

Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho

The Reminiscences of
Janny Bui

Asian American Comparative Collection
University of Idaho
2020

PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of recorded interviews with Janny Bui conducted by Kathy M. Min on July 6, 2020 and July 24, 2020. This interview is part of the Oral Histories of the Post-1965 Lives of Asian Americans in Idaho project, conducted in partnership with the Asian American Comparative Collection.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Janny Bui
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	1
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	July 6, 2020

00:00:01

Q: Okay, it looks like it's recording, so I'm just going to record the lead. So I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer, and today I'm interviewing Janny Bui. And then today is July 6, 2020, and we're doing the call over Zoom because of coronavirus. And the proposed subject is Asian American oral histories in Idaho after 1965.

00:00:29

Q: So what is your full name?

Bui: Janny Bui. I don't have a middle name.

00:00:37

Q: And can you spell it?

Bui: Yeah, J-A-N-N-Y, and then my last name is B as in boy, U as in—

Q: Oh, sorry. Maybe it cut out a little bit for me.

Bui: Oh yeah, I'll do it again, I can do it again. So my name is spelled J, A as in apple, N as in Nancy, N as in Nancy, Y. Then my last name is B as in boy, U as in umbrella, and I as in igloo.

00:01:10

Q: And when and where were you born?

Bui: I was born August 1, 1996, in Fountain Valley, California.

00:01:21

Q: And what is your current occupation, or if you're studying, what have you been studying?

Bui: Yeah, I work right now. I am a content creator at a startup marketing company.

00:01:33

Q: Cool, which company?

Bui: They're called the Lead Gurus. They started in 2018, and I joined their team last July. So it's almost been a year. It's going to be a year at the end of this month. It's a small startup in marketing.

00:01:57

Q: [Unclear.] It's kind of echo-ey right now.

Bui: Oh is it? Let me try and put my headphones in and see if that makes more of a difference; it may be something in my room.

00:02:09

Q: Okay, I'll just pause the recording, if that's okay.

[INTERRUPTION]

Bui: Okay, one second.

00:02:18

Q: I think we were talking about your work. A follow up question to get back into it—what kind of start up is it?

Bui: So it's just a marketing startup, but they started off as just kind of a social media advertising company. I guess it still is, but we just have been targeting different people. At first, we were just running social media advertising for life insurance agents to get leads. But now we've kind of steered away from that and we're just targeting more local businesses to help them with their marketing.

00:03:03

Q: That's cool. And it's a Boise-based startup?

Bui: Yeah, yes. Boise based.

00:03:10

Q: Yeah, I think we will talk about more of your current ongoings towards the end. So I'll just back up a little bit. What are the names of your parents?

Bui: My mom's name is Mai Nguyen and my dad's name is Duc Bui.

00:03:29

Q: And can you tell me how those are spelled?

Bui: Yeah, so my mom's name—do you want her full name, or just what she usually goes by?

00:03:40

Q: Either, whatever you prefer.

Bui: Okay, so my mom has a pretty long name. It's Hoang Mai Nguyen. And so it's H-O-A-N-G and then M-A-I, and then her last name is N-G-U-Y-E-N. And then my dad's full name is Hong Duc Bui, so I pronounce my last name "Boo-ee" but the Vietnamese way to pronounce it is "Boo-oy." I guess, when I started growing up and at school and stuff like that, I just pronounced it "Boo-ee" because it was easier for people to say. But my dad's name is spelled H-O-N-G, D-U-C, and then B-U-I.

00:04:27

Q: And do you know their ages, or when they were born?

Bui: My mom was born in 1967, so she's going to be turning 53 this year. And then my dad was born 1972—why am I blanking on his age? He's 48? Yeah, 48. My dad's younger than my mom, by five years.

00:05:01

Q: How did they meet?

Bui: My parents met—my mom tells me this story—they met in California. So my mom used to live in Boise and then when her sister got married, her sister moved to California. And my mom was single at the time. So she's like, "Well, you know, I'll just move too and try to live in California." And so my mom was working in California at the time. And I believe she said that, where she was working in California, she had a mutual coworker and he brought his friend over, and it was my dad. And so they kind of met through her co-worker. And so they kind of just hit it off and started dating.

00:05:52

Q: When were they dating, or when did they get married?

Bui: That is a good question. I know they got married in February of 1996. It was six months before I was born. But they were dating for a few years before that. I think they were dating for two years before that.

00:06:19

Q: So I think I'm going to try and back up a little bit more into your family history. So how did your mom end up in Boise originally and how did your dad come to California?

Bui: So my mom ended up in Boise probably in the early '90s. And it was because when my mom and her siblings were growing up, my grandpa was a police officer in Vietnam. And so during the Vietnam War, he was a really big advocate and worked alongside the US Army when they came over and helped with the war between North and South Vietnam. And so my grandpa helping with the US—they kind of promised him and granted him a chance to move him and his family to America after the war was over.

00:07:22

Bui: And so that's kind of how they were able to move to America and to be able to have a host family. And so we're really lucky that it went that route. I've heard of families not being so lucky and having to travel by boat. So my family flew over by plane. And so, yeah, it's just my grandpa working with the US Army that really got us to come here. As for my dad's family, as background, I don't really know much. I just know just a little bit about my dad's family, because my parents are divorced and so I know more about my mom's side than my dad's side.

00:08:06

Q: And then also, just to let you know, I might be a little bit quiet when you're talking. So you can just know that I am listening but I'm just trying not to interrupt.

Bui: No worries!

00:08:19

Q: Yeah, that's really—I was also talking to Eric about your mom's side of the family's history. So it's cool to hear how they line up from different perspectives. Let's see, what do I want to ask? What does your mom do for a living?

Bui: Yeah, she works as a seamstress at Micron, which I think you know what Micron is. It's a local tech company here, but they're pretty big. They make microchips and things for computers

and such. But my mom doesn't do that part of Micron. She makes the bunny suits for the uniforms that all the technicians wear in the labs and stuff. So she sews for a living.

00:09:15

Q: Sorry, I missed the first part. What did you say her title was?

Bui: She's a seamstress.

00:09:23

Q: And do you know if she's always been working in that role since she's been in Boise?

Bui: No. So, when she moved to Boise—from Vietnam—when she moved to Boise, she had a few different jobs. She worked at a Mongolian Grill as a server. And then when she moved to California, she was working, I believe at just a factory or something. I think she sewed there too. And then when we moved back to Boise, she worked at the dry cleaners. It was called Baird Dry Cleaners. And then she worked at Micron, but she's been at Micron for a long time. So she's been at Micron for probably, I want to say, like 17 years.

00:10:16

Q: So you think she feels settled and she likes the work there?

Bui: I wouldn't say "like" it. But I think it's more of, that's her established job, and she doesn't mind it. But yeah, she's had it for forever. And so my mom's a woman of routine and so she's not one to be like, "I'm going to quit and find a new job because I don't like it." She says it's doable and it's not stressful and so she'll stay. And so, yeah, she's been there for a while. It's not a bad job. I mean, considering that she doesn't have a college degree—she only has a high school diploma—and moving here as an immigrant, it's a pretty good job.

00:11:03

Q: Yeah. I didn't even know Micron had that kind of role. So that's really cool.

Bui: Yeah. It used to be pretty big, like she had more co-workers. But since they've downsized and they laid off a lot of people, my mom was one that stayed. So she's the only person who makes the bunny suits and the uniforms now for the entire company.

00:11:27

Q: Wow, that's quite intense. And so she's held on to that role through all the different rounds of layoffs.

Bui: Yeah, oh yeah. So I think she's pretty lucky, and that's why she stayed, because it's a stable job.

00:11:46

Q: And tell me a little bit about your mom's side of the family, because it sounds like, you know, your mom's side of the family traveled together to the US.

Bui: So when they moved here in the early '90s, it was my grandparents—my grandma, my grandpa. And then their two oldest children didn't move; they stayed in Vietnam. But it was their third, fourth, fifth, and sixth that moved. So it was my aunt and then my mom, and then my two uncles are the youngest. So they moved, and they moved to Boise. My mom's told me stories before, and she said that when they first were initially moving to America, they had a host family in Boise ready.

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Bui: And then something had happened, and so the host family had to pull out last minute, and so they were kind of afraid that they weren't able to move to America. But luckily they found another just last-minute host family. And so my family was able to move. And so they moved here and they lived in a really small house. I think it was towards the North End of Boise and it was six of them in one small house. I think they said it was a two bedroom house. And so, some of them had to sleep in the living room and I think one of my uncles slept in the kitchen.

00:13:29

Bui: Yeah, it was very small. They didn't really have a lot of money coming to America. So they were there for a little bit. And then my aunt got married, I think a year or two after they had moved here. And so that's when she moved to California. And that's when my mom followed her. And so my mom lived in California for a while. She probably lived there for about maybe six or seven years. And that's where she formed her family and where she met my dad and had me and my brother.

00:14:09

Bui: And then my other two uncles, they stayed in Boise while my mom and her sister moved to California. So upon coming here [the US], I guess, my mom and my mom's sister kind of traveled a lot, and did their own thing in California while the majority of them stayed in Boise. But Boise's always been our home and my grandparents never really left either. They were always just here in Boise.

00:14:36

Q: Yeah, so it sounds like your mom and your aunt are pretty close then?

Bui: They're really close, yeah. Because after my parents separated and my mom moved back to Boise, they've always stayed in touch. You know, we've always visited them. And she is so amazing, my aunt. She's very nurturing and very loving. They've [Janny's aunt and mom] always been close. They talk on the phone almost every day. I'm not even kidding.

00:15:08

Bui: She reminds me a lot of my mom. I'll go and visit California sometimes, when I go see my dad, and so I'll go and visit her. And she really is the same as my mom, which is really nice because I feel like I'm at home, even though my mom's not with me. Yeah, she's awesome.

00:15:27

Q: So your aunt still lives in California?

Bui: Yes, she still lives in California. And then the rest of siblings live in Boise, Idaho. And then the two oldest, they never moved to America, they were always in Vietnam, but they both passed away so they're no longer with us anymore.

00:15:49

Q: So sorry to hear that.

Bui: Oh, that's okay.

00:15:55

Q: Let me know if this is too intrusive, but do you know when they passed?

Bui: Yeah, my aunt actually recently passed. She passed away two weeks ago. It was to cancer. And then my uncle passed away, actually more recently too, so he passed away last October. Yeah, it's kind of been a rough year for our family, but it's been also a blessing too, because it definitely brought us really close together.

00:16:28

Q: Definitely, and thanks for feeling comfortable sharing. Since we're kind of on the topic, tell me a little bit about your mom and your brother.

Bui: Growing up, it's always just been me, my mom, and my brother. My mom never remarried or anything like that. So growing up, she was a single parent the entire time. I would say we're not the richest, but my mom, she always made it feel comfortable for us. I definitely feel like my brother and I really didn't have to worry about money growing up. She never made it seem like it was a problem, but I always knew in the back of my head, even as a young kid, I can't ever have

nice things or nice toys like other kids do. And I was fine with it, because I was always surrounded with family, regardless if it was just my brother and my mom and I. Because we live really close to my uncle, which is the youngest of the family, which is Eric's dad.

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Bui: Yeah, we literally live—probably 10 seconds away. I can walk to his house right now. And I'd be in his house in 10 seconds. But we live really close to them. And so it was like there was always something to do. And so, I mean, I'm very grateful that I was really close to my uncle and my aunt growing up. And so even though I didn't have a father figure and my brother didn't have a father figure, my uncle was there and also my grandpa. So they're really big father figures in our lives. Even though my dad's family was absent in my life, my mom's family was very, very involved. And so I always felt like I had a big family regardless.

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Q: Yeah, that sounds really warm, and a great space to grow up in.

Bui: Yeah, we're always there. When we moved back to Boise, we used to live at my uncle's house with my grandparents. And so we were there for a few years. And then when my uncle started expanding his family and his wife moved to America, we moved out. And then we chose this house, which is the street over. So it wasn't a huge move for us, because we were just down the street, but we used to live in that house with my grandparents.

00:19:14

Q: Yeah, Eric also described the closeness of your family, not just in relationships also in proximity. Again, let me know if you don't want to answer, but I just wanted to know a little bit more about your mom's divorce and why that happened. And also when it happened.

Bui: My mom's divorce, is what you said?

00:19:48

Q: Mhm.

Bui: I guess it happened when I was four. I was very young. And my brother probably wasn't even a year old yet. Basically my mom and my dad were having problems. My dad wasn't the most faithful to my mom and so she kind of had enough. And she didn't want to live and be in a relationship where she wasn't respected and there's just lots of lying and stuff. So she chose to leave him and she chose to take her kids with her and kind of start her life again somewhere else where she was close to family, or not so alone. She did have her sister in California, but she

really wanted to be closer to her parents, especially trying to raise two kids on her own. And so that's why we moved back to Boise.

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Bui: Yeah, so she didn't want to stay with my dad because of that. I guess for Asian Americans or just Asian culture in general, it's looked down upon to get a divorce. Especially back then, maybe not so much now. But when I was younger and my mom divorced, I remember—I have a really good memory of when I was young—I remember people just coming up to her, when we moved back to Boise, coming up to her in grocery stores and saying sorry and feeling pity for her. And so I remember her telling me she just hated that. She hated how much the Asian community here in Boise talked, because everyone kind of knows everybody. There's not a lot of Vietnamese people here.

00:21:44

Bui: And so it was something that she just didn't like about the community, because it was her own private life and her personal life. And when people start talking about what happened, people like to pry and get nosy. It's kind of just how the community is. That's something that she never really liked when she was raising us, because it was just people always being nosy, but it was kind of fake. Like, they would kind of feel sorry, but then they would go behind your back and talk about you and say, “Oh, poor her” type of thing. She didn't like that.

00:22:24

Q: Yeah, I can see where your mom is coming from. And again, thank you for sharing. I think it's a really hard thing to talk about.

Bui: Yeah, I think throughout the years, it definitely would have been harder to talk about it if I was younger. But now that I'm older and I kind of understand what my mom was going through and understand why she did the things she did, I am definitely grateful for what she did. And, I mean, I think every day she's so brave and strong for doing that. I wouldn't want it any other way because I love my life now. I really appreciate all the things that happened now and my relationship with my mom is so strong because of it. So, I wouldn't want it any other way. I wouldn't want to go back and change anything.

00:23:20

Q: Yeah, for sure. And I think that's a really mature perspective to have. Since you mentioned it earlier, you sometimes go back to California to see your aunt and then your dad as well sometimes? So I was wondering if you would talk about your relationship with your dad and what your impression of him is like.

Bui: With my dad, growing up, we would just go visit him every once in a while when we were in California. And then if we weren't visiting, we might talk on the phone, maybe once a month or so. Or around holidays and birthdays usually he'll give us a call, but then when I grew up and I was older, I was able to make more trips out there. And so I was able to visit him more.

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Bui: I would say my relationship with my dad, it's not bad, it's very good. Every time I see him, I always, you know, I enjoy it and I cherish the time I have with him. But it's definitely not a strong relationship. It's lots of small talk and just talking about work or how Idaho is. And just like that, it's nothing like deep, I would say.

00:24:43

Bui: My mom and my dad, regardless of what happened, they have a good relationship now. They're able to talk on the phone and talk about everything. So it's pretty cool to see that. After their divorce, my mom was able to forgive him because my mom's one to not hold grudges or hold back past feelings. So she's let go because she thinks it's not good for your mental health to be holding in that stuff, which I agree. So she's forgiven him a long time ago, and so they have a good relationship now. But yeah, I don't know, I just, I think it could be a better relationship with my dad. It could have been bad, for sure, but it's not a bad relationship.

00:25:33

Q: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. And also, I feel like I feel so much respect for your mom the more you talk about her. Tell me a little bit about your brother. What's he like? How old is he?

Bui: Yeah, my brother's name is Tom. He is 20 years old; he's turning 21 in November, which is so crazy to even think, because he's getting so old. I'm like, "What the heck!" Right now, he works for FedEx delivery. He's a delivery person. He just drops off packages at people's doors and stuff.

00:26:16

Bui: But he's a very creative person. He wants to be a photographer, videographer—when he grows older, obviously. But right now, he's kind of just doing job stuff, just trying to make money and pay for rent and stuff. But he's awesome. Growing up, obviously, having a little brother—I'm not sure if you have little brothers or brothers in general or siblings, but they were so annoying. And so we fought all the time. And always got mad at each other and annoyed each other.

00:26:59

Bui: But definitely as we got older, our relationship got really strong. And so we definitely bonded on things like pain growing up. Not having a father, we really bonded on that. Since we didn't have another parent, we just kept really close and confided in each other for things and so I would say my brother is one of my best friends. We're really close. We tell each other basically everything and always are there for each other and stuff. So it's really awesome. But yeah, he's a cool guy, I guess. But yeah, we're really close.

00:27:49

Q: Is his name spelled just T-O-M?

Bui: Yeah, just T-O-M. My mom got really, really lazy with that name. Just six letters in his whole name, and he has no middle name either.

00:28:08

Q: Yeah, I guess—actually I'll ask that later. So let's see, you've talked a little bit about other family members who live in Boise with you. Could you just run through an itemized list of it really quick?

Bui: Of all my family members?

00:28:30

Q: In Boise.

Bui: In Boise? Yeah. Okay. So, for instance, me, my mom, and my brother. And then, I have—sorry, I was getting a call on my laptop—and then there is my uncle. He is the next-born after my mom, and it's him, his wife, and then his two daughters. One of them is 24 and then the other one is 19. And then it's my youngest uncle, and so there's his wife and then their three children—so Eric, who is 18, and then Jayson who is 16, and then Lilly, who is 14. And that's all that's in Idaho.

00:29:32

Q: And then remind me what place in the family your mom is out of the siblings.

Bui: She is the fourth born. So the firstborn was my aunt, the one that lived in Vietnam and she never moved to America. And then the second one is my uncle. The sisters, they have the same Mai name. So the first one is Bach Mai. The second born, which is my uncle, his name is Dat. And then the third born is my aunt who lives in California, and her name is Hong Mai. And my mom is the fourth, and her name is Hoang Mai. And then it is my uncle, which is Tam. And then the youngest one is Duc.

00:30:46

Q: Yeah, and thanks also for running through all of it. Let me see, what was I going to ask? So it sounds like you have a lot of cousins who you've grown up around and are close in age. I was wondering if you could tell me more about that.

Bui: So growing up, I was pretty close to my cousin Kaly when I lived in California. And so she is my aunt in California—her daughter. She [Janny's aunt] has two daughters [Kaly and Lisa]. And so I was close with them growing up. And then when I moved to Boise, that's when I was really close with my cousin Julianne; that is Tam's daughter. Sorry, there's a lot of them [aunts and uncles], so hopefully you're following along.

00:31:41

Bui: But yeah, so Julianne is my age. She was born February 1996, so we are six months apart, so growing up, we did everything together. I want to say she was like my twin growing up, because growing up, our moms made us dress the same. And I don't know why, but we always had matching outfits. So everywhere we went we were wearing the same thing. And we literally did everything together. We loved the same things, and so that was pretty cool. And then, she has a younger sister, Jennifer, and she's the 19-year-old. And so, Tom and Jennifer are really close in age. And I feel like, just right after Jennifer, they [cousins] just kept popping out.

00:32:34

Bui: So Eric next, and so when he was born—I see Eric, Jayson, and Lilly as my own siblings too. I see them all as my own siblings, not cousins. Because growing up, we really were over at each other's house every weekend. It was nonstop. It was like you could time it. Every time they would come over, they'd come over on a Sunday. Right after my cousin was done with church, she'd come over and we'd hang out all day.

00:33:04

Bui: And so when Eric was born, I think we were still living at my grandpa's house at the time. So we were all under the same roof for a little bit. So when Eric was born, we were all living together. And then it was right before Eric's brother was born, Jayson, that's why we moved out of the house, because their family was expanding and so they needed a room, and so we were like, "We'll get our own house."

00:33:39

Bui: But literally, I've always seen them. I feel like it's weird when I don't see them. I honestly see them every week, so we're all really close. We share our things with each other. So I feel weird when I have some friends who aren't as close with their cousins and they don't even know

half their cousins' names. And I'm just like, "How could you do that?", because I couldn't even imagine not being close with my cousins.

00:34:10

Q: Yeah, that's really special. This is a little bit of a different question, but what world events had the most impact on you while you were growing up? Did any of them personally affect your family?

Bui: I feel like they probably have, but it wasn't anything—maybe the [Great] Recession really hit? Maybe this isn't a world event—I think it was around the Recession anyways, though. But when Micron was laying off a lot of people, my mom was really scared that she was going to lose her job, but she luckily didn't.

00:35:02

Bui: But even then, around that time, it was definitely hard, just because things were really expensive or she couldn't afford everything. And so we cut back on a lot of stuff. I'm trying to think of anything else. Nothing off the top of my head. I think the Recession was a huge thing though.

00:35:25

Q: Yeah, kind of in the same vein, do you feel like you or maybe older generations in your family stay abreast of things that are happening in Vietnam or not really?

Bui: I'm sorry, could you say that one more time?

00:35:42

Q: Yeah. Do you or your mom's generation keep up with how things are in Vietnam?

Bui: Oh, my mom, not really, but I feel my aunt and my uncle do—the youngest uncle and his wife. So I think they definitely do. They read more of the news. Some of the Asian grocery stores around here carry Vietnamese newspapers, and sometimes they'll pick that up. But when my grandpa lived here, he did. He read a lot of Vietnamese newspapers and kept up with the news. And my grandma used to watch this Vietnamese news channel that you could get on Direct TV. I think it's called SBTN [Saigon Broadcasting Television Network]. I remember because my grandma would watch it when she would babysit me. So my grandparents definitely kept up with the news a lot. But I feel like most of the adults, like my mom and her siblings, and then me and my cousins don't really keep up too much with it.

00:36:55

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. Another kind of different question. Describe a typical family dinner. Did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? And what were your favorite foods?

Bui: I guess if it's just me and my mom and my brother, we definitely would eat together. We try to eat together almost every day. My mom would do mainly most of the cooking. And my mom made more simpler foods, so it would just be like rice and some type of protein and then we'd eat it with—it's called canh. But it's just a soup, a vegetable soup, and we just would eat that with the rice and the protein.

00:37:50

Bui: And if we ever had—we always do. It's probably every weekend that we would have dinners at my uncle's and aunt's house. And my aunt does a lot of cooking. She cooks a lot of different Vietnamese foods. So it's always different with her. We'd either have noodle soups or we'd have—like yesterday, we did a Vietnamese barbecue style and it's kind of like Korean barbecue, where you cook it in front of you and eat it. So we had that last night, and then the night before, we had what's called banh xeo and it's a Vietnamese crepe. Yeah, so my aunt definitely makes a lot of those different stuff and my mom's fixed kind of more simpler stuff. Lots of rice, or we eat a lot of seafood, tofu.

00:38:48

Q: Do you have a favorite meal out of the ones you've described?

Bui: Ooh, I have a lot of favorites. So banh xeo is up there—love banh xeo. And then my favorite is bun rieu. It's a seafood-based noodle soup. That one's so good. I think it's underrated. Everyone talks about Vietnamese pho, but I think bun rieu is where it's at. And then, let's see, what else? I also like goi cuon, which is just a summer roll. So it's a rice paper and rice noodles, and then you put pork and shrimp in it, and you eat it with a peanut sauce or a fish sauce. So I like that too, but yeah. I like a lot of Vietnamese food, so I'm not very picky.

00:39:42

Q: Yeah, it all sounds really good.

Bui: Mhm, I know! Now I'm starving just thinking about it.

00:39:50

Q: The next question is, how are holidays celebrated in your family? Did you have any special traditions? And so holidays, you can define how you want; it could be birthdays, it could be particular American holidays, or otherwise.

Bui: I think there are typical holidays. For birthdays, we'd either just have dinner, and then just celebrate with a cake. And then we celebrate Christmas, even though we're Buddhist. We just celebrate more to give gifts and have an excuse to get together and eat. So for Christmas, we usually just make food. We've been trying making American food and then sometimes just make Vietnamese food every other year, something like that. So there's no strict tradition that we have. And then we just give gifts and stuff.

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Bui: I think one of the biggest holidays that we do celebrate is Vietnamese New Year. And so for that, we usually get together. And last year I learned how to make banh tet, which is basically like a huge log, but inside is a sticky rice. It's wrapped with banana leaves, and inside the sticky rice is either bananas or pork. It depends on which one it is, but I learned how to make that last year, which was really fun. So that's kind of something cool that we usually do, is make all this Vietnamese food to celebrate bringing in the new year. But yeah. I think we don't have any really special traditions. Any holiday, we just try to make an excuse to get together and eat with each other and spend time with each other.

00:42:07

Q: Yeah, definitely. You mentioned Buddhism. I'm wondering what sort of relationship you have to that, what the role has been in your life and in your family?

Bui: With food?

00:42:22

Q: With Buddhism.

Bui: Buddhism, sorry. I was like, "Oh yeah, I love food." But yeah, Buddhism. We're definitely not the most religious. Growing up, my mom actually had a pretty big part with the temple here in Boise. She volunteered a lot and helped out a lot at the Buddhist temple here in Boise, but over the years, she's kind of stopped going, just because sometimes, some of the people who go there, they're not there for the right reason in my mom's opinion.

00:43:03

Bui: And I kind of agree with that, too. I feel like the times I've gone before to the temple to celebrate stuff, people are there just gossiping and chatting about stuff. And we should be there praying or, you know, listening to the scriptures and all that stuff. Growing up, I wasn't that religious. We would just do basic prayers and we'd just light incense and do a prayer or sit on the mantle to pray for our ancestors. But that's basically the most that we've done with Buddhism, at least for me, my mom, and my brother.

00:43:52

Bui: Eric and his family definitely go to the temple more than I do. But that's one thing I definitely want to change. I like the teachings of Buddhism and it's something that I resonate with and really agree with. So I definitely have been trying to make it as a resolution of mine to learn more. So I'm definitely learning more, but I wouldn't say I'm as spiritual as some people who are a part of the Buddhist temple and stuff.

00:44:23

Q: And you're mentioning your mom used to be really involved? Do you think those are still really important beliefs for her; she just doesn't go to temple anymore?

Bui: I feel like definitely over the years, it hasn't been much of a practice in our house. We only light incense every once in a while. But yeah, that's definitely something that my mom's kind of lost touch with. My dad is definitely more religious with that stuff. I know every time I go visit him, we do a lot of praying. So all the prayers I do know and are familiar with, I've learned from my dad. But yeah, she's definitely kind of lost touch with it. But, I think it's more so, at least, you know, she's still a good person even if she's not so in touch with it anymore. But she definitely still believes in the teachings and the practices and stuff.

00:45:25

Q: Yeah definitely. Also, just so you know, I think we're coming close to the one hour mark. So let me know if you want to take a break.

Bui: I think I'm good, yeah.

00:45:39

Q: But I think we're going to continue to the “growing up and childhood” section of my questions. This is a pretty big question, but how would you describe your experience growing up?

Bui: I would say “not normal for a child.” Not in a bad way. But definitely growing up, I was one of the first generation kids in Boise to grow up and go to American school and learn English through elementary school and such. So Vietnamese was my first language. And so I didn't really know a whole lot of English going into school, so I was lost for a little bit. And so they entered me into ELL classes, so English language learning classes.

00:46:43

Bui: And so, probably until fourth grade, I was in class—like regular class with anybody else—but then they would take me out for an hour and I would learn English. And so definitely at first that was confusing, because I didn't understand English at all. I remember being in kindergarten and we'd be counting. And I'm counting, but I don't really understand—like I'm trying to match “1”, this is what “one” looks like. So this is how I say it, like “one.” But in my head, I'm saying it in Vietnamese. So it was really confusing.

00:47:21

Bui: But yeah, I think, as a kid, we learn languages very quickly. So I learned English pretty quickly. But growing up, since I learned English really quickly, I became kind of a translator for my mom and sometimes my aunt and uncle and my grandparents. And so if they got a bill or something, or they got a letter in the mail and they didn't really understand what it said, I would be the person to go to read it. And it'd be me, like nine years old, trying to read this bill and trying to translate “we've got to pay the mortgage by next month” or something like that.

00:47:58

Bui: And so that was something I dealt with growing up. And I think to me, it felt normal, but now being older, that's why I say it's not normal, because it's what I guess children of immigrants have to do growing up. You just kind of take on these roles that a typical American adult would be doing. But they [the adults in Janny's life] didn't know English and they were still learning American history for their citizenship test. So, for all the other stuff, I was kind of being the translator. I remember reading my grandma's citizenship test quiz questions. So I was reading it off and quizzing her [in Vietnamese].

00:48:47

Bui: And so there's lots of different things [about my childhood] that it was definitely different. And my mom worked a lot too, because she's a single mom. So she worked graveyard shifts, and so, growing up, my grandma took care of me most the time—me and my brother. And so I rarely saw my mom growing up. Probably on the weekends and briefly when she got home at night, right before I went to bed.

00:49:16

Bui: So that's how it was growing up. And it was definitely lots of—since my mom had to go through a lot of stuff, like working a lot, provide for two children, she sacrificed a lot. So I felt like my brother and I had to sacrifice a lot. And so, it was fine. I don't complain about it; it's not a bad thing. But it definitely was a different childhood growing up.

00:49:46

Bui: I remember she had to go to work at three in the morning. And we were really young and we can't be home by ourselves. So she would wake us up at three in the morning and she would take us over to my grandma's house. And luckily, I mean, it's up the street, so she would just drop us off and we'd just drive over to my grandma's. And then we had a key, so we'd just go into the house and then we slept in a spare bedroom. And so we'd leave, go back to sleep, and then wake up again around eight a.m. to go to school. And so that was our morning every day. It would be sleeping at our house until three a.m., wake up, go get dropped off at our grandma's, wake up again at eight, go to school, and then after school was done, we'd take the bus home, and we'd go back to my grandma's house because my mom still wasn't home from work.

00:50:39

Bui: And so we'd be at my grandma's house until my mom was done at work, and she'd come pick us up and then we'd go home. So that was like every day. And it got tedious, but that was normal. It was normal, because it was kind of how we did every day.

00:50:59

Q: You mentioned Vietnamese was your first language. Do you still consider it your first language?

Bui: Yeah, I think it will always be my first language, but I've definitely lost touch with Viet—like I can speak it, I can understand it, but there's some words I don't really remember anymore. I just forget how I say this. And I think my accent has kind of gone away, like the way I say things, I kind of forget how to say it, because I speak English so much now. But yeah, I still understand it. When my family talks to me in Vietnamese, I'll completely understand what they're saying, and then I can speak back but it definitely has been harder.

00:51:45

Q: And do you know how to write and read in Vietnamese?

Bui: I don't know a lot, no. Like very basic stuff, like “yes,” or “yes, how are you?”, or all that stuff, like “hi,” “bye.” And then when I read, I can kind of make out what it says, but I only know basic conversation words. If I was to read a whole Vietnamese news article, I could not do that.

00:52:18

Q: Yeah, it does require a lot of language skill. Tell me a little bit about your neighborhood growing up and what that was like.

Bui: It was really fun. In the summer, growing up in our neighborhood, there was a lot of kids. It was like everyone who I went to school with. So in the summer, we'd just all get on our bikes

and go to the park—it was literally across the street from my house. And so yeah, every day I was outside and I'd play with the neighborhood kids and my next door neighbor and stuff. And so we're always outside playing.

00:53:03

Bui: I would say in general it was a pretty safe neighborhood, because we do live in Boise. But the neighborhood I lived in particular, there were a couple kids who were kind of—rebellious, I would say. Those were kids that I just didn't hang out with, but we knew they were rebellious so we would just stay away from them. Yeah, there definitely were just bad kids in general. They were a little bit older than me, but they would go and vandalize people's houses. My grandma's house was one of them. And they were just stupid kids. I think they were just young and dumb, but it definitely was scary, because my grandma not knowing English and having this happen, she was terrified and scared that they were picking on her. But for the most part, our neighborhood was not too bad. I could go out and ride my bike, or stay out a little late and be okay.

00:54:16

Q: Were there other Asians outside of your family in the neighborhood?

Bui: Yes, there were probably one or two more Vietnamese families in the neighborhood that were friends with my grandma. And then, on the same street I lived on, there's a Chinese family. And then, actually my best friend growing up, she was two streets down and she's Chinese. And it's funny because the Chinese family living down the street from us both were her cousins. And so her family was really close to the neighborhood, as well as my family was really close to the neighborhood.

00:54:57

Bui: So we really bonded. We met in kindergarten. And it was funny because we always talk about this now, because we've been friends since we were five years old. And so when we met in kindergarten, Chinese was her first language and then Vietnamese was mine. We just were drawn to each other because we were like, "We're both Asian-looking." So we just clicked together, but we both didn't know English. And so we would just be talking to each other, but I'd be talking to her in Vietnamese, and she'd talk to me in Chinese, and so we're all just trying to figure out each other. It was a lot of gesturing and picking up things, but it was really funny. And then we did ELL classes together, and so we learned English together. It's just funny looking back, because we didn't know a word of English, but yet we were the best of friends.

00:55:54

Q: What was her name?

Bui: Mandy. Her name is Mandy.

00:55:58

Q: And so this is kind of related, but have you ever experienced a particular moment where you realized you were Asian?

Bui: I think it was in elementary school. It wasn't kindergarten; I would say it was either first or second grade. We had a party—I think it was an “end of the year party” type of thing. And we all had to bring one item. And so the teacher said, “Bring a snack you want to share with everyone.” And so in my head, the only snacks I know are Asian snacks. And so I was like, “I can bring shrimp chips or Pocky or Hello Panda,” or something like that, something that my mom would buy me from the grocery store.

00:57:00

Bui: And so I was telling my teacher, I was like, “Oh, I can bring shrimp chips or something.” And she was like, “What are those?” I didn't know—I got confused because I was like, *How does she not know what shrimp chips are?* And she was just like, “Um, how about you just find something else? How about you do celery and peanut butter?” And I didn't even know what that was, so I was like, “Okay?”

00:57:24

Bui: And so I went home, and I had her write it down for me—because I didn't know what it was—so I could show my mom. And I told my mom, I was like, “I need to get this for school.” And my mom was like, “What the heck is this?” That's what I knew I was a little bit different, because it was things they [classmates] would eat that I had never tried before, because I didn't grow up eating celery and peanut butter. That's when I knew, I was like, “Okay. I'm different than the rest. I don't look like everybody here.”

00:57:58

Q: It's interesting because all the snacks you mentioned, I feel like I can find in Costco these days, like Pocky and Hello Panda and things.

Bui: Yeah! Definitely. You can literally find that anywhere now. But back then, they [white folks] were like, “What?” I was like, “Um. Okay. You don't know anything.”

00:58:19

Q: I'm sorry the teacher had that response, though. It's like, just let her bring her shrimp chips!

Bui: Yeah, she was just like, “What are shrimp chips?” I was like, “I don’t know? Chips that taste like shrimp? I don’t know!” But yeah, I didn’t know how to explain it to her, so [unclear]. Chips? I don’t know. But yeah, she was just like, “Just bring something else.” And I was like, “What the—?” So, I just brought that [celery and peanut butter]

00:58:50

Bui: And I remember bringing it in, she kind of got upset with me that I didn't make it. Like, I didn't put the peanut butter in the celery, because I didn't know how to do it. So I showed up to school, and it was in a produce bag, and the celery was in there, and then I had a jar of peanut butter. And that's all I brought. I literally just brought the two. I didn't put it together. And so she was just like, “What is this?” And I was like, “Celery and peanut butter.” And then she's like, “You were supposed to put it together!” And I was like, “I didn't know that.” I didn't figure it out.

00:59:25

Q: Such a strange teacher!

Bui: She wasn't even my main teacher, too, because there in second grade, we would switch classes and switch teachers. And some teachers would teach us just reading or something. But yeah, she wasn't my main teacher. My main teacher never said things like that.

00:59:58

Q: Sort of in the same vein—and I know you've talked about it in other parts of this interview—but how would you describe being Asian or Asian American in Idaho?

Bui: I would say—I don't know if I could do it in one word. [Actually] I can. I would just say different. In Idaho, for sure, it's like you kind of feel like an outsider, or just like the black sheep, I guess. Growing up in every single one of my classes, I was always the one minority student. Or if it was not just me, it was me and one Hispanic person. And that was it. And everyone else was predominantly white. And so, you just felt like a sore thumb. You just stuck out.

01:01:00

Bui: I felt like I was always telling my story of how my parents and I came to America, how my family came to America. I felt almost like a broken record, and so growing up, I hated it. I hated talking about it because I was like, “Why do I always have to say something about my family and everyone else should sit there and listen to me?” I was like, “Why don't we listen to everyone else's story?” And so I kind of just felt like it was a spotlight on me all the time. Growing up, I definitely hated it.

01:01:37

Bui: I don't feel this way now. But definitely when I was younger, I didn't want to be Asian, because I felt like I was just so different than everybody else. And it definitely was just different growing up too, because it's like, at school, you're speaking English and you're going to act a certain way. But when you're at home, it's a totally different culture. And so I'm at home and I'm speaking Vietnamese, I'm eating Vietnamese food, and just doing things totally different than I would at school. And so, yeah, I definitely felt like it was different.

01:02:11

Bui: I felt like I was living two different lives, because it'd be like a switch. Once I stepped onto the bus, I'm speaking English, I'm hanging out with my friends and we're all speaking English, talking about American stuff—I guess if that even is a thing. And then being at school is just a totally different environment than when I'm heading home. When I get home, I take my shoes off and I take my school clothes off—I don't know, maybe it's just my family, but my grandma hated that I would wear school clothes at home. Like, "You should put on home clothes." I do this now. Literally when I get home from work, I take off my work clothes, the clothes I wear to work, and I put on PJs and comfortable clothes.

01:03:09

Bui: I think growing up, it's like, "It's dirty! You were out in public and you have outside clothes on. You don't want to be sitting down on your furniture and your bed with dirty clothes on, so that's why change out of your clothes"—I don't know. Maybe it was just my family.

01:03:27

Bui: But yeah, it was just so different. I would get home, take my shoes off, and then my grandma would have rice and meat and stuff like that—and soup—ready for me when I was at home eating Vietnamese dinner. So it was just very different. I remember, even in elementary school I would get confused. I'd be at school and I'd accidentally start speaking Vietnamese, and I was like, "Oh, sorry! I was thinking about it in Vietnamese, and then I just started talking in Vietnamese." And then I'd have to correct myself and say it English. But yeah, definitely growing up, you get used to it. Middle school and high school, I got used to turning that switch on and off. It's just a lot, because it's just a lot of explaining, I guess.

01:04:23

Q: I think it's interesting because I think you're the third person I've interviewed so far. I think everyone I've talked to has said something along the same lines of having two lives at school and at home, and I think a lot of what you're saying definitely resonated with me as well.

Bui: Oh, good, good. I feel like a lot of Asian Americans do live that type of life. I do have friends who are Vietnamese, or different groups—Laotian, Chinese, whatever. And just in general, Asian Americans, I think they've all gone through the same thing, being able to flip flop back and forth to school life and then home life.

01:05:19

Q: I have some follow-ups, but I want to ask them later to keep it chronological. So I have a few more childhood questions. Did you have a favorite activity that you did when you were younger, like a toy or a game or just a way you hung out with friends?

Bui: Mandy was my best friend, so we did a lot of things together. But something I loved—we always played with our dolls growing up. We had Barbie dolls. And we would just play something like make-believe with our dolls. We also had baby dolls so we could pretend to be moms and stuff. So those were some things I really liked doing, hanging out and imagining things with my friends. Yeah, we did a lot of make-believe scenarios. I'm trying to think of anything else.

01:06:22

Bui: I played with my cousins too, growing up. My cousins and I liked to perform. I was not talented at all! But my cousins and I would put on skits for our families; they wouldn't even make sense. But they'd come over, and then we'd go into the playroom area downstairs in my grandma's house, and we were just like, "Okay, guys, what's our skit today?" And then we would rehearse and put on a show for our family. They definitely hated it, but we loved it, because we're just having so much fun. So we did lots of stuff like that. Played tag a lot, hide-and-seek.

01:07:12

Bui: We had a lot of games growing up. We just played a lot of games. But there's one that I always remember growing up. I don't think we even had a name for it. But at my grandpa's, when he still lived there, we had a bunk bed. And we would all play this game where we'd all be on the top bunk bed and there'd be one person at the bottom, and we'd have to reach up to the top bunk bed and try to tag. It was like a game of tag, but it was just grabbing, I guess. And if we got grabbed, we would have to go down and be "it" with them and tag the rest. So it was fun for me growing up.

01:08:01

Q: Yeah. Kids always come up with such fun games.

Bui: Yeah, I know! It's like, how do we even think about this and now it's just card games or something like that. My family and I bonded a lot over playing so many different games. And it was just so fun for us.

01:08:19

Q: With your cousins or your friends now, do you feel like the hangouts have changed, or is there still the same elements of just having fun and playing games?

Bui: With friends now, we'll have game nights and play card games here and there. But with friends, we usually just go out and get dinner and sit and chat. But when it's together with my cousins, yeah, we're always playing games. Whether it's a puzzle we're doing together or a card game or video games even, we're always doing something like that. It's either that or eating.

01:09:02

Q: Very classic ways to hang out. I'm going to try and get more to the school side of questions, and I know we've talked a little bit about school already. What was school like for you as a child, in terms of the academics. What were your best and worst subjects, and things like that?

Bui: I'd say English was my best. I really liked English—the writing portion of it and not the literature part, like the reading. I did not really like reading, but I loved writing and spelling and grammar. I loved all that. My worst, I would say science. I just never clicked with science. It was just boring to me and I never understood it really. It never really clicked in my head. So yeah, I'd say science is my worst. But I loved English. I was the best speller in seventh grade, I think. And so I was really proud of that. I was like, "Yeah." I was getting 100 percents on spelling tests. I was like, "This is awesome," because I'm still in ELL and I'm killing it with English words.

01:10:19

Q: Yeah, I was going to say, you've only started learning English a few years before that. What was I going to ask? I always forget my questions that are follow-ups. Where did you attend elementary, middle, and high school?

Bui: I went to Frontier Elementary, and then I went to Lowell Scott Middle School, and then high school was Centennial High School.

01:10:51

Q: Wait, really?

Bui: Yeah!

01:10:53

Q: I have no idea. I went to Centennial too.

Bui: Did you really?

01:10:57

Q: Yeah, that's how I know Kathy Pham.

Bui: Oh, okay, that makes sense. Yeah, my family and her family go way back. They've known each other for a very long time too.

01:11:10

Q: How do they know each other?

Bui: I want to say it's either my grandparents and her grandpa, or it was between the adults or something like that. My uncle was really good friends with her uncle. I'm pretty sure my uncle used to like Kathy's mom at one point—before he got married, obviously, and before she got married, so it was a really long time ago. But they've known each other for so long and Kathy and I have photos of each other when we were younger. Yeah, we've known each other for a really long time.

01:11:45

Q: Wait, when did you graduate Centennial?

Bui: 2014.

01:11:51

Q: Oh, I'm a little bit younger than you, so I don't know if I was at Centennial at that point.

Bui: When did you graduate?

Q: Oh, I graduated 2017, so I guess we overlapped freshman and senior year. That makes sense. That was a very short overlap.

01:12:17

Q: There's these ideas—maybe you've heard—like model minority and things. And also, there's stereotypes of tiger moms when it comes to Asian students. So in terms of school, did you ever feel any of those sorts of ideas? Or do you feel like they were not really applicable to you? Or something in the middle?

Bui: Regarding the model minority, or just stereotypes?

01:12:50

Q: I guess either or, or both.

Bui: I'm not really familiar with the term of "tiger mom."

01:12:59

Q: Oh yeah, it's like the really strict Asian parent, like really hard on their kids' academics and success and things.

Bui: I feel like that one wasn't as applicable to me. Growing up, I would say in general my mom was very different than, I guess, "the typical Asian parent." Growing up, she was strict on me for other things. But when it came to academics, she wasn't that strict with me. She was just like, "Just try your best and work hard at school." But if I got a B, I wouldn't get a spanking or something like that, or get disciplined for it. She wanted me to try harder, or asked me why it was hard for me to get a better grade or something like that, but my mom was never strict with me. But regardless, I always really cared about school, even though my mom wasn't strict on school. So I wasn't a bad student. I was a pretty good student.

01:14:10

Bui: But my mom was strict with me with other things, like hanging out with friends a lot. It was like pulling teeth just to ask her if I could hang out with friends, especially when it came to middle school, high school. She really didn't like me hanging out with friends too much. I think she just didn't want me to be influenced or something by bad kids, or anything like that. I think she was just scared about that.

01:14:48

Bui: As for stereotypes, I think growing up in general, there were those kids growing up who would always come up to me, like if I was in my math class, like, "Oh, I want to partner up with Janny, because she's Asian and she's probably really good at math" type of thing. That's kind of things I've experienced before, and stuff like that.

01:15:16

Q: Makes sense. Did you ever participate in after-school activities or jobs or sports at school?

Bui: In middle school, I did Builders Club—I'm not sure if you know what it is.

Q: No.

Bui: It's basically a Key Club where you go and you volunteer for local organizations. So I did Rake Up Boise with them. I'm trying to think; it was a really long time ago. I did food drives; we did a lot of donating our time to local organizations in Boise. And so I was part of that for a year or two.

01:16:03

Bui: And then, I was also in a club called FCCLA [Family, Career and Community Leaders of America] at Centennial. And that was the consumer science club. So there's that one. It was just a club where you could participate in more family consumer science-based projects. And so you could do competition for culinary or event planning. It's really cool stuff. I did fashion design.

01:16:46

Bui: I just created a fashion design project. You come up with a whole fashion design company and your own line of clothing and you draw and sketch out what your line would be. And then out of the six pieces that you created—like, you drew out—you would just pick one and you'd actually make it, like the fabric itself. And so I did that, and I competed and then I won gold in state and so that pushed me to be able to go to nationals and represent Idaho in that competition field. That was really fun.

01:17:29

Bui: Growing up, I didn't really participate in too many clubs at school. I was pretty shy. Anything with big groups made me really nervous. It's definitely different now. I think being in FCCLA made me branch out a lot and I was able to really be confident in myself. And I did it because I was also doing it with my close friends and they really brought me out and supported me, so I felt very comfortable being in that realm. In middle school, for sure, I was very shy and quiet.

01:18:06

Q: Congrats, by the way. That sounds really cool. So were a lot of your friends from high school from FCCLA then?

Bui: Yes, like half and half of my friends. My two closest friends, they were in it—Mandy was in it, and then my friend Kieryn, she was in it as well. And me and her [Kieryn] are really close. We talk quite much. But now, she lives in Seattle and stuff, but she's one of my closest friends. But yeah, we did it together, so it was fun, because we'd be able to stay after school and work on our projects together. And any moment we weren't working on FCCLA together, we were just studying together. And then we were able to travel for all the competitions together. That was really fun.

01:19:02

Q: Yeah, sounds really fun. Hm, what do I want to ask? Tell me a little bit about life since high school.

Bui: After high school, after graduating, I attended Boise State University. I majored in marketing; I never changed my major. I always knew—It was kind of funny because after high school my plan was to go to a regular state university, and later on, go to fashion school. But I changed my direction; I didn't really want to go into fashion anymore. After taking a few classes at Boise State and just loving marketing as a whole, I just felt like that's something I want to go more into instead of just fashion. And so I stuck with it and I did four years at Boise State, graduated with marketing, and I've been doing marketing ever since.

01:20:13

Bui: And so college was a really good experience. I definitely feel like college was just normal for me. I went to school, I went home. Since I still stayed in Boise, I just lived at my mom's house. And I currently still live at her house. But yeah, it wasn't a typical college experience, I guess. But it was fine because I was saving money in the long run.

01:20:45

Bui: And then after I graduated college, I did an internship for a little bit. And then I found a job, an entry accounts job with account managing at a marketing agency. And so I had marketing clients and I helped come up with marketing campaigns and manage their social media and stuff like that. And so I worked there for probably four, five months. But I just felt like it wasn't the right fit for me. I didn't really like doing so much managing clients and managing accounts. It was just a lot of stress and anxiety and definitely wasn't something I wanted to go into in that aspect of marketing.

1:21:39

Bui: And so then, a good friend of mine who works at the company I work at now, he was telling me that they had a position open. And so I interviewed and I got the job. So then I moved and started working there, and so now I'm here. At first, I started off doing—I would just make Facebook ads for life insurance agents, but since then, I got promoted and I changed positions. And I just create social media content for businesses.

01:22:15

Q: Also, I think I'm audio started to get a little bit fuzzy towards the end.

Bui: I can just restate it too.

01:22:30

Q: Yeah, I think from the part you were saying, before you got promoted—like right before that I think is where it started to get fuzzy.

Bui: I was working at my previous job, which was handling the accounts and handling clients. And then I just didn't end up loving it. And it just wasn't the path I wanted to go into. And so my friend who works at the company I work at now kind of referred me and got me an interview with this company. And so I got accepted and I took the job. And now I'm here and I just create social media content for them.

01:23:16

Q: Can you hear me?

Bui: Yeah. Was it adequate?

01:23:20

Q: Yeah, I think I heard a good amount between the two takes. And thanks so much for repeating it.

Bui: Yeah, of course. Sorry about that.

Q: No, it's okay. The Zoom interview makes for some interesting recordings.

01:23:51

Q: Before we dive a little bit more into what's next, I just want to talk a little bit more about identity. And so the first question I have with that is, how would you describe your friends these days? Are they mostly Asian or it's more of a mix?

Bui: Sorry, can you say that one more time?

01:24:20

Q: Yeah. What is the ethnicity of your main friends these days?

Bui: Ethnicity of my friend group—yeah, I would say it's mixed. Can you hear me?

01:24:39

Q: Yes.

Bui: Okay, sorry. So I'd say it's mixed. I have some friends who are Chinese, Laotian, Vietnamese. And then my closest friends are Bosnian and one American. But yeah, it's kind of just a mixture of everybody. Growing up, I resonated more with friends who were, I guess, "more foreign," or had different cultures, because they kind of understood where I was coming from. So I always clicked better with friends like that.

01:25:35

Bui: I definitely—it's not like I butted heads—but for example, in high school, I had a friend who always wanted me to come spend the night. And she just never understood that I couldn't, because my mom was strict about that. My mom didn't really like me staying the night at people's houses. It's just one of her rules, that she didn't like [sleeping over somewhere else]. And, I mean, I can't talk back to my mom, because it's very disrespectful.

01:26:02

Bui: And so I was like, to my friend, "I'm sorry, I can't stay the night." And she would just get mad at me for it, and I'm like, "I'm sorry." But then if it was somebody else, they would totally understand. Like Mandy, we rarely had any sleepovers. Despite how close we were, we probably slept over at each other's houses once or twice, maybe? But she knew how my mom was strict about certain things, so she was like, "Oh, I totally get it. My mom's the same way." And so, we were like, "Okay, cool." We'll be able to hang out for as long as we want, but we can't stay the night, but that's fine, because we understand that's how our moms are. So it's just things like that. But yeah, growing up and friends now, definitely all my friends are mainly Bosnian, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Laotian.

01:26:59

Q: Earlier I was asking about what it felt like to be Asian American growing up in Idaho. And you had mentioned that at one point, it was something that you weren't really proud of or didn't really want. And you mentioned, it's not really your viewpoint now. So I'm wondering what caused the shift. How do you feel about it these days?

Bui: These days, I definitely say I feel very proud to be Asian American. I think when I was younger, I felt so different and I hated feeling different. And so I guess I just didn't want to be associated with any of it, like coming from a different culture and all that stuff. It sucks to say that I even felt that way, but I felt ashamed and I felt like people just never understood me. And I hated not being understood.

01:28:08

Bui: When I was younger, I always tried to assimilate myself into American culture. And so now, looking back on it, I'm very proud that even if I hated it [being Vietnamese], I still stuck

with it. Because even when I'm at home, I would still do the same things in Vietnamese culture and traditions and all these different ways of being Vietnamese. I still stuck with it, but I'm proud, because that's what makes me who I am. Yeah, I feel like that's a part of me and I feel very proud to be Vietnamese now.

01:28:48

Bui: It just sucks that I even thought that—I don't know—I had to change who I was to fit in with everybody. I think it's just the pressure of wanting to be like everybody else. So I kind of fell into that and stuff. And now just looking back, I'm glad that I still stuck with my roots and still appreciate everything in my culture.

01:29:18

Q: Yeah, and I think all of that resonates so much with anyone who has grown up around this area and is Asian American. Sort of a different kind of question, but if you were to have kids—which is, you know, you don't have to—but if you were, would there be any traditions or beliefs, anything that you'd want to pass on?

Bui: Yeah, I've been thinking about this a lot, because I definitely do want children. But it definitely—I don't know, maybe I just overthink about dating and all that stuff. But I want to be able to carry on traditions as much as I can to my children, and teach them as much as I can of Vietnamese language, Vietnamese food, the history of my family. I definitely want to carry that on and I want my children to know where my family came from.

01:30:31

Bui: Even though I grew up in America, it's not like I totally have all the true Vietnamese way. I definitely think that growing up, it was more Americanized. But I want to be able to still carry the things I do know about the Vietnamese tradition and culture.

01:30:53

Bui: As for beliefs, I think it's a little hard with things nowadays. I don't know. I guess it's hard for me to say if there are certain beliefs I want to carry on with my children, because I don't know if the person I marry, if they're going to be the same religion as me or not, or anything like that. So I would want them to just at least carry on the traditions I have with my family. And appreciate the food and appreciate the special holidays that we celebrate. If they can just appreciate the beauty of culture in general.

01:31:38

Q: Yeah, definitely. I think that sounds really, really special. And I'm sure if you do have kids somewhere down the line, I think they'll be very lucky.

Bui: Aw, thanks. I hope so!

01:31:57

Q: I mean, I think sharing culture and things like that are really special things for kids to grow up with.

Bui: Yeah, and I want them to be close with cousins and my family too, like how I was growing up. I want them close with my brother. And then with the dad's side too. I just want them to have that type of relationship that I did with my family. Growing up, we had my aunts and uncles as mother figures and father figures. So I would want my kids to be as close with their aunts and uncles as much as I was too.

01:32:38

Q: That makes sense. I think I'm getting to the present day and "looking forward" section of my questions. So I think I'll start with some current events. And again, they're contentious, so answer how you want.

01:33:00

Q: I think I'm calling you at a really interesting moment in history. We're experiencing a pandemic, we're experiencing a lot of social tension in the US. Are there any issues that—like with COVID—have affected you or your family in any way? We can start with that one.

Bui: I had maybe one or two run-ins since COVID happened, where I'd go to the grocery store and I'd just get looks, or people would step farther away from me, just because they were white and I look Asian. I don't know, maybe.

01:33:48

Bui: There was one moment, one time I went to the grocery store and there was an older gentleman, and I was wearing a mask. It was towards the beginning, in March, when the first case hit Idaho, and I think it was two or three weeks into quarantine. This was the first grocery trip I made since quarantining. I went to the grocery store; I was wearing a mask. I went to Walmart, and I noticed the majority of people in the Walmart weren't wearing a mask. I was probably one of the few that were in there wearing a mask.

01:34:28

Bui: And I was going down the aisle and this guy walks towards me. And he kind of—he pushed his cart further closer towards the shelving. And I looked at him, because that was just very abrupt, he scooted over really quickly, just kind of backed up towards the shelving. And so I was

approaching him—maybe I shouldn’t have done this—but I just started getting closer to him, because I was just like, “Why are you getting weird about it?” And so I just started pushing closer to him, just to see if I was actually seeing what I was seeing. And as I was getting a little closer to him, he backed up even more. And I said [to myself], “Oh wow, okay. He’s trying to back away from me.”

01:35:26

Bui: I was like, “Well, that’s weird.” It wasn’t crowded at all. It was just us two. But he was obviously trying to back away from me. But then someone was coming up behind me. And I walked away past him [the initial man]. I looked back and the person behind me was still walking behind me. And he [the initial man] pushed out and he walked normally, closer to the person that was behind me. So I was like, “Okay.” So he was just trying to stay away from me. But everyone else that was behind me, he just walked normally, close to them.

01:36:01

Bui: Yeah, so that was the one thing I witnessed, I feel like just a lot of people giving stares. More than usual. I’ve never gotten stares like that before the pandemic happened, and then *that* happened with the dude at the grocery store backing away from me.

01:36:18

Q: Wow, that is so terrible. I’m so sorry.

Bui: I was like, I’ve experienced racism before, but not to that extent where they’re physically backing away from me. And so I was just kind of appalled.

01:36:34

Bui: It’s funny because people say, “Oh, Boise is this friendly community. This stuff doesn’t happen in Boise.”¹ But it really does happen. And I’m not the only person that has happened like that before. During this pandemic, I’ve heard plenty of stories of other people—who are Asian—who’ve had encounters with other people who were blatantly racist towards them, because of the pandemic. So, it’s kind of a weird time.

¹ Perceptions of Boise as a “liberal enclave”: Justin Davidson, “Cities Vs. Trump,” *New York Magazine*, April 17, 2017, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2017/04/the-urban-rural-divide-matters-more-than-red-vs-blue-state.html>; Craig Craker, “An afternoon in downtown Boise,” *Traveling the PNW*, December 22, 2017, <https://travelingthepnw.com/2017/12/22/an-afternoon-in-downtown-boise/>; Harrison Berry, “They Came Anyway: Boise Black Lives Matter Protest Pushes Through COVID, Criticism, Counter Protesters,” *Boise Weekly*, May 31, 2020, https://www.idahopress.com/boiseweekly/news/citydesk/they-came-anyway-boise-black-lives-matter-protest-pushes-through-covid-criticism-counter-protesters/article_fb9355d8-cc9c-5b53-b4c9-b044a3a59f1c.html.

01:37:05

Q: I think it's really brave of you to, you know, walk forward as he's being threatening.

Bui: Yeah, for sure. I was like, "Is he really doing this?" I just wanted to make sure that I wasn't just crazy in thinking—I don't know—that I wasn't overthinking it. But he definitely was trying to back away from me—

Q: Wow I'm so sorry.

Bui: —and then when he walked away [from Janny], he was walking towards other people and—no it's okay. I don't know. I definitely don't want it to get to me too much. But I think it gets frustrating when those things happen to me firsthand. And then there's some people who—I'm not saying my actual neighbors—people who live in this community and they think it's not real, and they think that that doesn't happen.

01:37:56

Bui: And it's [racial aggressions are] just things they see on the news. It's not. It happens to a lot of people in this area and it sucks to hear it. It's sad. And it's like people don't believe that we witness this stuff. So that's when it gets frustrating.

01:38:12

Q: Definitely. Yeah, I think you couldn't have put it better. And it's definitely a different side to the Boise that I think many other people experience.

01:38:29

Q: Sort of on a different note—again, answer how you want—but we've also been seeing protests in Boise and across the country with regards to Black Lives Matter. So I was wondering if that's been significant to your life or to conversations in your family or anything? Yeah, just wondering how that sort of big story filters down into individual people's lives.

Bui: Yeah, I definitely think that has been a big impact in my life and my family's life, for sure. It's something that's like, I've experienced racism firsthand, but I don't think it compares to the racism that my Black friends have witnessed in this country. And so it's something that I think I am still educating myself and informing myself of things that have happened, and learning about it and being informed and also just trying to keep others informed about it too.

01:39:40

Bui: So I think during this time, it's been a lot of reflection about how I've handled things like racism towards me, but then also just knowing not to be a bystander in situations like that too.

So I think it's something, in general, a lot of people need to learn and just be aware of. I hope this movement taught a lot of people to stand up and be aware that this [anti-Blackness] is something that's real and happening in our country, and it has been happening for so long.

01:40:20

Bui: But also, I think the conversations I've had with my family about the movement have definitely been eye-opening. I think more so—I had a conversation with my mom, especially when it first happened, like the first week of the protests after George Floyd passed away. That was probably a very eye-opening week for me and for my family.

01:40:51

Bui: I had a discussion with my mom and we were talking and reading the news, talking about the news together. And we started talking about the protests. And so my mom definitely was confused about, I think, just telling the difference between the protests and the looting. She was seeing a lot of stories about the vandalism and the looting and the raiding of all the business and stuff. And so she was kind of tying that in with the protests; she thought that came hand-in-hand. And so that was a discussion that we had for a while about the movement and the protests, that BLM was doing nothing tied to that part of the bad side of it.

01:41:47

Bui: That was definitely a lengthy discussion about why this was happening and stuff, because I think my mom just doesn't understand it as much. Because I think I've never heard her talk about experiencing racism, so I don't think she really understands what it is really. I think she probably has experienced racism, but she didn't recognize it. Because of a language barrier, she probably thinks of it more as, if someone says something about her race, she'll maybe think it was a joke and so she'll laugh it off. Or something like that.

01:42:34

Bui: She's not one to differentiate what racism is. And so it was a long discussion about why this is a movement and why this is a topic of discussion of our country. And so, I think she's still coming to terms with why it's still a thing. Because I remember at the beginning, she was saying that she was scared that the looting and stuff was going to happen in Boise. And so that was a conversation we had, that she shouldn't be scared. And she shouldn't be scared of BLM; that's not what they're doing. The raiding is not a part of them. It's just like some people taking the opportunity to use it as a way to loot and raid and kind of destroy the city. And they're using BLM as a cover up to do so, or just taking the opportunity to do that. So that was something I was discussing with my mom. I think it's just hard for them to understand why it's happening.

01:43:43

Bui: So, it's just kind of frustrating for me because I feel like I am educated myself, but I feel like I'm not educated enough to really tell her why these things are happening, because I don't want to tell the wrong information and I don't want to say the wrong information about the movement, either. So it's been kind of hard to convince them, like, "This is what I'm reading and this is what I'm watching." For me, it's easy to understand why they're doing this [protesting for Black Lives Matter] and how they feel about it, but it's another thing to be able to sit there and interpret that and translate that to my mom who doesn't necessarily understand why it's happening.

01:44:39

Q: Yeah, that makes sense. It's good to hear you're having—I'm not sure if "difficult" is the right term—but complex discussions at home.

Bui: Yeah. These are discussions that we haven't really had before, so that part feels different now, but it's important to talk about it.

Q: Yeah, definitely. And I think opening the space just to have that discussion is also really good.

01:45:13

Q: The next question is shifting away from current events. We've talked a lot about your life. You're in your mid-twenties. At this stage of your life, what are your dreams, your hopes, your visions for the future?

Bui: I think about this a lot, but I feel like my dreams and my hopes always change so frequently. I really like what I'm doing now. I'm pretty content with myself, career-wise, right now. But I would definitely love to branch into, just be able to—I don't want to own my own business or anything—but being able to work for companies that I am able to keep doing this, social media content. I really like writing and blogging and all that stuff, so something along the lines of that and just being able to be creative.

01:46:23

Bui: I would love to move to a bigger city in the near future. I think Boise is a little too small for me and not as diverse as I want it to be. So I really want to move away and kind of experience a different culture and environment.

01:46:42

Bui: Yeah, and then I hope to, obviously, start my own family in my early thirties. So I definitely want to have my twenties to have time for myself to do whatever I want, travel, and be able to

experience different stuff, too. But I think right now, my next goal is to be able to lock down a really good job, like a job I would have for the rest of my life, I would say.

01:47:14

Q: Are there any cities you're thinking of in particular?

Bui: Seattle seems at the top of my list. Kind of New York. I haven't visited yet—I was going to visit in May, but with everything going on, I canceled that flight. I canceled the trip. So I'll go later. But I definitely want to experience a big city like that. I don't know. I'm not sure if I'll like it, but I still just want to try it. I don't want to have to wonder what it's like all the time

01:47:50

Bui: I love Seattle. I visit there quite a bit, but I love the environment there. I used to want to move to LA. So I don't know! My dream with that has kind of changed. So I definitely want to try and move to different places.

01:48:07

Q: Also just to let you know, I am being cognizant of the time. So these are winding down to the last questions.

01:48:23

Q: We'll do this for one of the last questions. What is one thing you want people to remember about you?

Bui: Ooh, that's a great question. Hm. I think I want people to remember—that's a good question, I don't know. I don't think I've ever thought that to myself. I don't know. I hope I made some type of impact on people's lives. It doesn't have to be big, but just know that I was always there for people. Maybe just remember that everything I did, I put 100 percent of my heart into. I don't know.

01:49:32

Q: Yeah, I think so those make sense to me. You have a lot of time to figure it out.

Bui: I was like, "That is a good question!" I think, also, remember that I'm just human, and I'm not perfect, but I hope that regardless of all that, I still make an impact on people's lives. And just know that I was, you know, the person that was there for them, regardless of where they are in life. I feel like I've had a lot of people come and go in my life but, regardless, if they're not in my life anymore, they know to always turn to me. And if they ever needed something I'd be there for them.

01:50:25

Q: Yeah, definitely. The only question I have left is, is there anything you'd like to add, like any part of your life you feel like we haven't talked about enough or something we should touch on more? Yes. Anything you want to add?

Bui: I think I would just want to reiterate that I wouldn't be here—like what I'm doing now with my life—if it wasn't for my mom and my family moving here. My family sacrificed a lot and everything they did in their life led up to where I am now.

01:51:14

Bui: My grandpa, he went through so much to get his family to America. He sacrificed a lot and my family sacrificed a lot and was basically shamed in Vietnam, because we were not communist. And so my grandpa went to jail—to prison, basically—for seven years. When the North found out that he was working with America and that he was non-communist, and so they imprisoned him for being open about that. And so my grandpa, I mean, he did it anyways. He was very open because he knew that, you know, it was going to lead his family to a better place, to start their lives in a better place.

01:52:04

Bui: And so them moving to America was a big thing. And I think every day that that was probably the hardest thing ever—to move to a completely different country and not know the language and start your life all over again. And so I'm really glad that my family had each other and they were able to grow their family even more and have us.

01:52:27

Bui: And now we're here, able to go to school and get college degrees and work really good jobs. And I mean, that's all I've wanted to do, like after I graduated college—I went to college mainly because I wanted to just better my life, and also do it for my mom, and so that further on, she doesn't have to work another day in her life. And I can just provide and help her. I mean, that's the most I can do, you know, to repay her.

01:52:59

Bui: I'm very grateful for where I am. And I think every day of how much they've done to, you know, just to give me this life and so I really can't complain. They've gone through a lot just so I could have a really good life here in America.

01:53:15

Q: Yeah, definitely. And thanks for sharing about all the different kinds of challenges and sacrifices that your family has made. Is there anything else that you wanted to add as well?

Bui: No, I don't think so. I think that's it.

Q: Okay, I'm going to stop the recording.

[END OF SESSION]

Transcriptionist	Kathy M. Min
Narrator	Janny Bui
Interviewer	Kathy M. Min
Session Number	2
Location	Virtually through Zoom. Both participants called from Boise, Idaho.
Date	July 24, 2020

00:00:02

Q: Today is July 24, 2020, and I'm doing a follow up interview with Janny Bui. I'm Kathy Min, the interviewer. And so the first question is, can you tell me more about your grandpa's and family's experiences before coming to the United States in Vietnam?

Bui: Let's see. So my family, I've heard bits and pieces of stuff. My grandpa was a police officer. And so he did that. I think that was his only profession. And so I think I touched on a little bit in my last interview, basically when the Vietnam War was around and stuff, he helped with the US Army. And so he worked alongside there. He did a lot of stuff in the office with them more so than being out and in the streets, I guess. As a police officer, I think he was more in the office, doing paperwork and stuff like that. And so he worked alongside the US army in that sense, I believe.

00:01:15

Bui: My grandma was a stay-at-home mom. And I know during the time when my grandpa was working, and then also when he was imprisoned, my grandma had a hard time taking care of six kids by herself. And so my mom and two of her other siblings, they separated from my grandma and they went and moved and lived with her grandparents. And so that would have been my grandpa's parents.

00:01:48

Bui: And so my mom said growing up, she was mainly with them. And so she didn't live in Saigon, which is Ho Chi Minh City. She lived in their old family home, which was more in the country. I'm trying to remember the city. I don't really remember the city's name.¹ I might have to get back to you on that, just so it's accurate. But yeah, so she lived in that home, but I would

¹ Janny's family home is located in Ben Tre, Vietnam.

say they weren't poor. But they weren't rich either. I think they were pretty comfortable for the most part.

00:02:34

Bui: My grandpa's dad—so my great grandfather—he was a professor. And so in Vietnam, professors, teachers are very much—they're really respected. They're highly respected over there. And they tend to make a lot more money. Whereas here, I feel like for American culture, I mean, I think teachers are respected here, but monetarily they're not paid as much. But over in Vietnam, they get paid pretty well. I'm trying to think of anything else in my family.

00:03:24

Bui: We also owned a rice business, a rice-selling business and we still currently do. It got handed down to my uncle, but now since he's passed, my aunt, which is his wife, handles that business. So we have a stand in the market in Vietnam. It's in the city, Saigon city. And so they just sell rice there, but it's attached to their house too, which is pretty cool. And it's really normal for Vietnamese homes to have that type of layout, where your house is attached to your business.

00:04:05

Bui: But yeah, it wasn't anything crazy. We have a lot of family and we kind of have a cool family history. One of my great grandpas is a king. And that's pretty cool. Yeah. You can Wikipedia him. But he was a pretty well known king a few hundred years ago. I've heard bits and pieces of really cool pieces of our family history, but I would say I'd like to learn more. But it's kind of hard when not a lot of the Vietnamese community or the culture there, really—at least for my family—we don't collect too much of history or information to backtrack and see who all was related.

00:05:01

Q: What was the king's name?

Bui: I have it, let's see. I don't remember this name off the top of my head. But I do have it. Sorry, might take me a little bit. I thought it was really cool, like, “Woah, that's awesome. I'm related to a king.” His name is Nguyen Hue.

00:05:32

Q: Could you spell it?

Bui: Yeah. His first name is Hue. He's also known as Nguyen Quang Binh. But he's an emperor. Yeah, which is really cool. One of my great uncles—my grandpa's youngest brother—he's really into family history and trying to document as much as possible. And so he made this huge family

tree of our family and his [Nguyen Hue's] name's at the top of the list. And I was like, "Woah, who's that?" And so my uncle told me that he's an emperor that's related to on my grandpa's side.

00:06:28

Q: Also, I think you've touched on this, both in this interview and in the past one, but do you know when your grandfather was in prison?

Bui: I don't remember the exact date. I know it was seven years. I believe my mom was fairly young. I believe it was in the '70s. I think my uncle was a baby still. But yeah, it was early on, during the war. But I don't remember exactly. I might have to ask my uncle or my aunt, or my mom, the exact dates for that one.² My mom just remembers her being really young.

00:07:17

Q: Do you know what he did after he was out of prison?

Bui: He wouldn't tell me much. I think, after, he just went back to just doing police work or he just ran the rice business. But that one, I'm not really sure either.³ My grandpa didn't really talk much about it. It was hard to pry out of him. I think I mentioned it before, but in high school, I tried to write a paper on him and his experience being imprisoned, and it was really hard, trying to get things out of him.

00:07:54

Bui: He didn't really like talking about it much, because he said it was a horrible time. And it's just lots of hard labor, they didn't feed them very much, they would just stuff a bunch of men under tents and that's how they were "imprisoned." It was just a huge labor camp. But I believe it either just was selling rice or going back to police work.

00:08:26

Bui: It was kind of hard because I know after he left prison and was done serving his time, my family was—I don't know if this is the correct term or anything like that—but essentially blacklisted in Vietnam. Just because, since my grandpa declared he was not communist, that obviously didn't go well with the government. And so the government tried to blacklist my family from being able to have opportunities in Vietnam, like going to college or getting good

² Janny's grandfather was in prison between 1975 to 1982.

³ Later, Janny asked her mom this question. Her mom said that after he was released, Janny's grandfather went into other ventures such as farming and making wine to sell.

jobs and such like that.⁴ So the only good opportunity for them to be able to fulfill their life was to move to America. And so we were really grateful for that.

00:09:21

Bui: And so the government was a huge reason why my grandpa wanted to leave and move to America, even though we didn't have such a horrible place in Vietnam. It wasn't like we were living in poverty or anything, but the only way we could keep bettering ourselves was to move to America. And to have a better life for essentially me and my cousins too.

00:09:43

Q: Do you know the details of the immigration process? Because I was trying to research a little bit about it, and I wasn't sure if there's a particular law or something that he immigrated through. I know that there's something for people who served in a war; there's preferences or the application process for naturalization is easier, I believe, but that's what I was finding. So I didn't know if you knew more about how your family immigrated.

Bui: I wish I did. I think his [immigration process] fell under that too. He wasn't in the army, but he was a police officer. And so it did help us a little bit. But I would assume it would be something similar to that.⁵ I believe my cousin's grandpa went through the same thing, because he actually was in the war; he was a soldier in the war and he filled that out. I don't know. I would have to ask. I think my aunts and uncles and my mom would know more, but they didn't really tell me much. They just said the process of them coming here. But yeah, I'll have to ask again.

00:11:03

Q: Are all your family members American citizens now?

Bui: Yes. They're all American citizens. I think they all got their citizenship really early on. Within a few years of them moving to America, they got their citizenship. My grandma, I believe, had dual citizenship here in America and Vietnam. And I think my grandpa did too. We have all American citizenship now.

00:11:35

Q: And then, did you ever go back to Vietnam to visit?

⁴ For example, a 1997 United Nations Human Rights Watch report notes how “the Vietnamese government has a history of stigmatizing and blacklisting families over generations for political and religious expression as well as for class affiliations.” From Human Rights Watch, “Abuses Against Vietnamese Asylum Seekers in the Final Days of the Comprehensive Plan of Action,” *UNHCR*, March 1, 1997, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a7f10.html>.

⁵ According to Janny's mother, Janny's grandfather's records were kept on file with the US, so they could easily search his officer badge number and helped him fill out the applications to start moving his family to America.

Bui: Yes, I did. My most recent trip was in 2018, right after I graduated college. It was a gift for graduating. And so I went back in 2018. And then I've also been two other times, but I was really young. I was three years old, I believe? And it was for my uncle's wedding—so Eric's dad.

00:12:04

Bui: But yeah, I went recently. It's so beautiful there. It is so beautiful and I think my favorite part was just being able to go back, since I'm older and I remember everything now. Because I visited our old family home before but I honestly don't remember it. So going back and being able to see that and see where my mom grew up was really, really cool and kind of eye-opening, just because it's so different from how American homes are. So that was definitely very cool.

00:12:43

Bui: And it's very different. So that home that has been with our families for generations, and I believe it started with my grandpa's grandpa. Or grandpa's grandpa's grandpa? Something like that. But it's been a while. And so there's a tree in front of their home that was planted by my first grandpa, whatever, that lived there. And so that tree's hundreds of years old. And then we do have a lot of land. I think we have one or two acres of land that's all ours. And so in the back of the house is where they keep—it's basically our family cemetery. And so it's generations of our family in the back. Which is kind of weird to think, but it's normal in Vietnam, to just have your family plotted back there.

00:13:48

Bui: It's a very old, huge, wooden house and everything is just wooden. No A/C, no running, plumbing—anything. So yeah, it's a very old house. But my grandpa's sister built another house right next to it, which is a little bit more modern. But yeah, it's pretty cool. It was just really awesome. I mean, it's Vietnam, so it's really hot and humid, which I hated the most, but I would totally go again. I think it's so pretty there.

00:14:27

Q: And you just went to Ho Chi Minh City or other parts of Vietnam as well?

Bui: Yeah we flew into there, because that's where my aunt, uncle lived. And so we flew into Ho Chi Minh City and then we went to the old family home, which is in the country, like three hours east of Ho Chi Minh City. And then we also went to Phu Quoc, which is an island, I believe, south of Vietnam. It's still in Vietnam, but it's this little island. And that place was really gorgeous. It's like a resort, travel-y, touristy area, but that place was very, very pretty. And we did lots of touristy stuff there. But yeah, that's basically all we've been to. I definitely want to go

back and visit more of Hanoi area, so the northern part of Vietnam. Yeah, there's a lot I hope we're able to experience, but I was mainly in Ho Chi Minh City.

00:15:30

Q: Then I got some more questions on the US side of things. Are you engaged in the Vietnamese community here in Boise, and how would you describe the community in terms of the size and what it's like?

Bui: I would say I'm not as engaged with the community. I do have a few Vietnamese friends. But there's not much you can do to be engaged in the community. Like there's no specific Vietnamese events that happen every month or something like that. The only time you could be very engaging with the community is if you were to go to the Vietnamese temple or the Buddhist temple. Or there's also—the Catholic Church puts on stuff because there's a pretty big Vietnamese Catholic group.

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Bui: But, yeah, I wouldn't say I'm totally engaged with the community in that sense, where it's events and stuff. As for knowing people, I feel like I do know a lot of Vietnamese people, people my mom's age, people who knew my grandparents. My grandparents were pretty well known here—and my whole family is pretty well known here, just because we were one of the first Vietnamese families to live in Boise.⁶

00:17:10

Bui: Since then, a lot of people have moved to Boise who are Vietnamese. So our community has grown, but I wouldn't say it's big compared to other places in America that do have a huge Vietnamese group. Where I lived in California, it was all Vietnamese. It was named Little Saigon, because in that city, it literally was just all Vietnamese. You just drive down the street and every store, restaurant were Vietnamese. You couldn't read a speck of English there or even hear a speck of English, either.

00:17:51

⁶ Boise has had a Vietnamese presence since the 1970's, but many of the earlier Vietnamese families moved away from Boise. From Kathleen Rubinow Hodges, "Across the Pacific," *Investigate Boise Community Research Series 8* (2017): 26, https://scholarworks.boisestate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1481&context=fac_books.

Bui: But here, I would say, it's up there, but definitely places like Garden Grove, California, is the hugest.⁷ Seattle has a huge Vietnamese population.⁸ Texas has a lot of Vietnamese people.⁹ It's a good comfortable size in Boise. But definitely, everybody knows everyone, or if you don't know them, you know someone who does know them.

00:18:37

Q: Did you ever feel represented either in classroom textbooks or in media, growing up around here? I think “represented” means your histories or just who you identify with.

Bui: You cut out in the first part. Did you just say that, did I feel represented in history books?

Q: Yeah, history textbooks and in media growing up.

Bui: Oh, and media. Locally? Local media?

00:19:05

Q: Either.

Bui: History books, not so much. I definitely feel like I remember learning about the Vietnam War, but it wasn't a whole week of learning about the Vietnam War. It was like, “Vietnam War happened this and this time. We [the United States] helped them.” And then that was it, “moving on” type of thing. So that's how much I know about the Vietnam War. It was not a lot from history classes and books and such.

00:19:38

Bui: And there was just not a lot of discussion about Vietnam specifically, but I do remember learning about other histories that were Asian history-based too. There was a little bit of that. But honestly, not too much. I would say it was definitely very biased in history classes, especially learning in Boise, where it is predominantly white.

00:20:16

⁷ As of the 2010 census, Orange County, California, where Garden Grove is located, has the largest Vietnamese population of any US county. From Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce, “The Vietnamese Population in the United States: 2010,” June 2011,

https://vacoc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/The-Vietnamese-Population-2010_July-2,2011.pdf

⁸ As of 2015, the Seattle metropolitan area has one of the largest Vietnamese populations in the US. From Pew Research Center, “Top 10 U.S. metropolitan areas by Vietnamese population, 2015,” September 8, 2017,

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/chart/top-10-u-s-metropolitan-areas-by-vietnamese-population/>.

⁹ After California, Texas has the largest Vietnamese population in the US, as of 2010. From Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce.

Bui: As for media, I would say no, I didn't see a lot in media. Only about recently I've started seeing more Asian American representation in media.¹⁰ I think the first person I remember that I was like, "She looks like me," was Lucy Liu in *Charlie's Angels*. And then *Mulan* was a huge one.¹¹ And then Sandra Oh in *Grey's Anatomy*. I might be missing some people but those are the most that I've resonated and remembered the most, because I was like, "Wow, I have never seen an Asian on a television screen."

00:21:06

Bui: As for news, I think I barely saw anybody that looked like me or just represented Asian American culture or anything like that. Especially in Boise, when you read the news or watch the news here, everyone's predominantly white. But yeah, it's definitely hard. I definitely think it is growing, though, which is really good, in a Hollywood-type of setting, but that's basically where I see it the most.

00:21:43

Q: And then I wanted to ask a little bit more about gender, because I feel like I didn't ask a lot about it last time. So I was wondering about what the role gender and/or sexuality play out in your life, and if you feel any expectations or stereotypes as a woman / Asian American woman.

Bui: I feel like with gender, since I am a woman in Asian American culture. The standard with Vietnamese culture, I feel like they expect girls or women to do everything, I guess. And I feel personally for me, I didn't have as much freedom as my brother growing up. I saw a huge divide in that. I don't blame my mom or anything, but I noticed when it came to me and my, for example, asking to stay late at school or go over to a friend's house to study, it was like pulling teeth.

00:22:51

Bui: Whereas with my brother, my brother wouldn't even ask. He would just be like, "Hey, I'm going over to so-and-so's house and we're going to do homework." My mom would be like, "Okay, don't be home late." But I was like, "Why do I have to ask and beg for me to go and he can just do whatever?" And they'd be like, "You're a girl. You need to be careful. It's dangerous out there." But it could be dangerous for a guy, too. You never know. So I think it's something like that, too.

00:23:23

¹⁰ Asian American representation has gradually increased in the years leading up to 2020, with the film *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018) as a notable example of a pan-Asian cast. From Jenn Fang, "The Decade in Asian America," *NBC News*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/decade-asian-america-n1108581>.

¹¹ Referring to the 1998 animated film.

Bui: And then growing up, it was always like—I think maybe it’s just a traditional Asian mindset—but it was like, “Girls always need to learn how to cook, learn how to clean, and take care of yourself. But you also need to know these things if you ever want to marry. And you need to help and provide for a man.”

00:23:53

Bui: It's hard to say that, because that's just not how it is anymore. And so, especially me, I don't think that way ever. I think you should do it for yourself. You shouldn't do it for somebody else. But that's definitely the traditional Vietnamese way of thinking.

00:24:16

Bui: Also, my mom never said stuff like that. That was my grandma. She always said stuff like that. She’d always just tell me to work hard in school and don't worry about boys until I’m older. After college is when I should start looking for a man and all that stuff. I should focus on school and focus on learning how to cook and clean and stuff, and then I'm able to go find a boyfriend. And it's funny because literally after I graduated college, my grandma on my mom’s side asked me if I have a boyfriend yet. I’m like, “No, I don't want to date yet. I'm just focusing on work.”

00:25:01

Bui: I don’t know, it’s just funny. Before, I was like, “Why can’t I have a boyfriend?” And then, now I’m like, “I don’t really want a boyfriend.” And now she’s all pressuring me to go get married. She teases, but she's just like “just find a boyfriend” or “get married before I die, I want to witness you married before I die.” It’s a lot of pressure!

00:25:24

Bui: But I think just for a girl's point of view, a Vietnamese girl’s point of view, we do have a lot of pressure compared to the boys in the family. There's always just nagging and there’s lots of beauty pressures and beauty, to be a certain size or for your skin to look a certain way. I feel with Asian parents, they're very quick to point out imperfections. And that could really be—that could be kind of harmful to somebody growing up. I mean, either way, I think they don't really understand what that does to somebody. I just don’t think they were educated enough growing up to realize that could hurt somebody’s feelings. I don't know. But I definitely think girls have it harder. Yeah.

00:26:24

Q: Well, thanks for sharing. I think those are all my follow-ups, but I think since you've had a chance to look at the transcript as well, just again, if there's anything you felt like we haven't covered, you can also take the space to add it in.

Bui: Yeah, definitely. I'll have to make a note of getting that city where my family originated from. I don't remember that city where our family home is. So I'll have to get that back to you. And I'll probably ask more questions to my mom and my uncle about what my grandpa did after he got out of prison. So I'll probably fill you in with that.

Q: Yeah, that sounds great. So I'll stop the recording.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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