

**UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

INFORMANT: LAN & HAI PHO

INTERVIEWER: KALE CONNERTY

DATE: October 5th, 2016

L=LAN

H=HAI

K=KALE

[**Note:** At the request of Lan and Hai Pho minor edits have been made to this transcript for clarification. An unedited version of this transcript is available.]

H: Okay, why don't you introduce yourself and then I'll do it?

L: My name is Lan Pho. And my husband and I have participated in the resettlement of refugees from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, into Massachusetts in general and in Lowell and the greater Lowell area to be more specific since the late 70s.

H: My name is Hai Pho. I am a member of the initial establishment of the Indochinese Refugee Foundation back in 1976. And with the participation and support of my wife Lan, and five other members, we established what is known as the Indochinese Refugee Foundation Incorporated in 1977, on January 27, 1977 by the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Thank you.

K: So just to get started, what were the circumstances under which the IRF was started? Or how did you decide to start it?

H: Okay, all right. The histories of immigration and refugees are quite different. The U.S. program for immigrants started a long, long time ago, but I think in 1965, '66 there was a law by the Congress to define immigration. And the status of refugees were not well defined then. So people that came before 1975 were classified by law not as refugees but as immigrants. Immigrants came to better their lives economically, socially. Refugees came as a place for protection because they were pushed out.

So there's a theory, there's a pull and push theory. Immigrants are pulled into the U.S. for the economic social betterment. Refugees were people whose lives were threatened and were pushed out of their countries and they came for shelter, for protection, for survival. And so in 1975 at the end of the Vietnam War some hundred and a hundred and thirty thousand refugees from Vietnam were hosted in the U.S. for their survival, because they were pushed out by the Communist army victory in South Vietnam. In 1980 the U.S. Congress established a law, the 1980 Refugee Act, that defined the meaning of refugees and provided a systematic procedures and numbers for annual admission of refugees into the US, the quota for Indochinese refugees to be resettled in the U.S. per year. And that is the beginning as far as a statutory refugee definition is concerned.

As far as the Indochinese Refugee Foundation is concerned, we established it in 1977 because in 1975 some Vietnamese refugees just came to New England, to Boston, most of them with nothing but the clothes on their back. So for the first year or so we were just trying to establish our life, re-establish our life. And we do try to pull our community together. And we made an appeal on September 27, 1976 for Vietnamese and American friends and supporters to help us organize into a kind of a Mutual Assistance Association. And that sort of launched the action to create an Indochinese Refugee Foundation that was drafted. The Charter was drafted and then finally incorporated in the spring of, January 27, 1977.

K: So going off of talking about the definition of refugees. Looking through the archives we see documents that are trying to distinguish between political refugees and economic migrants. So were there any difficulties, or controversies involved with trying to make that distinction? Or did you have any problems?

H: There are a lot of difficulties. In most peoples' mind immigrants come [here] to better themselves, and they should not be dependent on anybody, particularly on public assistance. When refugees came they had nothing with them. There was no preparation. There was no anticipation of self-sufficiency at that particular point. In fact total lack of preparation. So from Southeast Asia, from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, there are two phases. The first phase in 1975 to 1977, these people came from a very advanced background, and so they can establish, re-establish themselves very fast, very well. In fact there are a lot of studies that prove how successful that first phase of resettlement of refugees from Vietnam at that time [was]. There's a group of studies that was made [showing] there's no impact on the host country, on the United States, particularly with the initial U.S. policy of integration. In the policy of integration of Indochinese refugees in 1975 there was an effort to disperse, meaning to spread them out. How did they do that? By a hosting requirement, a requirement having a host, a family host or a church, or an agency to host each family from Vietnam to settle in the U.S. Because of that requirement, the Vietnamese who first came as refugees in 1975, '76 were spread out all across the U.S. But – and in addition they were well, trained well, professional people, so with their

background and skills they could find jobs, they could find housing on their own. They didn't need to depend on any help from agencies of the states or the federal government.

The phase of refugees that came from 1979, 1980 on were pushed out from Southeast Asia, from Cambodia, from Vietnam because of the drastic, drastic, horrible, horrible violent policy of the regimes in Southeast Asia. Those people were not prepared and they had to be dependent on public assistance, and that created a lot of objections.

K: So – I'll start with you Hai – what were your specific roles in the IRF, first as a member of the Board of Directors?

H: Yes, I was fortunate to be educated, trained, get my Doctorate Degree at Boston University, teach at UMass Lowell from 1968 on. So I have a well established root in Lowell. In fact I came to Lowell some five, six years before anybody else was here, my wife and I, our family. And, in 1975 when the first wave of Vietnamese refugees came, I was with my friend Doctor Nghia Nguyen, a physicist at Draper Labs in Cambridge and we put together a group of leading Vietnamese refugees. They are lawyers, they are engineers, they are scholars, and an American retiree from the State Department, [unintelligible] to form the founding members group of the Indochinese Refugee Foundation to help to provide the technical skill to help those who follow us who need some help to create a Mutual Assistance Association. That is my role.

K: And what about your duties as the Coordinator for the Indochinese Self-Help Project?

H: Then three, four years later when the boat people from Vietnam and the Cambodian Refugees from Cambodia who were sheltered on the Thailand borders, came. The State Department, because of [continued need] to resettle Cambodians and Laotians, instead of dispersal they created a cluster system, meaning they bring them as groups into different locations in the U.S. There were about five, six clusters, one of which was the Lawrence/Lowell cluster. And each cluster, they bring about a hundred families to the area, and these are supposed to receive not only assistance in resettlement, but also to receive assistance in language skills, in employment training and job placement. So the resettlement consisted of two phases. One is housing and (L: Language skills) language skills. No, that is training, training in employment. ET, training, education and training. Okay. The first phase is housing welfare resettlement, just to get them settled in a local community. The second phase is Employment and Training. And because of the cluster system there was a high demand for employment training in the Lawrence/Lowell area, [such] that the agencies, the local agencies that provide the resettlement cannot handle it and do not have the staff, the skill to handle the education, English as a Second Language, the job preparation and employment placement for them. So we sort of see the need for it and find ways voluntarily to do it, but [there are] not enough resources available to

us, because we are just resettling five years ago and it's just not enough resources available to us. So we call on the U.S Government, which at the time [it] is the State Department that is responsible for resettlement to give us the funding. And so they did earmark some five million dollars to those self-help groups, mutual assistance groups, to apply. And if we did qualify they would give us the grant to provide English as a Second Language, and orientation to resettle, and Employment and Training. So that's how I submit an application, because they sent out what is called a "Request for Proposal" across the United States. And we are among the four or five Mutual Assistance Associations that received that funding to provide Employment and Training here.

K: Was that the same as the Targeted Assistance Grants Program, or is that something different?

H: Separate.

K: Separate, okay. We won't talk about that.

H: Target Assistance is different. (K: Okay) So that is the Self-Help Project from the Indochinese Refugee Foundation.

K: Which was later renamed, years later, to the (--)

H: Employment Training.

K: Employment, yeah.

H: Yes, yes, because – well, before I jump into that. That is how the Mutual Assistance Association transformed itself in this activity through the Self-Help Project because we believe that we can do it just as well as anyone else. And in doing that we really make a special effort to find qualified Vietnamese, qualified Cambodian, qualified Laotian refugees unlike many VOLAGs that relied on American staffs. We screen ourselves to ask them to provide us staff for these services. The only ones that we need are Americans who are skilled in teaching English as a Second Language, who are skilled in running the businesses of Self-Help Project. So that's how we recruited Miss Jacqueline [Fidler] Moloney as the Project Director, and Miss Elise Martin as an English language teacher. But the rest of the staff, and these are very important people, the Vietnamese social workers, the Cambodian social works, Laotian social workers to go out and do the actual helping of refugee families that came to Lowell.

K: Okay, I'll move to Lan. Oh –

H: Just one more step.

K: Okay, go ahead.

H: The first one hundred families in Lowell consist of about maybe four or five hundred people, mostly children and women. There are very few men, okay, because as you can understand the men were killed in the war or they run all over the place. So the fact that from 1979 to 1982 there's a large number of children that need to go to school, there's quite a few women that need to get the health, medical health, mental health and welfare, creates some kind of pressure on the community, but because of the capabilities of these native social providers, workers, they did manage so well that their reputation gets across the United States to the other clusters. And the problem with that is that it creates what is known as the second migration. It creates the attraction for Cambodians, for Laotians, from other clusters who are in South Carolina, who are in Louisiana, who are in Minnesota, who are in Oregon, who are in California, to drift on their own, nobody brings them here, but on their own they slowly migrated to Lowell. That increased the population several folds that nobody anticipated. No one from the State Department, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare – in those days HEW is also the one that provided the funding – and we did not anticipate that, definitely. We didn't know what's happening there. So that creates a kind of pressure on the host, on the city of Lowell.

K: Were you able to get more funding from the state because of that influx?

H: No! There's no (--) [Laughs]. That's the problem. That's the original problem that creates a lot of pressure. That's where my wife came into play.

K: Okay. So [addressing Lan] what were your duties as President of the IRF?

L: Well I immersed [myself in] an effort to relieve the community at large of number one, the challenge of housing and feeding the refugees and their families. I realized [the need to] get them to be self-sufficient. Get them to be able to communicate in English and give them an opportunity to work and earn the bread for their family. I realized that if we don't want to add any more burden to the community then we have to seek help from the prospective employer to take part of the, to provide you know, some limited English language capability and job training for their own employees. So I went into different companies and appealed to them, that if they like to have good and faithful employees, then they have to provide some extra services to their employees. For example, the provision of on-the-job English training. So we came to the company at first learning the job ourselves and what kind of English that the employees would need. And we developed a curriculum for job related English training. And we also appealed to the company to provide at least one hour a day for their employee who came from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to learn English on the job, and also to do

show-and-tell on how to do the job, you know, more efficiently. And it turned out that the curriculum that we helped to develop is very helpful. And the employers are very happy with it. The employees are very excited about it. So I think all in all the placement of, you know, the refugees into entry level jobs is not difficult at all. And we started out with one company at the time. And the first one in Lowell is Lowell Lingerie, which is a textile company. And then we went into Billerica to get into a little bit of a higher skilled job. At Lowell Lingerie it's basically training stitchers, you know, who can work on a sewing machine and do the sewing job. And when we brought the project to BASF, which is a medical instrument manufacturing company – [H: Medical instruments.] – medical instruments producing company, it worked out also very well. The job requirement was a bit higher than at Lowell Lingerie. And it worked out fine. And then we brought it into Bedford with Bedford Glen Hotel and Resort Center, to train housekeepers, and people in the food processing area. So these are examples of the three companies lend a hand into the recruitment training maintaining their employees who came from the Southeast Asian Community.

K: That's great.

H: That explains the switches, the changes in name of this Self-Help Association, because the Self-Help start with the resettlement mostly, but by 1982, '83, as you know, it split. The program changed name. And the reason for that is that we've now set up the process of recruiting Cambodian, Laotian, Vietnamese to be providers themselves, to be direct participants themselves. Now we manage to get them into three separate identities. I don't know if you realize Indochinese is an umbrella, broad umbrella, but the fact that the Cambodian are to help themselves, the Vietnamese are to help themselves, the Laotian are to help themselves, became a reality around 1982, '83 – that's the turning point. That's when the Indochinese Refugee Foundation focused on Employment and Training.

K: Did [focusing on] that have anything to do with the struggling economy that was happening at the time just right in the early 80s?

H: The economy actually is part of the issues, but at that time I think we mostly focused on providing services. And when we applied for funding for the Mutual Assistance Association we were focusing mainly at the beginning on resettlement, but by 1982, '83, the Employment and Training became very important, critical because there's pressure to place these people and get them out from dependency on welfare. So maybe it played a role, but I don't think that's a major role. The major role is the pressure put on the community, the host community, that means the Lowell inner city agencies, and that coming to issue is education too, the children, schooling. And that's where my wife again has to do the advocacy with the help of city fathers. She can tell you about the effort to do that.

L: I guess, you know, at that time, the practice of school desegregation started in the Lowell Public Schools, because some educators believed that the Southeast Asian children should be integrated into different schools rather than concentrated in the Acres area, you know, which is also in the heart of the Lowell area.

H: Also that's the low cost housing, that's where the refugees kind of get stuck into. So the children, you know, naturally are placed into the Acres school and they are all over, in the closet, sitting in the hallways, etc. They even rented spaces from the YMCA and to house the children.

L: Wherever they can find space for the children, but mostly concentrated in the number schools in the Acres area. And both the parents and the teachers are not happy about that. No, no, not just the community, not just the students. So the school undertook a desegregation, it started out with busing children across the school district rather than concentrated them in one area. At first the movement or the practice was met with a lot of challenges from not just the community, but from the teachers themselves. In addition, because parents in the Belvidere area of Lowell would not like to have refugee children attending the same school with their children.

H: They fall behind and sort of drag the mainstream students. There are a lot of problems then.

L: However I believe that there is a short vision from both the parents and schools. I believe that diversity started in the school system. You don't have to wait until the student graduates and is suddenly met with the challenge of being different. That's what my personal belief [was], and I fully agreed with the school desegregation and supported busing of students to different schools in the district, rather than a concentration of refugee students in a couple of schools. And I was very fortunate to get the support of first, the Dean of the Graduate School of Education from UMass Lowell. So together we provide training to the teachers on how to work with students of different cultural backgrounds and different English capability. So when teachers felt their job was very rewarding – challenging, but very rewarding – then they started to feel like diversity needed to be started in the school.

H: I think in addition to that there was such a large influx of children from the refugee community that the school system was overwhelmed. And because of that there was a lot of resistance not only to school, but also to refugees and immigrants that fled into Lowell, and they start a movement of anti-refugee, anti-immigrants. And in fact it involved the city mayor [Dick Howe]. He had to come up and justify why, you know, what are we going to do with all of these kids in the school? And so I recall a time when Dick Howe I think called on us to do something. And so Lan was the one that joined him to go to Washington to demand more support, you know? And I remember she made a couple of trips

with him to HEW, what's that, Health, Education and Welfare Department to get funding. We got a lot of additional funds from the federal government to support the school system here.

L: In fact, you know, in the period of five years from a joint effort between the mayor of the city, the superintendent of schools (H: Mr. Mroz) yah, Mr. Mroz, we went to Washington, DC and knocked at the door of then Senator Kennedy and Congressman Atkins.

H: Paul Tsongas.

L: Yes, Paul Tsongas, and all together they were able to advise us how to approach in terms of applying for funding from a pool of money for what they called the Dire Need of Refugee Resettlement, which is a federal pool of money. And in the period of five years we were able to bring in more than two million dollars [K: Wow] to this school system, the public school system in Lowell. So it alleviated the school budget quite a bit, and they were able to hire ESL teachers, guidance counselors, and also to provide some limited services to students, like free lunch, you know, for the children. So all in all I think it's an effort of a community, you know, together with the parents to make school for the children from refugee families available to them and also it's a pleasant experience.

K: You were also involved on an Affirmative Action Committee at the, I think maybe at UMass Lowell? Do you remember?

L: I think (--) Correct, I think at UMass Lowell I was asked to join as a group of faculty to assist the person in charge of the Affirmative Action Program, or at the time I think it was known as EEO, which is Equal Employment Opportunity (--)

H: Equal Employment Opportunity.

L: Yes, Equal Employment Opportunity, which is a kind of a different look at Affirmative Action. It's a matter of wording, but I think it's more than that, because with EEO, people feel like, well I can work with you, but with Affirmative Action Program, it looked like, I have to accommodate you. So I think it's a slightly different perspective, but is very helpful you know, to get any initiative started.

K: Do you think there was a problem of discrimination against refugees when they came to Lowell, or do you think it was more (--)

L: I think there's a level of challenges. I wouldn't say discrimination. I think the physical appearance of children, or adults, from Southeast Asia is very much different from the so to say Caucasian mainstream. The ability to communicate is also different. And people usually do not have time to

understand and to be patient enough to make themselves understood. So I think it created challenges, but I wouldn't say discrimination.

K: So the building where the IRF was kind of held, or, was at the International Institute. Were there any other associations that used that building?

H: Well from 1980 up until 1983 there's only one, the Self-Help Project that has the funding to pay for the rent and the classrooms at the International Institute of Lowell, on High Street. And the other, the Cambodian Mutual Assistance Association, the Laos Mutual Assistance Association and the Vietnamese one, were just beginning to perform as social, cultural groups. They used the facility under our, the Indochinese Refugee umbrella, and we try as much as possible to facilitate the facilities for them. And in fact we know that – because I'm fully familiar with the history, the rivalry, the hostility – to be honest with you there's hostility among the Vietnamese, and the Cambodian, and the Laotian back in their own country. This is nothing new. So that as the supervisor of the Indochinese Refugee and the Self-Help Project, I have to anticipate what's going to happen once each group develops their own identity. Sort of to reassemble themselves here in Lowell, to gain their own footing in Lowell, they wanted to be independent from one another. And that is when we prepare the way, honestly at that time as the program supervisor I don't expect it to last any more than five years, and that's exactly what happened. By 1985 we want to be sure that each one of them can provide service to themselves, and that the Indochinese would [proceed] in the background and would give up the service providing for any one of them. Okay, so Miss Keirstead should be the one to tell you how we pulled back and how the Laotian, the Cambodian, and Vietnamese applied, with her help, their own funding to give direct support to each other, and that the Indochinese would no longer be there for them. And so in a way the rental for the International Institute was paid by themselves, no longer [the IRF] by 1985.

K: So after 1985 it seems like you started serving on several advisory councils?

H: That's correct.

K: So was that kind of the shift with your involvement?

H: That's correct, yes. Well at that time there was a lot of opposition, a lot of anti-refugee, anti-immigrants across the states, and so it really took more advocacy in the public domain than giving services to the new refugees. And I really think at that time, I wish I could still stay local, but the pressure for me to get into the state level to do the advocacy become so critical and there was nobody else who was doing that. So that's how we sort of get moving onto that level.

K: So what were some of the things you did as part of the Education Task Force?

H: In, not so much in the Education Task Force, it's mostly in trying to create a place in the state government to advocate for refugees. I was very fortunate that in 1982 I had the connection with a team of four or five persons in Boston. These are volunteers. These are some of the social workers, but they are volunteers in helping refugees, and that included Dr. Don Luce, Jim Lavelle, from the Indochinese Psychiatry Clinic, Holly Lockwood from the South Cove Mental Health Center, Kathy Lique from the Boston School of Social Work and me from UMass Lowell, to petition, to draft a petition, for a kind of an advisory council to the governor. And when Mr. Dukakis was elected for the second term as Governor of the State, in fact we go through his wife Kitty Dukakis, to ask him to take a positive role for refugees. He established an advisory council after his election. He created the refugee advisory council, on April of 1982. So we start off in the fall of 1981 and helped create a council for him. And from then on it goes on to advocate for refugees across the state. In 1985 we were fortunate to have a state senator from Lawrence/Methuen, her name is Patricia McGovern, who really, who was the Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, you know that's money, Ways and Means is where the funding is, to provide several million dollars, I think it's about twenty, twenty-seven million dollars funding for cities that have high refugee impact and that's known as the Gateway Program.

K: Were there any other committees that either of you served on that you'd like to talk about? Those were just the ones that I saw in the archives.

H: So I served on the Advisory, the Governor's Advisory Council. I was one of the co-chairs of that. And I also served as co-chair of the Gateway City Program. It was established we had to hold hearings to see whether the city can justify to receive the money. So we have to hold hearings in twenty plus cities to see what they need, and to see whether the agencies, the state agencies can really provide service to refugees in their cities or not. So we hold whatever, you know, is required as hearings committee. And there are reports. I don't know if we have the collection here, but the state do have these hearing reports from the Gateway City Program.

K: So who was at the hearings?

H: There are, the states have many agencies that provide social services. Mental Health, okay, Welfare, what is, WIC is for women.

L: For women and children prenatal and natal care.

H: Employment training, there is a Labor Department, but in the state what is it called? I forget, it's employment training, really placement training.

L: Employment and Training.

H: The Office of Employment and Training. There are about seven or nine agencies, the state agencies that deal with refugee trainees. That do not have any you know, in order to get the services you have to be eligible. And in order to be eligible you have to be a legal resident. Refugees are not legal residents. You have to remember that. So they are not eligible until the governor issued a new act authorizing the agency to admit refugees into their services, and that is really where it opens access to refugees to come and apply for employment training, or apply for welfare, or apply for women and children assistances. So we really work on that state level between 1985, 1990, but I end my services by 1989.

K: So speaking on health, were there any significant issues with refugees receiving health care or mental health care?

L: I think that is a poorly situation. In Vietnam, or Laos, or Cambodia, mental health is not perceived as a sickness. It's perceived as karma. You know in your previous life you must have done something wrong so therefore you pay for it, you know, in this life. That you [are not mentally stable], because of something you did in the past, in the previous life. So that is one challenge from the patient perspective of, "what's wrong with me?" "Do I need help?" Or "This is my karma. I have to live with it." And from the perspective of the service provider, guidance and counseling that is appropriate for the cultural background of the patient was not available. So therefore in dealing specifically with mental health issues, it is not easy neither for the service provider nor for the patient. So a lot of education has to be provided before the patient is ready to receive services, and before the medical staff, or the counselor is ready to provide the service.

H: Well I can remember one incident or a controversy back in those days that creates a lot of issues for both schools and parents. In the Southeast Asian community, the Laos, and Cambodian, and Vietnamese, when you catch a cold what do you do? You don't take aspirin or anything like that. You have what's known as coin rubbings. I don't know if you're familiar with coin rubbings. They, in order to increase skin heat, they rub coins over your neck in the back. And when the kids come to school and they see all these rubbing marks they say, "Abuse, abuse, child abuse," from the parents. And so there's a huge controversy about what's going on between parents and children, and it takes a lot of explanation, a lot to the medical staff, to the school, to explain that's not abuse of children it's kind of a medical treatment.

L: Remedy.

H: Remedy for cold, okay. That became a controversy across the refugee community in the U.S. And they have to have medical doctors from different, you know, perspectives come and explain and write articles to explain that it is not really an abuse of children. And we here too, are asked to explain what's going on with the children, and we have to go to school and explain it to them.

L: And I think, you know, Jim Lavelle who was at the time coordinating the mental health services providing (H: veterans) at Saint Elizabeth Hospital in (H: In Brighton) in Brighton, would have to do a lot of education, you know, explaining to both the physician and the parents, to know how to approach mental health assistance in a very appropriate way.

K: Were there any (--) Going back towards the schooling, were there any controversies with having bilingual classrooms, or having classrooms set aside for refugee children?

L: There was a movement at the time across the U.S. cities and communities of English as the only language taught in the schools.

H: Well there were leaders, community leaders, there was George Kouloheras, Lowell school committeeman who submitted a petition to the legislators, to the state officials, to make Lowell as the English language school, English language only in school.

L: English only in school. But I guess, you know, there is a transition period whereby students and teachers need to communicate with each other in order for education or learning to happen. And in that transitional period, there's a lot of study that's been done indicating that bilingual programs – which means that the subject is being taught in two languages, in English and in the home language also – would shorten the transitional period for the student into mainstream classroom. And so you know there're a lot of challenges that the teachers, the school district and the students are facing and they try to work out a better way to receive education and to provide education services.

K: There was also a campaign called "Jobs for New Americans." Do you remember exactly what that was about, or if it was connected to the Self-Help Project?

H: It's not connected to the Self-Help Project. How that came about I'm not familiar with.

K: Okay. What was one of the, what do you think, each of you, was your biggest challenge with working for the IRF, or what was the biggest challenge you faced?

L: I don't think that you know, there is a notion of the biggest or the smallest challenges that we were facing at the time, but it is the awareness of, we need to do more work in order to make things happen

either in schools, in hospitals, in the community. And when we came to terms with that challenge, you know, everything we did was trying to smooth the way and make the challenges less challenging. So I think we both, you know, the service providers and the service recipients, realized that, it's just a matter of making it work. So it's a challenge, but there's no big and no small one.

H: The only one of my concerns in those days when we [first] established the Indochinese Refugee Foundation, [we] focused mostly in Boston, because that was the time when refugees came and resettled in Boston. But by 1980 the population shifted to Lowell, the refugee population shifted in Lowell and we had to focus so much work in Lowell that we left out Boston. And in that sense I felt kind of sad that I could not, we could not do much more for those refugees in the Boston area. And to that extent the members on the Refugee Foundation Board could not give us, lend us more support, because most of them were in Boston, they were not in Lowell. However they did come every month faithfully to the meeting, the board meeting here in Lowell in order to lend us support. We just could not have enough resources, have enough strength to lend more work to the Boston area. But in a way we felt that they gave us more support than anybody else that could help us to move on, to establish the kind of services that we were able to do here in Lowell. So that, I would say that's the only thing.

K: You spoke about how refugees ended up coming here because of the relative success of the resettlement program here. Do you think that was the big kind of influence in why there's such a big (L: influx) Cambodian population now? Is that the explanation?

L: I think for, you know, that concentration of refugees from Southeast Asia into Massachusetts and into Lowell, there were three situational factors that influenced the movement. One is the availability of beginning low skill jobs. The number two factor is the availability of housing, low income housing. And the number three factor is actually quite important. There are Buddhist Temples, places that are a different religious entity that are available in support of the refugees who live, or who want to, who were drawn to Lowell. So I think these are the three major factors that fuel, or attract the second migration movement into Lowell.

H: These factors are very important, but I think the initial factor is, I believe, the fact that we perhaps were the first organization that insisted on having a Cambodian, a Laotian, a Vietnamese native to do the assistance to provide the kind of outreach, resettlement and employment training support within the refugee communities. That really provided the sense of confidence that we understand what they have to go through and we know what we can do to help them here. That sort of created a wave, an appeal to those who are from elsewhere, from other clusters, to drift into Lowell. That I think, that created the increases in population, and that also increased the support, the social support, the cultural support, I think critically it's the cultural, social support that brought about the Temples, that brought about you know, the family clusters. Otherwise if you just have housing placement alone,

anywhere else in the U.S. you can have that. Housing, jobs, you can go anywhere, but without that value system, the social, the cultural values that “This is my people,” it will not attract them to come.

K: Do either of you have any other stories you’d like to share from the time, any specific experiences with somebody?

L: Well actually I think that the interview with the information that we share with you thus far, you know, would provide a sufficient story of resettlement, of the first wave, the second wave, the third wave of refugees and immigrants from, you know, Cambodia, from Laos, and from Vietnam. When you work more on the transcription, if you feel like you need some more information please feel free to contact us.

K: Okay.

H: Well I just have a little story that I happened to experience. And that is, when we explained the conditions of refugees in Lowell to Kitty Dukakis, she nearly cried. And she was the one that really said, “Let me see what I can do.” In 1979 she paid her way to Cambodia, to Thailand in the border. And she came back and hosted, adopted a Cambodian kid. I mean to me that is something that I will never forget.

K: How do you think your time working for the IRF has influenced you?

L: I usually think that if I receive some good advice or some services from somebody then I mark on my bucket list that I will find the opportunity to pay back. And I think the most satisfying feeling that I had in volunteering my time for more than thirty years in the resettlement of refugees is a way, a very small way, of paying back.

H: For me I think that it changed my life really. I came here to be a professional. Okay, I came not as a refugee. I came as a student, went to high school in Waltham. I don’t know if you know anything about Waltham. In those days back in the 1950s there was not a single Asian around let alone a Vietnamese. I went to Boston College to get my degree so that I could go home and, you know, be someone important. The feeling that I’m home-rooted here in Lowell because of that experience, volunteer work, helping refugees, my own people and getting to know a lot of good people, really profoundly affected my life. I cannot tell you how much, like Chet Atkins, Congressman from I think Groton or, no, not Groton, Concord, or Kitty Dukakis, or Elise Martin and Jackie Moloney. These people affected my life deeply. Made me feel I am rooted here. So I can tell you that really helped me more than anybody else. Thank you.

End of Interview

jw

edited by kc