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Ho, Johny Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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Oral History Interview
Interviewee: Johny Ho
Interviewer: Ryan Kerstetter
November 19, 1999

RK: What is your name?

JH: Johnny Ho

RK: How old are you?

JH: I am twenty-five

RK: Where are you originally from?

JH: I was originally from Vietnam, big city in Vietnam, Saigon. Now is named Ho-Chi-Minh City.

RK: Are you an immigrant or a refugee?

JH: I'm refugee, refugee, boat people.

RK: Can you tell me anything about your trip? What do you remember?

JH: Rough, rough, hard, and dangerous, and risky, very risky to go on this journey. But, um, yeah, it took us, we were stranded in the ocean for almost close to a month. And half the time were on a shortage, a food shortage. And, yeah, there was very little hope, but eventually God looked upon us and brought us to safety.

RK: Did you come with your entire family?

JH: No, unfortunately I was the only one in the family who got to go. Yeah, that's because economic, like financially, because we have to pay a certain amount money to get on the boat. And, just had enough money for me, and I was the lucky one. And, changed my life. You know?

RK: Did you have any bad thoughts about America before you came? Like negative thoughts?

JH: I really never thought of it, because I was too young then I guess, I just listened to my mom to what she wanted me to do. I was, like, part of her plan.

RK: What exactly did you do when you came to shore in the United States?

JH: We were picked up by Philippine, Filipino fisherman. And they brought us ashore, and feed us. We were very out of shape, I mean, we were stranded for a while, and without money, I mean food, and water, so, we were lost. Our health wasn't too good. They fed us, in Manilla, in Philippine. Yeah, we camp there, they move us to Batta Ann, Batta Ann is one of the city in Philippine. That's a big camp, refugee camp. And that's were we waited for a sponsor, from the states. And we waited for maybe, almost a month. They we got an answer that someone here in Michigan want to sponsor us. She's from the church, one of the organizations, church organizations. Yeah, we got sponsor, and that's how we got here.

RK: How did you decide on Hope College?

JH: Oh, is kind of last minute thingy, I...

RK: Why did you decide on Hope College?

JH: Oh, I decided on Hope College because at that time, I didn't have any other school in mind, and Hope is located close to where I know best. I've been living in Holland since I got here. So, yeah, and they showed some interest, that's how I decided to come here.

RK: What was the biggest problem you had to overcome?

JH: Oh, the language barrier. Took, time, took time. It was tough, I mean communication-wise. Hard on me. I mean, I work really hard to try to improve the language, but at the same time try to not forget my own language, and that's really hard.

RK: My next question is, do you try keep both cultures separate, or do you take the best from one and the best from the other and bring those together?

JH: For me, I left Vietnam at a older, you can say older, age. Like am, still have the culture, I still believe in the culture. And now I live in a different environment in America. It's different environment, different culture. And I learn to adapt to it, but also I want to keep my traditional culture. You can say I try to live my life with both culture.

RK: Do you like American culture?

JH: Oh yeah, I like American culture, is lot of freedom and free choice and nice place to live. I mean wealthy economy, friendly people, just good environment to live. To live and to have a better future.

RK: Have you ever felt any discrimination here in Holland or on Hope's campus?

JH: Maybe there's some discrimination. But is not, extrovert. I mean people don't, not noticeable. I can feel the discrimination, and yeah that's another part, that's why it's so tough for me to go to this school, beside education. Education, the level is tough, and beside that I have to also deal with, social like Diversity.

RK: Okay, that's about all the questions I have, if there's anything else you want to say?

JH: I guess I don't have anything else to say.

RK: Well, thank you very much for your time.

JH: You're welcome man, anytime.

RK: Alright.