is the horrible thing that we couldn't forget that. That was
18 bad.

19 AM: Because you were looking for him; did you ever find him?

20 BE: No, because later on when his partner came back from the war when they
21 exchanged to come back. When he fought and they all surrounded him, and they took
22 him, but he held the M26—I mean—he blew it up right there, and the other one survived
23 and came home, and told that story; so, he blew his body to pieces out at the field, so we
24 couldn't find his body.

25 AM: So, like a landmine or booby trap?

26 BE: No, he had the M26—the hand grenade.

27 AM: Ok. Sorry, I wanted to make sure I understood.

28 BE: Yeah, hand grenade and so he blew himself up right there, and they came
29 home and told that story.

30 AM: Well, I'm glad you found out what happened, because it's really sad when
31 some people never know. So, what did you think of the Viet Cong?

1 BE: When my grandmother had five of her children died, because they accused
2 them of being Viet Minh back then. Viet Cong? Viet Minh?

3 AM: Yeah, the Viet Minh were later.

4 BE: Yeah, the Viet Minh. Depending on where you live, and if you were local,
5 you probably joined the Viet Cong. They believed in Ho Chi Minh to defend their family,
6 their country; so, part of my family—my uncle was with the Viet Minh, that's why they
7 caught and killed them. I don't think they are bad, but you have helped (inaudible). Even
8 if South Vietnam—nobody wanted to go fight in the war because they knew they would
9 die, but if you have no choice and they make you, then you have to.

10 AM: Right.

11 BE: And, if you become a soldier either way you have to go out there and shoot
12 people, or people will shoot you.

13 AM: Yeah, it split many families, and I think one of the hardest things is how
14 much it's affected Vietnam's families is really tragic.

15 BE: Yes, it's a tragedy for both sides, and there's so many people that kill. Every
16 family in Vietnam I know, either side, they do get killed, but now the VC win, so for
17 those who joined the VC they win, and they got to have some money, and all that stuff.
18 But, the other side, they go, and fight and their families get killed, so they have nothing,
19 but now their children enjoy the freedom that they can start their life new—they don't
20 even remember the war anymore because they are newborns, but someone like me, I still
21 remember.

22 AM: Yeah, because it wasn't that long ago. So, what did you think of the PAVN
23 (People's Army of Vietnam)? P-A-V-N, the People's Army of Vietnam?

24 BE: Of the Army in Vietnam?

25 AM: Yeah, you have ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) and you have
26 PAVN. Do you remember the PAVN?

27 BE: No, uh-uh.

28 AM: Ok, so what did you think of the ARVN?

29 BE: ARVN is—

30 AM: South Vietnamese.

1 BE: South Vietnamese. Well, at that point in time during the war, the South
2 Vietnamese, if they would devote their lives for the people then wouldn't have lost, but
3 they only puckered themselves. I think they basically were not very good for the people,
4 and that's why they lost the war. North Vietnam, they fight to win because the family
5 gives all they have, even the young children to go fight; but, the South Vietnam, I heard a
6 lot of rough cartels, and they have to—

7 AM: Bribes, or corruption.

8 BE: Bribes and corruption a lot; that's why they lost the war. I say that people
9 might not like what I say, but that's what I believe.

10 AM: Yeah, it was a big factor. Besides the uncle that you mentioned, did any of
11 your relatives serve in the ARVN, the Viet Cong, or the NVA (North Vietnamese Army)?

12 BE: They all do, because their family joined it and family joined that, and we all
13 know.

14 AM: And what are some of the things they told you about their experiences?

15 BE: For the war?

16 AM: Yeah, what are some of the things that those who served in the ARVN, the
17 Viet Cong, or the NVA; what did they tell you? In your family?

18 BE: Well, each of them believe in different things, and each tell the right thing of
19 the other. When they got together in the car, that group was bad and they think they were
20 the best, and the other would just rolling and they talked to each other that way.

21 AM: So, they would—

22 BE: Yeah, they come to you. They say, "Ok, if I'm South Vietnam and I think and
23 I think I do the right thing for the country." And if I'm in the VC, you say, "I believe I do
24 the right thing for the country." So, everybody believed in what their job is.

25 AM: Do you remember specific relatives that served? Do you remember specific
26 relatives that served in the ARVN, the Viet Cong, or the NVA?

27 BE: Yeah, some of it. My aunt's son was (inaudible), and they came home after
28 the war. A couple of them still survived. Some of them got caught. He worked for an
29 Americans, and then VC caught him and put him in the jail for a lot of years and he came
30 back. I remember he said the communists they're feisty and they're really hand workers,
31 and then the South Vietnam what he said.

1 AM: Your family was very divided—you had all over. Are they able now, when
2 they get together, to talk and to kind of focus on now?

3 BE: They focus on now—a couple of them are still alive, but they don't talk about
4 that anymore. They get drunk.

5 AM: And talk. That's good, because they're still getting together.

6 BE: Yeah, New Year they will get together.

7 AM: That's good. Ok. How did American soldiers you saw behave while serving
8 in Vietnam? You talked about with the kids and being good, and so, you've talked about
9 good ways they behaved. Is there anything that really stands out in your mind besides
10 what we've already talked about that you want to say about how you saw American
11 soldiers behave?

12 BE: They did their job well. When sent to do something they really did their job,
13 and I saw—they did a lot better than the Cambodian GI did or the South Vietnam Navy.
14 You know, when Americans were sent out to do something, they would take their job
15 very seriously, better than South Vietnam guys.

16 AM: And so how did ARVN soldiers behave?

17 BE: They do, because they have to. Sometimes if somebody—what we call
18 whenever the sun would come you say that, and so they do that a lot to survive.

19 AM: Did you have any contact with any of the allied soldiers? Like Australian,
20 Korean?

21 BE: No. How I am I doing so far?

22 AM: Very well. Extremely well, thank you so much. Describe your personal
23 interaction with American soldiers who served in Vietnam. You've talked about the
24 helicopters, and you've talked about working with them, and of course, your husband; but
25 is there something else you want to tell us about describing your personal interactions
26 with the American soldiers. Is there anything else you want to add?

27 BE: I think that all, you know.

28 AM: What do you think was significant about the Tet Offensive of 1968? You've
29 mentioned that with the young kids, and in the US, we talk about how it changed our
30 perception of the war, but I want to hear what you think about the significance of that
31 event.

1 BE: For what I see it on its significance, Ho Chi Minh, he did not respect the
2 traditional New Year, and he kind of betrayed the tradition and took all of that to further
3 what he taught, that we'll win the war. But the thing is, because Americans are still there,
4 and the Americans were stronger. I don't know if it's locked in between or not.

5 AM: So that significant about it that he went against the tradition.

6 BE: Mm-hmm.

7 AM: Do you think—ok, the US forces took it back a few days later and some
8 people few like it took the VC a long time to recuperate from that.

9 BE: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

10 AM: How do you feel about that? Is that what you saw too?

11 BE: It took a long time, because their sons—very young kids, because they'd run
12 out of the big people, so it took a while to get it back, but it also taught the South
13 Vietnamese a very, very valuable lesson about not to let up your guard.

14 AM: Yeah, to not drop your guard. What do you think of the allied decision to
15 withdraw their forces after 1968?

16 BE: Well, that I really truly don't know. A lot of people think that American and
17 allied abandoned South Vietnam, and they feel really bad about that; but I think the
18 Vietnam War, it was long and hard, and it was time for the end of it. You know, that's
19 what I think. So, American GIs go home; everybody won, because if they were no longer
20 trapped to the Americans than we don't need to be over there, that's why, I think. A lot of
21 people make a mistake, they think the Americans came because it would help South
22 Vietnam and all, but not really. They helped to maintain their job, and they helped to
23 maintain the war that the VC fought with the Americans. We often say, "The two
24 elephant fight," that means Russian and American. We are the rats, so we get stepped on.
25 And so, (phone ringing in background) they bring all GI home after that because they no
26 longer belonged it was trapped to them anymore, so they took off.

27 AM: And what do you think of the Paris Peace of 1973? The peace agreements of
28 1973?

29 BE: Everybody was hopeful and would dream that freedom would come for real,
30 but soon as Americans were gone, everybody got back together. The war was worse than
31 ever. I got caught in the between there. It was a lot worse than before.

1 AM: How so?

2 BE: Because they kept fighting, the North and the South. They fought with each
3 other in every single town, after that until it's 1975. Really bad.

4 AM: So, it like escalated for you?

5 BE: Yeah.

6 AM: What do you think of the American decision to withhold assistance in 1975?
7 Because you talked about how some felt that—were upset that Americans backed down
8 and some even felt betrayed by our withdraw; but what do you think of the American
9 decision to withhold assistance in 1975?

10 BE: Withhold assistance?

11 AM: Like the fall.

12 BE: Not help anymore? Yeah, at that point in time, we kind of left everything and
13 ran. There were a lot of South Vietnam soldiers just dropping their guns and run back to
14 the country because they no longer have hope, and so they felt that they were abandoned.
15 A lot of them felt abandoned, then would just give it up and that's how the VC won.

16 AM: In what ways did the war most effect you and your family? You've talked
17 about the loss of loved ones, but is the loss of loved ones—I'm sure is the most affected
18 way, but what other ways did it most effect you?

19 BE: If it were not for the war, I wouldn't have met my husband, and after I met
20 him, my life, my family's life, and my children's life was very good. If that, you know,
21 answers the question?

22 AM: So, that's the good way that affected you the most.

23 BE: Yeah, the good way. Now, we all have loved ones that we lost, and we miss
24 them, and all that stuff; but, without the Americans coming in, my six children were not
25 going to have the life they have, and I'm probably long dead. So, my family and the three
26 children of my sister—my older sister has three children and their father die from missing
27 in action. One of them came to America, and one of them I sent money to help here.
28 He's a schoolteacher, and he's a principal and little girl is doing well, so my family really
29 have been able to get out of it. I don't if that's good or bad, but to my family that's very
30 good. But we do remember the people who died. My cousin, and my relative, my brother;

1 and so, my mom had eleven children and three are alive now. Everything happened we
2 tried to fight but looks like my family came out ahead.

3 AM: Good. Now, you mentioned that your husband—that you bought two cows.
4 In your book, I think you said that was more than a husband paid for in the area you were
5 in.

6 BE: Yeah.

7 AM: Can you explain a little bit about that? Because that was a really neat thing
8 that he had given so much.

9 BE: Yeah, mostly the Vietnamese in my village if they get married, they have a
10 pair of golden earrings if they're lucky. For a little girl like me and to get bought with the
11 two cows, that a lot of money. But, you know, it started out with the two cows, but I feel
12 pretty proud. I thought cheated him out pretty good. But actually, he and I met—I kept up
13 with my bargain. I came to Saigon after he gave me money, on and off for another month,
14 and I could've taken the money and run off and don't even bother to see him; but I kept
15 my bargain because that's quite a bit of money for a man to pay for me, so I kept my
16 word and because I kept my words. I always try to outsmart him, but I found he was a lot
17 smarter than me; but he's so dumb he fights too much. I'm kind of proud to get that
18 money, you know, to help my family out; but I always thought, "For two cows, you got
19 cheated."

20 AM: (laughs) No, you're worth it. How did you first meet him?

21 BE: We worked on the sick bay, and I saw him—they got their log, and they were
22 too big or something, so I hem it down or do all that; and he was really interested in
23 learning Vietnamese, and I am interested in learning English. So, we both studied
24 together. He always looked at me like a sister, because at that point in time he has a
25 girlfriend in the village that he used to be, and then they came and go up there. But the
26 girl was a lot older than him, and every time he came, she just took his wallet and took
27 everything out, and he got really tired of that; and he wanted to get rid of her, but he
28 didn't know how. One day, I speak english, so she come and say, "Hey Bak, can you
29 translate me to Sam? Say he gives me 15,000 PFs and I'll never see him again. I'll
30 leave." He was so happy he gave 25,000 to break up, and I said, "Oh man, he has the

1 money and I need the money,” so that’s why I said I love him, “I love you, Sam.” He
2 says, “Oh shit.” That’s how I go for a bargain.

3 AM: So, when did you come to the US?

4 BE: We came April 1975. Almost twentieth of April.

5 AM: So, right at the fall?

6 BE: Yeah.

7 AM: Oh, wow. Very dangerous.

8 BE: Very, very dangerous. They shoot, and they already bombed the White
9 House, and so I didn’t want to go, and it just kept delaying. Then, finally he took me and
10 the two children, and pushed us into the back of the plane and they fly us to—

11 AM: Guam?

12 BE: No, the Philippines. It was only a couple days before Saigon fell the thirtieth.
13 We actually left the twenty something. We were able to make it here.

14 AM: How old were you?

15 BE: At that point in time, I’m twenty-one.

16 AM: And your daughters?

17 BE: She was two, and the other baby was seven months old.

18 AM: Now, that was quite an ordeal. How long were you in the Philippines?

19 BE: A couple of days. Then, we fly to America, to California.

20 AM: Which part of California?

21 BE: Los Angeles. My mother-in-law lived there at that point in time.

22 AM: How long did you stay there?

23 BE: Stayed there until ‘81, and then we moved to Texas.

24 AM: And your husband has roots here?

25 BE: Yes, he’s born and raised in Texas.

26 AM: So, you stayed in California not quite six years. Did he always want to come
27 back here?

28 BE: Well, I told him, and at that point in time, Maria she’s really good at school
29 and skipped some grades and things. The teacher said she had a really good future,
30 because she’s really smart. Then, we live in a neighborhood that’s kind of dangerous.
31 When we were out, on the sentry tree, we saw somebody up there, without clothes on and

1 all that kind of stuff; and I saw so many things. I said, “Sam, if we can not stay at my
2 village, why don’t we go to your country?” So, we loaded up in the car and took the kids,
3 and moved to Texas, because I saw so many things and I have girls, so I didn’t want them
4 to see things because I already see through everything. When I came here, I wanted to
5 raise the children in a good family, and I don’t want them to see all the yucky things over
6 there. But the first time my husband told me, “I live in Texas,” so when we came to
7 California, I saw Texaco. Then I saw one, and then we ride for a while and I saw another;
8 I said, “What Texaco is he going to? Two of them I’ve seen already.” I didn’t know what
9 the others say or see the gas that said Texaco. And we go a while; I see another one. I
10 say, “Which one are we going in?” That’s when I came here.

11 AM: And in Orange County, it has the biggest Vietnamese American population,
12 and Texas has the second and third with Dallas and Houston; was it hard for you to move
13 to Denton? Because there’s not as many Vietnamese in the area.

14 BE: When I came to Denton, I didn’t want to even stay in the city. We bought
15 sixteen acres out in the country, and I stayed away from, because in California I lived
16 around no Vietnamese, and they do a lot of things—it taught me a lot of things I’m not
17 really happy with. I wanted to be out in the country to raise the children. I don’t even
18 teach my children Vietnamese, because I say, “If you live in America, you have to fit in
19 good so you can go to school and be something,” because I’m a third grade dropout; I
20 can’t teach them anything, so they’re on their own and if they’re on their own they must
21 be good if they don’t speak too much Vietnamese. I said, “When they’re ready to learn
22 Vietnamese, they can have a chance to learn,” but I wanted—but, all my children, I’m not
23 bragging about, but they are super, super smart and doing well. All of them; and that’s
24 really, really my plus for marrying Sam and giving my children a better chance than I
25 ever dreamed I had, and that’s really something to me.

26 AM: Because you’re a good mother and you care about them. Your reasons to
27 move to the US, of course, are your husband and your kids.

28 BE: (laughs) Yeah. He beat me up and put me in—he did! I mean, I was blue and
29 black. He said, “Wake up!” I’m acting like a crazy woman, and he said, “Wake up. You
30 need to.”

1 AM: In your book, you mentioned about your worry about your daughter, and
2 because she Amerasian and you talked about even worried about being too loud while
3 you were having your daughter because you were worried about the VC.

4 BE: Yeah.

5 AM: And so, was that also part of a reason? Is that you're worried about your
6 daughters? What could happen to them?

7 BE: Yes, and so when Sam said, "I'll send the children with my mother, and I'll
8 stay here and die with you." I would just say, "If I'm so worried about my daughter dying
9 and trying to save her, then why now would I abandon her?" So, I gathered myself all
10 together, and go because of the children. Two of my children, and we have four more that
11 follow. I really devote my life to the children and my husband. I work and take care of
12 the family.

13 AM: At the beginning of our interview, you talked about, besides the feeling of
14 safety when you moved, because you know there's no more fighting and you didn't have
15 to hide; you also mentioned some of the freedoms. Can you explain what kind of
16 freedoms that you noticed when you got here?

17 BE: Yeah, there are a lot of things in America that are not freedom at all; like, you
18 can fish anywhere, you can do anything that you want, hunting and shooting. You have
19 time, and all that stuff; so, I don't think that as freedom. But, the freedom, it's you are
20 able to say anything without somebody listening and tell the other people, so that night
21 VC come and maybe rat you out, execute you, and all that stuff. I don't have to worry
22 about that. Even when I was young, I'd just say a couple of words from the guy who's
23 powerful, like he's rich and all the stuff, and he nearly ratted out and killed me right
24 there, by saying things like, "He's too rich, and he don't care about other people." Then,
25 he just would say all kinds of words and try to kill me just because I tell him the truth and
26 don't care for the other. We were poor, so we get pushed and anything we say, if it were
27 anything—if they think they're powerful and they have their family high in government,
28 they can kill you anytime they want to, and they do. In America, I don't have to worry
29 about that. That's the freedom I really like. The other freedom is I can get my gun and go
30 shoot at the dove or something without a little knife. I tried to survive, and Sam, he gave
31 me a hammer and a knife for self-defense, because a lot of people tried to pick me up and

1 hurt me. They came and caught me, and they were about to kill me because I have a knife
2 and a hammer, so they took it away and all. You know, so here you don't have to worry
3 about that. That's another freedom. And you can teach your children anything you want
4 to teach them.

5 AM: And at the time you left Vietnam, you were still living in the place you were
6 born and raised?

7 BE: Yes.

8 AM: And you were no longer working for the Americans, and you were kind of
9 working at home, kind of farming to survive that way?

10 BE: No. We tried to—we can camp at the house at with my family. At night we
11 have to go hide from house to house. There was one time I would hide under the hut, and
12 the VC were looking for me. They were walking on top of it, but I was able to survive
13 and do that from the hole and let them walk to look for me to kill me, several times.
14 When I worked for Americans and didn't want to join them to be a VC girl and they were
15 really, really—I have a bad record with them, so I have no choice but to go with Sam to
16 America or leave town.

17 AM: And a lot of former US employees and former government employees of the
18 government of South Vietnam were put in the education camps, and the closer their ties
19 to the US the longer they were in those awful camps. So, if you had stayed do you think
20 you would have been—?

21 BE: If they had not executed me, I would have been in the camps for a long time.
22 Maybe never make it back, because I have a lot of trouble with my blood condition and
23 with work in the jungle like that, I won't make it back.

24 AM: Did you have any relatives or friends that ended up in the reeducation
25 camps?

26 BE: Yes, my friends and my family. There are a couple I know. Some of them
27 died in it, and some of them came back. One or two came back.

28 AM: I'm sorry. So, the ones that came back are they relatives or friends?

29 BE: Friends.

30 AM: So, your relatives didn't.

31 BE: No.

1 AM: I'm sorry.

2 BE: My cousin didn't.

3 AM: Your friends, how long were they in the camps?

4 BE: Two years.

5 AM: Two years?

6 BE: Yeah, and she said they put her in the field and break out the duck and carry

7 and build the dam, and all that stuff every day, and eat one bowl of rice with salt and

8 whatever she can find. Potato or something.

9 AM: Because it was hard physical labor with very little food or medical care.

10 BE: And, the water was bad, so there are a lot of people dying.

11 AM: From sickness. When you were in the Philippines for those couple of days,

12 were you in a refugee camp?

13 BE: Yes.

14 AM: What were your experiences there? What was it like for you in the refugee

15 camp?

16 BE: I was just so out of it. It's so tiring, because to get on the plane for the first

17 time and go in the air with the two kids, with Sam and two suitcases with mostly books.

18 So, I was out of it. Everything was so different for me. Then, when we came to America

19 it was another jump.

20 AM: What was your first job?

21 BE: Huh? No, another jump.

22 AM: Oh, another jump. I'm sorry. Yeah, because everything is different the

23 language, the culture, everything; and it's hard to recognize what things are too.

24 BE: The food.

25 AM: The food. Medicine was different. Everything.

26 BE: I mean, when I was pregnant with my third child, which was the first one in

27 America, and all I want to eat was fingerling fish cooked with fish sauce. Sam, he bought

28 me fish sauce and rice, and had that there for me, so I'm ok with that. But I would not eat

29 anything if I did not have the fingerling fish, so I was starving myself, and really sick. So,

30 my mother-in-law say, "Sam, take her and go to the tropical fish—"

31 AM: Like the pet stores that have the aquariums, so you can say which ones.

1 BE: Yeah, “And buy her some of those, so she can eat,” and so I hear that, and I
2 feel so bad. I have to eat, so the baby would be ok but that’s all I wanted to eat.

3 AM: Did he take you to a fish market or anything too?

4 BE: No, I don’t want any. They don’t have it. He went everywhere, and would try
5 anything, but he didn’t find the fingerling ones. And I always dream like, “I go home
6 tomorrow, I go home tomorrow,” but we wind up from 1975 to 1992 before I go home.

7 AM: Right, because the US didn’t establish relations with Vietnam until actually
8 1995, so you were brave to go in 1992. You were very brave. So, what was it like going
9 back the first time?

10 BE: When I get off the plane, and I go through the line, and I saw all the VC. I got
11 really scared. They tell me to fill out the paper, and I’m really shaking and scared,
12 because I saw the uniform, because before they tried to kill to me, so I got really scared.
13 She showed me the paper, and she said fill it out, and actually I didn’t really know. I say,
14 “Ma’am, I don’t write that well, so can you please fill it out for me?” She said, “Ok, I’ll
15 fill it out.” I said, “Thank you, ma’am.” She said, “No, put some money under here. Not
16 just take me along.” So, I put it out a twenty dollar. But that was the first fear that I came
17 to that airport. Tan Son Nhut.

18 AM: Right, because it had been about seventeen years, right?

19 BE: 1992?

20 AM: Yeah, so about seventeen years. Did you feel like they were keeping an eye
21 on you?

22 BE: Everywhere you go, they have people follow you. They have people with
23 cameras in the house, and you’re not allowed to talk about anything but basically visit
24 with your family. You don’t even ask the people, they’re not there. You’re not allowed to
25 do anything. They watch your every movement, at that point in time. I heard in 1980,
26 when you eat a chicken, if you don’t have the permission to eat, they put your whole
27 family in jail. That happened from 1975 to 1980 something to 1990—it’s a really terrible
28 time for the people there.

29 AM: How about your family in Vietnam? Because you left; you had to leave,
30 unfortunately, some of your loved ones behind. How did they do?

1 BE: It was really tough. They nearly starved a couple of times, but by '76 I was
2 already able to send money home to help them out, so they were doing ok. The young
3 ones were able to go to school and all. We do not have a whole lot of money. My
4 husband goes to school with children, GI people; and he work, and we have kids, but
5 every single birthday I ask him, "What do you want for your birthday?" He said, "A
6 packet for your family to Vietnam," and we're able to send a couple of packets over there
7 to feed my family in Vietnam. That was really tough sometimes to gather a couple of
8 hundred dollars to send, but we never missed anything, and that's why they were able to
9 go to school.

10 AM: Did you ever have problems with it being confiscated or afraid that it
11 wouldn't reach them?

12 BE: No, because we have the plane that we send—they make sure they get it. We
13 do worry constantly, but they always got it, so we were lucky.

14 AM: Were you able to bring any of your relatives out of Vietnam?

15 BE: I have a brother and sister, and when they were young, we were able to do it,
16 but they wanted to stay in country, so until my mom died, they don't want anything to do
17 with—they don't want to leave; and, if now they want to leave, I'm too old to sponsor
18 them and they're too old to do anything. A lot of Vietnamese people do bring their family
19 here. Number one, we struggle with sick children we have, so we don't have extra money
20 to pay for their ticket or even rice, so they can make rice paper. We were really living
21 really tight, because for a long time Sam was the only one working and I was not, then
22 later on I worked, and it was ok. But we have sick children and them over there to take
23 of; so, we didn't bring any of my family. My nephew, the one with three other kids, he
24 was able to go to Cambodia and go to Thailand, and then later I sponser him here.

25 AM: You said there's a lot of the paperwork to sponsorship; the cost is a little
26 high too. How much did it cost you to sponsor him? Do you remember?

27 BE: With him I didn't have to pay anything, because he already ran to Thailand to
28 the camp—the refugee camp. But if he was in Vietnam, it would cost a whole lot and we
29 wouldn't have been able to afford that.

30 AM: So, did he escape by land through Thailand?

31 BE: He went to Cambodia by land; walked. Then, he went to Thailand and came.

1 AM: Wow, very dangerous.
2 BE: Yeah, but he made it.
3 AM: What year did he do that? Do you know?
4 BE: (To unknown speaker) Do you know when he left?
5 Unknown Speaker: We were in Texas, so it had to be mid-1980s.
6 BE: Yeah, 1990 or something.
7 Unknown Speaker: It was before 1990, because I was ten then.
8 AM: How long was he in the camps before he came here? Do you know?
9 BE: A couple of years, yeah. They wanted him to learn English, and spoke, all
10 that.
11 AM: And then get a sponsor.
12 BE: He was a young boy. He was eighteen. Not even eighteen yet when he got
13 here.
14 AM: I can't imagine being in a refugee camp for that long, but I'm proud of him
15 for it.
16 BE: He got it; he made it here.
17 AM: Upon leaving Vietnam, what did you think about the war?
18 BE: Well, it's just like you get used to it, so you don't think much of it.
19 AM: Because it's what you knew for pretty much your whole life.
20 BE: Yeah, my whole life I grew up with it, so it didn't bother me much.
21 AM: Have your thoughts on this changed since then? If so, how?
22 BE: Changed on the war?
23 AM: Yeah, since you left Vietnam have your thoughts on the war changed? And
24 if so, how? So, how have your views on the war changed since you left?
25 BE: Well—
26 (Editor's Note: audio cuts)

**Interview with
Session [2] of [2]
Date January 13, 2013**

1 Anna Mallett: This is Anna Mallett. I'm at the Southwest Collections Library in
2 Lubbock, Texas. It is January 13th, 2013, and I'm interviewing Bac, and can you please
3 start your name?

4 BE: My name is Bac Thi Eaton. I live in Vietnam right now in Lien Huong.

5 AM: And you're calling from Lien Huong?

6 BE: From Vietnam.

7 AM: Right, and we're gonna be continuing the interview from last month.

8 BE: Ok.

9 AM: So, my first question is, have your thoughts on the Vietnam War changed
10 since you left Vietnam?

11 BE: Took a long time to reform the country, but now, the freedom and the
12 children can go to school and the young they've got a job and they work. I thought the
13 war had to end, and right now it's the end of the war, and they start to live like normal
14 people. That's really good for Vietnam right now.

15 AM: I'm glad to hear that. So, it's changed to a little bit more positive view? Is
16 that what you're saying? From back then before you left Vietnam till now.

17 BE: Yeah, now. That's right.

18 AM: Can you describe the most significant ways in which the Vietnam War
19 affected you and your family?

20 BE: The war was really brining death and sorrow to my village and my family,
21 but the nice thing about it was I met Sam, my husband, and my family was safe from
22 starvation; so, the war brings bad and good both for my family.

23 AM: You still have family in Vietnam, and how long was it until you could keep
24 in contact with them after you left? After Vietnam how long was it before you could
25 reach them?

26 BE: Can you ask the question again please?

27 AM: Yeah, after you left Vietnam how long was it until you could reach your
28 family in Vietnam?

1 BE: I left Vietnam in April of 1975 until summer of 1992, before I come back to
2 my village and see my family for the first time.

3 AM: But you used to send them correspondence or money before that, right?

4 BE: We'd write maybe one or two letters a year. When my mom died in August
5 1973 and until 1974—I get news on January 1974 that my mom died.

6 (Unknown Speaker): That was 1984.

7 BE: 1984. So, to communicate at that time—because my family lived out in the
8 country, so it really took a long time. Six months or a year for one or two letters.

9 AM: That must have been very difficult, because I know you were worried about
10 them. How often do you get to see them now?

11 BE: Now?

12 AM: Mm-hmm.

13 BE: I really can't hear you.

14 AM: How often do you get to see them now?

15 BE: How often do I see them now?

16 AM: Mm-hmm.

17 BE: I have a brother and a sister, and their children; and we live in the
18 neighborhood. We live only a couple blocks away. I brought them all here and built their
19 house and started their business for them and helped them out. So, I saw them almost
20 every day.

21 AM: That's wonderful. How was your family treated? Those that remained in
22 Vietnam.

23 BE: When the communists came, and they live way out in the country; so, they
24 got to get some land and they trade some rice, so they're doing pretty well at the
25 beginning. But they are poor, so gradually they were doing better than in war, and with
26 money I helped, so they're doing alright. Some of my family did go to concentration
27 camps, and most of them don't come back.

28 AM: How many of them didn't come back?

29 BE: My cousin. They don't really—the one who needs to the concentration camp,
30 because they were the solider before. They come in the village, so they don't come back.

31 AM: And you had friends in the camps too? In the reeducation camps?

1 BE: Huh?

2 AM: You had friends also in the reeducation camps?

3 BE: Yeah.

4 AM: How many friends?

5 BE: I had three friends and two cousins that didn't come back; that were lost to

6 us.

7 AM: How long were they in the camps? Do you know?

8 BE: It's not long, because at that point in time, things were really, really tough

9 and I heard they only sick in the camps with the malaria and all that stuff that killed them

10 more than anything. They'd get sick and die in the camps.

11 AM: I'm so sorry. How many times have you returned to Vietnam?

12 BE: Well, the first time I returned in 1992, but after that we'd go two or three

13 times a year. We'd really go very often. Then, we live in Vietnam all of the time now, so

14 a lot. I don't remember the count, because normally we'd go back and forth here so many

15 times regularly.

16 AM: How have you been treated upon returning to Vietnam?

17 BE: When we come to Vietnam we get involved with local people. The helpless

18 and the poor, some of the students who are doing really well, but didn't have enough

19 money to go to school. We do a lot of volunteer work, something like that with the Red

20 Cross—the local Red Cross here. Everywhere we go, people treat us really well because,

21 actually, we do a lot of volunteer work around here with the school and with the local

22 people, so I get treated pretty well really.

23 AM: I'm glad to hear that and I'm glad you're volunteering. I hope you get a lot

24 of enjoyment out of that. Did returning to Vietnam have an impact, and if so, how?

25 BE: Yes. We get sick a lot and coming to Vietnam we were able to have people to

26 take care of me. I had to put the burden on my children, because with a hundred dollars a

27 month I have to live in, and people to take care of me; cook and clean. So, with the

28 American dollars I live in Vietnam, and I'm doing pretty well for me and help out the

29 people to have jobs. It works well for our family here.

30 AM: That's great, because you can afford a little more extra health care and also

31 employ people while you're there.

1 BE: Yeah, the health care, I have the nurse come to the house and give me
2 physical therapy and if it serious, the doctor does the house call here, and so that's great.

3 AM: That's really good. And so, do you like your doctor?

4 BE: Yeah, they truly help me and my husband a lot, because my husband has
5 been aging on with heart problems and diabetes, and all that; and I do have heart
6 problems and diabetes. The doctor has kept us pretty healthy.

7 AM: Is yours related to Agent Orange too?

8 BE: Huh?

9 AM: Is some of your health issues related to Agent Orange as well?

10 BE: Yes.

11 AM: What did you miss most about Vietnam?

12 BE: Well, I missed really the old days, and right now Vietnam has changed so
13 much. The people that I knew before, more of them die and are not really there anymore,
14 and I miss the family time. You know, we were poor, but my family of four generations
15 lived in the one room; so, we got a lot of family time. Wonderful to have a family, even
16 then. We were pretty poor, but all children and parents were together. I miss that a lot.
17 People I know now—I don't know them anymore. So, when I left Vietnam the only—in
18 my memory; I come back and it's completely changed, and I miss that so much. We can
19 talk, we can run around, at night we can gather together and say a lot of things. I miss all
20 that.

21 AM: Your family sounds like it was very close family.

22 BE: Yeah, it was really close. Now, when I come back, even my own brother and
23 sister they aren't them completely; it's the same anymore.

24 AM: But you've gotten to spend a lot of time with them though now, since you've
25 been back?

26 BE: Yes. We built their business, and we live—I see my sister and brother every
27 day, and my nieces and nephews. I try to take what I learned from American business,
28 and I own a couple of businesses in America that were very successful businesses in
29 America, so I teach them. I teach them what's the best in America, and I teach them how
30 make the business work, and I train them. I really have a business here, and I hope it
31 works, so that when I die, they can continue with their job here to take care of their young

1 ones. I'm a third-grade dropout, but now my nephew is able to go—great nephew is able
2 to go to college in Saigon; from my older sister—my younger sister's oldest son—
3 grandson go to college, and we helped them, and that's really good.

4 AM: So, education is important to you, because you went to third grade; but I
5 think that's amazing what you've been able to do and how you're blending the best of
6 both worlds. And your business, is that your fishing farm? Or what is the business?

7 BE: Yeah, my fish farm and my fruit tree. I have the video camera business for
8 wedding and photoshopping for my nephew. We helped them run a couple of businesses
9 here.

10 AM: So, you do a little bit of photography; and what kind of fruit trees?

11 BE: Mango and Jackfruit. Cashew.

12 AM: Well, I wish the best of luck.

13 BE: Coconut, too.

14 AM: Neat, and I wish your nephew a lot of luck.

15 BE: Well, if you are ever going to come here, you're going to love it, because it's
16 beautiful. We're feet from underneath the mountain—you look up the mountain and it's
17 really fresh air and a clear sky. It's really pretty.

18 AM: It sounds wonderful, and I hope I can make it someday. Where and when did
19 you learn English?

20 BE: Well, I learned a few words from Saigon when I was a housemaid. Then, I
21 got an OED guy to give me a job there on the YRMB21, and I met my husband. At that
22 point in time, he learned Vietnamese, and I learned English with him.

23 AM: That's great, so you helped each other? That's really neat.

24 BE: Yeah, we helped each other out.

25 AM: Have you become a US citizen, and if so, when?

26 BE: Yes, I became an American citizen in 1980.

27 AM: And so, what did you think of the tests to become a citizen?

28 BE: What did I think about to become an American citizen?

29 AM: The citizenship tests; what did you think of the tests?

30 BE: It was really an honor to become an American citizen, because at that point
31 in time I believed I didn't have a country, because I left Vietnam. The way we left

1 Vietnam to come to the United States—America that was always the country, at that
2 point in time, that I had. I’m still really honored to become an American citizen, because
3 I only had one country. So now, my main country is America. In Vietnam, I came back
4 here, and I could get here; I came with a visa, but America is still my main country.

5 AM: Well, I’m glad you’re one of our citizens. We need more good citizens like
6 you.

7 BE: Thank you.

8 AM: Was the test hard? Did you have to study a while for it?

9 BE: For me to study to become to an American citizen?

10 AM: Mm-hmm.

11 BE: Yes. I had a booklet, at that point in time, and they gave it to us; but they saw
12 me with three or four kids. The guy, he asked very easy questions for me, like, “Who’s
13 the President?” and “Who’s the Vice President?” Only five questions, and it was really,
14 really easy. So, I passed it right away.

15 AM: Well, I’m glad. Where are all the places you have lived in the United States?

16 BE: When I first came, I lived in Los Angeles with my mother-in-law; they lived
17 in Vietnam, so they bring me there. We moved out to San Bernardino, California, and we
18 had a house there. Then, we came to Texas, and we lived in Texas for all the years.

19 AM: What brought you to Texas?

20 BE: I was told my husband, that he came from Texas. I said, “Sam, I lost my
21 hometown, so let’s go into your hometown.” We raised the children; because I lived in
22 Los Angeles, and I didn’t really like Los Angeles that much. I’d go out at three and I
23 have all girls, and I saw there a lot of drug sellers standing on the sentry, twenty-one roll,
24 and doing all kinds of things. I don’t really like to let my children see that, so I said,
25 “Let’s go to Texas.” We loaded up a couple trucks, and I drove one vehicle, and my
26 husband drove one vehicle; and, whatever belonged we could put in there with four
27 kids—five kids at that point in time, and we went to Texas. We bought a fifteen-acre
28 land, and I put the mobile home in, and we build it from there on. We were very happy.
29 The kids went to school and learned; they were doing well.

30 AM: Good. And your husband had family in LA when you first moved there,
31 correct?

1 BE: His mother—he is an only child, so my children grow up with no cousins
2 here. All their cousins are in Vietnam. His mother lived in Los Angeles, and that's where
3 we lived from 1975 to 1981, then 1981 we came to the farm in Texas, and we stayed right
4 there and were set.

5 AM: Where you lived in Texas there wasn't a big Vietnamese population yet, and
6 the city that you lived in—can you say the city in Texas where you lived?

7 BE: In Vietnam?

8 AM: In Texas.

9 BE: 2519 Krum, K-R-U-M, Texas. (Someone speaking in the background) 2519
10 Lover Ln. The name of the street is Lover Ln, and Krum, Texas.

11 AM: Was it difficult for you because there wasn't a big Vietnamese population
12 there?

13 BE: (to Sam) What's the population there, Sam?

14 Sam Eaton: I think it's up to 3,000.

15 BE: It's up to 3,000.

16 SE: Or around there.

17 AM: So, why move from a big city to a little city?

18 SE: (in the background) Right at 1,000 when we moved there.

19 BE: When we moved there in 1981 it was just right at 1,000; and we lived in
20 between Krum and Denton on the sixteen acre, or thirty-two acres; I don't know.

21 AM: So, you had a nice small town to raise your kids in.

22 BE: We built a pretty nice house, now, but we lived in the mobile home for a long
23 time.

24 AM: Mm-hmm, and you grew vegetables on your acreage?

25 BE: Yeah. I dug some holes, and I grew vegetables. I was able to kill the rabbits,
26 and all that stuff. I had a little pond where I raised some fish. When my children were
27 young, I fed them out of my farm.

28 AM: So, you worked very hard.

29 BE: Yeah, I do. I ran the produce business for ten years or more.

30 AM: Wow. Was it difficult though, because there wasn't many Vietnamese in
31 Denton or Krum?

1 BE: At the beginning it was really difficult, but I normally got pretty lucky
2 wherever I go and whatever I do. The people were really helping me, like I'd sell the
3 produce and they'd all come and buy the tomatoes, and fresh vegetables from me. I was
4 able to do pretty well. My young children, when they were young, they were really cute
5 and beautiful and lovable; so, everybody saw that. I remember one day, I put six of my
6 children in daycare, but not one day; they are all on my arm when I work and they're all
7 around me. So, when they go to school and they come back, and I was there. I was able to
8 do that for my children.

9 AM: You had your hands full. I applaud you.

10 BE: Very hands full. I trained my oldest child—she did help me take care of the
11 younger ones, and the family worked out really well. No daycares, no nothing like that.
12 The old took care of the young.

13 AM: You have a very good work ethic and you're a good mom, it shows. So, did
14 you receive any job training or education in the US?

15 BE: My husband signed me in 1976 with the court, Woodbury University—
16 school, and I made a D out of that. He signed me up with ten or thirteen to correspond on
17 the TV, so that's what I do. But, the job thing, I sell employees—beginning, I sell the
18 produce for ten years, then I own a diamond business for fifteen years, so my entire life.
19 Besides raising six kids, I always have a job and work to help my husband take care of
20 the bills and the children. I do, until now that I'm disabled because I got sick a lot now,
21 but I worked the entire time I was here.

22 AM: The diamond business that you mentioned, can you—

23 BE: Yeah, I go around all over the United States in the pawn shops and I buy the
24 jewelry—buy the diamonds and take it out and sell to the wholesale. If it's a nice one, I
25 sell to the Vietnamese jewelry store. We were doing pretty well. We raised our children
26 through that business. That's how my husband quit his job, and we both were running
27 that for fifteen years. We'd make really good money and pay taxes and all that. My
28 husband made a tax-paying citizen out of me.

29 AM: I'm glad; I'm glad you guys could do that together.

30 BE: Yeah.

31 AM: Did you face any difficulties in adjusting to life in the US?

1 BE: Yes, in the beginning I was so homesick. I missed my family, I missed all the
2 food, I missed everything; I was just really depressed. One day, I was pregnant, but I
3 can't eat anything except a little fish from my village. That's what I'm craving, and my
4 mother-in-law says, "Hey, go to the tropical fish store and buy her whatever fish she likes
5 to eat," and when I hear her say that it feels very sweet for her to love me that much and I
6 just say, "Ok. Time to quit the fussing and leave everything behind and pick up from here
7 to begin the American lifestyle living." So, I could get up and find some food that I can
8 eat, then I just took off from there to help raise the children. I was just like, "Ok, I miss
9 Vietnam. I miss all that, but it's no longer so let's make the best of it from now on," and
10 so that's what I did.

11 AM: The fish that you were talking about that you missed—I'm glad your
12 mother-in-law cared about you and said that.

13 BE: Yeah, that just waked me up.

14 AM: Mm-hmm. Was there anything else? Any other specific food that you really
15 missed?

16 BE: I can't hear you very well on that question.

17 AM: Was there any other foods that you really missed? Like a certain kind of
18 fruit? Or a certain dish?

19 BE: Yeah, I really missed a lot of fruit like green guava and green mango, at that
20 point in time.

21 SE: (very hard to hear in the background) She's the only person I know that eats
22 her mango green enough that you eat (inaudible) day old with them.

23 BE: (laughs) Yeah, and I just miss all of that. I remember when the storm hit—
24 when the big wind came in before raining and storming, I ran to go underneath the mango
25 tree—the neighbor's mango tree and waiting for the wind. Finally, the wind hit and then
26 a couple of mangos dropped, and about ten children were there and fought for that
27 mango; then, we get one. Each bite is a one bite, and if someone who took a big bite, we
28 hit their head, so they bit small so we can share. I never forget that. I had so much fun.
29 Man, the mango dropped, and ten people were hit in the head by it. The same thing, when
30 helicopters were come into town, we'd all run. There are nearly twenty children that ran
31 and stand on the pad and waiting for the Americans to bring candy and gum, whatever

1 they have: they're bringing the gifts. But they never give enough for all because there's
2 so many, and so some of them have and some of them don't, but we all share; but if they
3 don't share, we beat them up and take it away. In that village, I played the leader—we
4 played army. You know, because we don't have TV or anything, so we played the game,
5 and we took the bamboo sticks; we made it gun. I always was the leader, so if they don't
6 share, we beat them up and took it away anyway, so we learned to share.

7 AM: Right, and now you have your own mango trees.

8 BE: Oh yeah. The other day—the last year my mango trees were full of fruit and
9 lots of fruit, and I sit out there, and I ask my sister if she remembered—now my mango
10 could drop all over the place and nobody would pick. I asked my sister if she
11 remembered when we were so starving and we don't even have one mango to eat the
12 whole thing, and so she said, “Yes, I remember all of that.” Now, we have so many fruits
13 now.

14 AM: Well, I'm glad she remembered. How would you describe your treatment
15 while living in the US?

16 BE: Really, my treatment in the US, it really—I don't have anybody looking
17 down on us. We lived in California, same thing; people were really nice. They give me so
18 much support and love. You know, they'd bring my children a lot of nice stuff.
19 Everywhere I'd go people were very helpful for me. It's not true to all Vietnamese
20 people, but at least for me because, you know, I always had my children me and they're
21 all very well behaved. People would really come to me all the time. I didn't have any
22 problem with anybody trying to hurt me or look down on me, or anything like that. They
23 treated me well.

24 AM: I'm happy to hear that; that makes me very happy. My last question is if one
25 of your family members listens to your oral history, or a patron at the archive listens to
26 our oral history, what do you hope they get out of your interview?

27 BE: I hope they honor the pattern even dead or alive and given and learn how to
28 live with one and others in harmony. If it needs to sacrifice, it needs to sacrifice the
29 whole one and other for the family or the other people, because if they're willing to do
30 that then no war will be fought again.

1 AM: Bac, thank you so much for this interview. It has been an absolute honor and
2 a pleasure, and just a delight; and I really appreciate you sharing your story with us.

3 BE: (laughs) I thank you for letting me finish the interview, and I hope someday
4 you can come to Vietnam, because the airplane tickets Sam bought for April were like
5 1,300 for round trip.

6 AM: Wow.

7 BE: If you come here, then you learn a lot of things in Vietnam nowadays. I
8 mean, really.

9 AM: Thank you so much, and I will definitely try, and I will definitely call you
10 and come visit you if I can.

11 BE: Uh-huh. I will pick you up at the airport and bring you out here.

12 AM: Aw, you don't have to do that. You are so kind and very generous; you are
13 so kind and thank you. I just wish you the best.

14 BE: I'm sorry that on some of them I couldn't hear you, but I have the questions
15 with me that I printed out and wrote it out, so it made it quicker.

16 AM: Thank you.

17 BE: Did you like the picture we sent you?

18 AM: I love it, thank you so much.

19 BE: Sam, he has a lot of other war pictures of me holding the baby and all that
20 stuff, and he'd happily send you some more.

21 AM: I would love that and thank you so much.

22 BE: Bye-bye.

23 AM: Bye-bye. Bye Sam.