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Nguyen, Tung Oral History Interview (Vietnamese): Asian and African American Residents of Holland

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Interview with
Tung Nguyen
Vietnamese Resident

Conducted June 2, 1994
by Donna M. Rottier

1994 Summer Oral History Project
The Asian-American Community in Holland, Michigan

DR: What I'm going to do is ask you questions about your life, about where you came from, and your life in Holland. I have a list of questions that I'll ask everyone I interview. I'll start out with a few formal questions. This is Donna Rottier. The date is June 2, 1994, and I am interviewing Tung Nguyen in his home in Holland, Michigan. Could you please repeat your full name for reference?

TN: They say my name is Tung Nguyen.

DR: Your current address?

TN: 67 West 17th Street, Holland, Michigan, 49423.

DR: Your date of birth?

TN: [date removed], 1970.

DR: Where were you born?

TN: I was born in Vietnam.

DR: When did you first move to Holland?

TN: I think about October 1992.

DR: Could you describe for me what growing up in Vietnam was like, or what you remember of living in Vietnam?

TN: I remember living in Vietnam I got to go to school, and that's it.

DR: Could you describe what school was like there?

TN: No, I didn't.

DR: Did you live in an urban or rural area in Vietnam?

TN: In a city, Saigon.

DR: Why did you leave Vietnam?

TN: Because we needed freedom.

DR: Who did you travel with leaving Vietnam?

TN: This whole family.

DR: How many people was that?

TN: About six people.

DR: Where did you go first after you left Vietnam?

TN: Philippines.

DR: How long were you there?

TN: About six months.

DR: How did you get there from Vietnam?

TN: Took the airplane.

DR: Why did you go first to the Philippines?

TN: Because everybody they get, before they come to the United States, they stop there in the Philippines. They got to study for English course about six months. After that they come to the United States.

DR: When you came to the United States, did you come directly here, to Holland?

TN: No. We went to Tennessee first.

DR: How long did you stay in Tennessee?

TN: Stayed about one-and-a-half months.

DR: Why did you decide to go to Tennessee?

TN: They send me there. I can't get the job. They said there were no jobs there.

DR: How did you first hear of Holland?

TN: They told me they got a lot of factories. Then they got too many jobs already. He said you come to work in Holland. We wanted to make more money, that's why, than we made in Tennessee.

DR: What did you expect before you came here? You mentioned jobs, that you would be able to find a place to work.

TN: No. We don't have to find out yet. You know they say they come here and live with my friend and after that we go to apply for a job, whatever you call it.

DR: Who were the first people that you met in Holland? How did you go about finding a place to live or finding a job?

TN: My family come to Tennessee. They pick me up and then they help me about looking for a job. Before I come here, I don't have a car yet.

DR: Did you move then with your entire family up here?

TN: No. They bring me and my wife.

DR: Did your family follow you later?

TN: Yes. Followed me later.

DR: From Tennessee?

TN: No, from Philippines.

DR: Where did you first live here in the city?

TN: I live in a lot of houses. I got to move a lot. Before we come and live about 415 W. 21st. That's how I lived first before.

DR: Could you describe for me how you found a job here in Holland and what your first job was?

TN: Before I come to the country, I had to fill out a form, an application for the job, and then they called me to come to work for Request Foods and then I still work over there about six months. After that I had to quit. After that we go back over there. I told them I don't like third shift no more. They sent me to Bil-Mar. I have to work part-time over there, about a six-hour day. About a week or so they got me hired full-time and we still work over there right now.

DR: What kind of work do you do there?

TN: Sanitation.

DR: How many people did you know before you came here?

TN: Only one.

DR: What do you remember as being the hardest adjustment to living here? What did you find hardest about moving to Holland?

TN: We know we don't know the language. My family help me a lot. I said I will learn. Then they take me around.

DR: Why are you living in Holland? Why have you stayed here?

TN: Because here, this is a nice neighborhood. And then after that I have a job. My family wanted to stay here.

DR: You still have family over in Vietnam, right?

TN: Yes. Before they come to the United States, they will probably come to the Philippines, and then to Holland. We have one other family, my mother-in-law, they live in Vietnam. We haven't got

the paperwork for them already. When we did what she told me, they wait about a couple months.

DR: Have you attended school here in Holland?

TN: Yes. We got to Community Education. We got sent over there.

DR: What sorts of classes do you take?

TN: They teach you about how to speak, and then how to make a nice day, how about a job. That's all they have.

DR: How did you learn about Community Education?

TN: They said they come, they take me out there. After that they go home. After that we know how to speak.

DR: Are you still taking classes now?

TN: No. Because I got so busy. We don't have the time to stop by there and study.

DR: What do you do in your free time when you're not working?

TN: We help my mom take care of the house, we take care my baby. When we got the time, we get a book, look at it, and then we study a little bit. After that we work, about 2:30, we have to come to work. We do that every day.

DR: Do you know other Vietnamese families that live in Holland?

TN: No, I didn't. But I now have too many friends. We don't have the time to go around. We are still so busy, every day.

DR: Could you tell me a little bit about your family?

TN: Talking about a whole family is that everybody is still working right now. We have a job. When we go home, we take care of the

house, and do cooking. That's it; that's all they have every day. On the weekend, we get to go to the park. We come back to the house, and after that we go to sleep.

DR: Do you celebrate any special holidays?

TN: No.

DR: How have things changed for you in the last two years that you've been living here?

TN: In the last two years I don't got a problem. And they say it's hard to live in Holland. It's still easy to live here. We don't got a problem.

DR: Have you noticed any sort of discrimination against you because you're from Vietnam?

TN: No, I don't.

DR: What do you feel that you have to offer Holland, coming from Vietnam and bringing with you a very distinct culture?

TN: This is the city, it's very nice for me. They don't have the difficulty. We got a lot of people come around. My family live in Tennessee. We say, we've got to do something, but what. That's why we come here. They don't have that bad. This is where we like and if we want to move, we'll probably come to live together because they have nice neighborhoods. Because they have jobs there, too. And so I have.

DR: If you had to tell people one thing about yourself or one thing about your experiences that you think people should know, what would that one thing be?

TN: I think that what matters, I think that all the people in my family are like me, they like to live here.

DR: I don't have anymore questions to ask you, but if there's more that you'd like to tell me about living in Vietnam or living here, or something that you don't think I've asked that I should have, feel free.

TN: In Vietnam? What in Vietnam?

DR: What you remember about life there.

TN: We remember we live in Vietnam, I go to school in the morning. After the school, we go home, they call me to the market, to help my dad. He has to sell something in the market. That's why I have to help him do something, after school. After the market we go home, we studied a little bit. After study, we watched t.v. a little bit, and then we went to bed.

DR: Thank-you for taking the time to do this.

TN: Your welcome.

[End of Interview]