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"I Was Given a Second Chance": Retrospective Life History Stories from Generation 1.25 Immigrant Students

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“I Was Given a Second Chance”:
Retrospective Life History Stories
from Generation 1.25 Immigrant Students

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Ngọc Hồng Trần

2020

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2020

Professor Carola Suárez-Orozco, Chair

This research study embraced the call-to-action of bridging the compassion gap (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2019) and a qualitative life history research approach to explore the (pre-, during-, and post-) migratory experiences of ten former newcomer high school students. Through in-depth interviews, this study sought to understand the stories of these ten 1.25-generation immigrants as they retrospectively narrate their lived experiences before, during, and after their immigration journeys, with a focused interest in displacement trauma and interrupted formal education, and the influences these experiences had on their academic and life trajectories. This study also documented the heartfelt advice each participant offered to current adolescent newcomer students. The findings of this study were shared in two distinct ways: Chapter Four was written in narrative vignettes and mainly in the voices of the participants as

they relived their stories, while Chapter Five examined the ten interviews collectively. The major findings of this study revealed that the longer the immigration journey, the longer the time of interrupted formal education. Most of the participants minimized or channeled their traumatic experiences to serve others. After completing high school in the United States, these newcomer students still felt unprepared for college and career due to limited English language skills. These 1.25-generation immigrants were self-motivated individuals who advised current newcomer adolescent students to study English deeply and connect with others to help with the stressors of post-migration experiences. The researcher of this study recommended more intensive English Language Development (ELD) for the 1.25-generation immigrant students, a sustained and collaborative articulation between K-12 and Higher Education to support English Learners, an ongoing orientation system to support and connect high school newcomer students, and the incorporation of trauma-informed social and emotional learning (SEL) into the curriculum.

This dissertation of Ngọc Hồng Trần is approved.

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University of California, Los Angeles

2020

DEDICATION

It is my honor to dedicate the work in this dissertation to my mother, father, husband, family, teachers, and friends, who believed in me and encouraged me to keep moving forward. Also, I dedicate this work to all my students, who inspired and moved me. Finally, to my sons, who may one day walk this path and remember their mother's journey.

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VITA

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

According to the UNHCR Global Report (2017), within a span of twelve months in 2017, migrating people of concern[1] (i.e. refugees, asylum-seekers, stateless people, internally displaced people, and returnees) increased by 5.4%. In January 2017, there were 67.7 million people of concern worldwide, but by December 2017, this number had risen to 71.4 million. Internally displaced people increased from 36.6 to 39.1 million. Stateless persons went from 3.2 to 3.9 million. In addition, refugees skyrocketed from 17.2 to 19.9 million[2]. Of the 19.9 million refugees, 51% were under the age of 18 (UNHCR Global Report, 2017). Additionally, in 2017, the United States has over 40 million or one-fifth of the world's diverse immigrants[3] (Radford, 2019). Pew Research Center (2015) predicts the immigration population to reach 78 million by 2065. Immigrant children made up one-quarter of all children in the United States and had grown by 51% to 19.6 million from 1994 to 2017 (Child Trends, 2018). Unfortunately, however,

[1] *Persons of concern to UNHCR* is a generic term used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to describe everyone who may need the protection and assistance of the UNHCR. *Persons of concern* to UNHCR include *refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless persons*, and *internally displaced persons*. Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms*, June 2006, Rev.1, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/42ce7d444.html [accessed 29 January 2019].

[2] In 2017, 19.9 million refugees were under UNHCR mandate. 5.4 million Palestinian refugees were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. This was a total of 25.4 million refugees worldwide. Source: https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html

[3] *Immigrant* or *international migrant* or *long-term migrant*, according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), is "any person who changes his or her country of usual residence. A person's country of usual residence is that in which the person lives, that is to say, the country in which the person has a place to live where he or she normally spends the daily period of rest…a long-term migrant should be defined as a person who moves to a country other than that of his or her usual residence for a period of at least a year (12 months) , so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence" (UN DESA, 1998, pp. 9-10). Source: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/events/other/workshop/2014/docs/SeriesM_58rev1e.pdf

educational systems are often ill-prepared to meet the needs of immigrant students (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019; C. Suárez-Orozco, 2019; M. Suárez-Orozco, 2019).

A Brief Overview of the Legal & Humanitarian Responses to Refugees & Immigrants

Violence, warfare, and natural disasters have been a continual feature of world history. Faced with the destruction of human conflicts or Nature's wrath, displaced people, asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants flee their homelands and trek across deserts, mountains, or seas to find refuge and safety. Historically, those in positions of power ultimately are in the position to respond (Stone, 2018). Throughout history, the United States and other powerful countries have responded with compassion as well as contempt to the plight of displaced people, immigrants, and refugees.

Page Act of 1875

The Page Act of 1875 was the very first United States federal immigration law. Its aim was to prohibit the entry of any contact laborer from Asia, especially Chinese women.

Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 restricted immigration of all Chinese laborers and prohibited Chinese naturalization. Later, the Geary Act of 1892 extended and strengthened the Chinese Exclusion Act. It was not until 1943 that the Magnuson Act repealed the Chinese Exclusion Act by permitting naturalization and a quota of 105 new Chinese immigrants per year.

United States Immigration Service, 1891

As a response to states implementing immigration laws after the Civil War, the United States Supreme Court put in place the federal regulation of immigration in 1876. By, the 1890's, the Bureau of Immigration was established.

The International Committee of the Red Cross & the League of Nations

After a decade of warfare (1912-1922), that included World War I and the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the International Committee of the Red Cross, founded in 1863, proposed that the League of Nations (1920-1946) launch a central coordinating body for the international protection of refugees (Jaeger, 2001). In 1922, Norwegian explorer, scientist, and humanitarian, Fridtjof Nansen, introduced the Nansen[4] passports—considered as the first legal development of international refugee laws—primarily to stabilize, monitor, and control the movement of Russian and Armenian refugees after World War I and the Russian Revolution and Civil War (Behrman, 2018). The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (1943-1947) and the International Refugee Organization (1946-1952) operated to assist refugees and displaced persons in Europe and Asia, after WWII. The Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, succeeded the IRO in 1951.

Quota Law, 1921

In direct response to the mass immigration after World War I, the Quota Law limited immigration by nationality. The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 was the first time in United States history that numerical limits were placed on the number of immigrants, mostly Eastern and Southern Europeans, who could enter the country.

The Refugee Crisis, 1938-1941

Another large-scale refugee crisis of the 20th century occurred months before the official beginning of World War II when hundreds of thousands of Austrian and German Jews applied for immigration visas to the United States. In June 1938, approximately 140,000 names were on

[4] The Nansen Passport was issued by the Nansen International Office for Refugees, named Dr. Fridtjof Nansen (1861-1930), who was the League of Nation's first High Commissioner for Refugees in 1921.

the German quota waiting list for US immigration visas (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia, n.d.). Only a few months later, this waiting list had reached 220,000 people. By 1939, 300,000 Jewish Germans remained on the waiting list for US immigration visas. Even as the refugee crisis increased, many Americans expressed their opposition to the arrivals of these new immigrants. In fact, Congress never voted on the Wagner-Rogers Bill of 1939, which would have admitted 20,000 German children to the US, because of negative public opinion. In 1941, operating out of fear, the US put in place even more immigration restrictions, which further restricted opportunities for refugees.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948

Against the tides of anti-immigration, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a historic document that has become customary international law. Uniquely as a response to the atrocities of the Holocaust and war crimes of World War II, this 1948 document defined fundamental human rights in thirty articles, including the freedom of movement in Articles 12-17. Specifically, Article 14 declared, "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution" (UDHR, 1948) as long as these asylum-seekers have not committed any non-political crimes or violated UN principles.

Establishment of UNHCR in 1950

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) - a body established in 1950 under the governance of the United Nations – was tasked to help millions of European refugees in the aftermath of World War II. At the onset of its creation, UNHCR was expected to complete its purpose in three year and then disband. However, seventy years later, UNHCR continues to serve refugees and displaced individuals all over the world. UNHCR defines an asylum-seeker

as anyone who seeks both international protection and to be recognized as a refugee, defined as anyone who has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted (UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms, 2006).

The Refugee Conventions of 1951 & 1967

By 1951, world leaders recognized the need to establish international refugee protection laws. In the Introductory Note by the Office of the UNHCR, the Refugee Convention of 1951 asserted that "grounded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of human rights 1948," this document defines the term *refugee*, outlines the rights of displaced people, and clarifies the legal obligations of countries to protect them. The main purpose of the Refugee Convention of 1951 was and is non-refoulment, which is the fundamental principle of customary international law that forbids the forced return of asylum-seekers to the persecuting country based on race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Other major world conflicts, including the 1956 Hungarian Revolution that displaced 200,000 people and the decolonization of Africa in the 1960s, affirmed the need for international protocols to protect refugee rights. The Refugee Convention of 1967 developed the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees treaty expanded the time and geographic limits of the 1951 Convention. Ultimately, the 1967 Protocol extended protection beyond those refugees affected by WWII.

The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965

The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 replaced the national-origins quota system with a categorical preference system, which gave preference to relatives of U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and immigrants with job skills needed in the U.S. (Congressional Budget Office, 2006).

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1976

By 1976, the United Nations adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) to strengthen the protection of human rights and freedoms. The ICCPR compels countries that have endorsed the treaty to defend and preserve basic human rights. It should be noted that the United States did not ratify the ICCPR until 1992, making the ICCPR the supreme law of the land under the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

The Refugee Act of 1980

In the aftermath of the Vietnam War, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese and Cambodians sought refuge from political persecution. On the fall of Saigon in 1975 to 1979, nearly 300,000 Vietnamese and Cambodians entered the United States as refugees thanks to the executive power of President Jimmy Carter. Recognizing the need to amend immigration laws at the time (i.e. the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965), Congress unanimously ratified the Refugee Act of 1980, which included the adoption of UNHC's definition of *refugee*, the expansion of the annual admission caps for refugees in times of conflict, and the funding of the Office of US Coordinator for Refugee Affairs and the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

The Immigration Reform & Control Act of 1986

The Immigration Reform & Control Act (IRCA) of 1986's main purpose was to increase border security and put in place employer sanctions for those who hired unauthorized immigrants (Chishti et al., 2011). The hard-fought-for IRCA also addressed the potential for millions of unauthorized immigrants attaining legal status. It created a new guest worker program and a path towards citizenship for agricultural workers already in the United States. A benefit that came out of this law was the Office of Special Counsel for Immigration Related Unfair Employment Practices in the Department of Justice.

The Homeland Security Act of 2002

As a reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and immigration anxieties, the Homeland Security Act of 2002 created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), consolidating twenty-two U.S. agencies and bureaus.

UNHCR Global Report of 2017

In April 2017, due to increase climate change and disaster-related displacements, the UNHCR recommended the inclusion of legal refugee protection for those fleeing from conflict- and famine-affected country (Legal Considerations on Refugee Protection…, 2017). As a result of the massive increase of persons of concerns and refugees, the UNCHR was called upon to respond.

Current United States Refugee Policies

A September 2018 report of U.S. refugee laws and policies by the American Immigration Council[5] proclaimed that although the "United States has long been a global leader in the resettlement of refugees" recently imposed security vetting procedures on refugees has "greatly lengthened waiting times and left many refugees in dangerous situations for prolonged periods" (p. 1). This 2018 report emphasized that it is in the power of the United States President to determine the refugee admissions ceiling each year. In 2018, the Refugee Processing Center[6] reported the lowest United States refugee admissions ceiling of 45,000 and the lowest number of 22,501 admitted refugees in the midst of the current worldwide refugee crisis. Notably, Behrman (2018) argued that the real refugee crisis is the crisis of refugee law. In his own words,

[5] The American Immigration Council was established in 1987 as a non-profit, non-partisan organization.

[6] The Refugee Processing Center is operated by the United States Department of State (DOS) Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM).

"…with border controls and ID checks, this same phenomenon becomes instead a crisis" (p. 110).

The "high risk" nations. One of the very first acts of the new 2016 presidential administration was an executive order for a ban on Muslims entering the United States as a response to the 2015 San Bernardino mass shooting by a U.S.-born Pakistani American citizen. In January 2017, the United States president issued Executive Order 13769[7] that: 1) lowered the refugee admission ceiling from 80,000 to 50,000, 2) suspended the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program for 120 days, 3) suspended the entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely, 4) and effectively banned the entry of those who came from seven countries: Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Executive Order 13769, better known as the Muslim ban or the travel ban, detained 700 travelers and provisionally revoked 60,000 visas. After much public condemnation and lawsuits, revisions were made and the executive order was replaced by the Presidential Proclamation 9645[8], signed on September 24, 2017, adding North Korea and Venezuela to the list of banned countries and leaving out Iraq and Sudan from the original list. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld this travel ban in *Trump v. Hawaii* on June 28, 2018 by a 5 to 4 vote[9].

Family separation policy. Further restrictions discouraged asylum-seekers from Central and South America. The United States has long been a divided country on the issue of

[7] Executive Order 13769, entitled "Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States." Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/executive-order-protecting-nation-foreign-terrorist-entry-united-states-2/.

[8] Presidential Proclamation 9645, entitled "Presidential Proclamation Enhancing Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry into the United States by Terrorists or Other Public-Safety Threats." Available at https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/presidential-proclamation-enhancing-vetting-capabilities-processes-detecting-attempted-entry-united-states-terrorists-public-safety-threats/.

[9] Available at the Supreme Court of the United States Blog: https://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/trump-v-hawaii-3/.

immigration policy and border security, especially on the southwest border. In May 2018, the U.S. Attorney General declared a zero tolerance on illegal crossings at the Mexico border by separating parents from children. Former practices have kept families together in detention centers. There are concerns that approximately 2,000 detained children, especially girls, are at risk and need mental health therapy for "psychological trauma from assault and rape they faced in their home countries" (Rhodan, 2018). In December 2018, two detained Guatemalan children, being held by the Border Patrol in New Mexico, and a 20-month-old baby, held at an ICE family detention center in Texas with her mother, died from illness. AZCentral.com reported that detained children are not cared for even when they are sick (Larson, 2018). Noguera (2019) warns:

> [W]e have been inundated with news of mass drownings as boats carrying refugees capsize in the Mediterranean, of borders closing due to fears pertaining to terrorists attacks, and of mass arrests by immigration agents targeting the undocumented. Such incidents are occurring in communities throughout the United States (including in so-called sanctuary cities) and in the diverse array of countries throughout the word. The news is frightening, and the problem may seem overwhelming. Because the atrocities occur with such frequency, they can easily become accepted as the new normal. But why should we accept this condition? Normalization and complacency toward human suffering must be seen for what they are: threats to our collective future that can and must be resisted through creative forms of action. (Kindle location 7425)

Linton et al. (2017) espouse the position of the American Academy of Pediatrics that the detention of immigrant children, with or separate from a parent, is unacceptable. Furthermore, "children, especially those who have been exposed to trauma and violence,

should not be placed in settings that do not meet basic standards for children's physical and mental health and that expose children to additional risk, fear, and trauma" (Linton et al., 2017, p. 7).

Significance of the Study

Part of the inspiration to this research study came about as a reaction to the call-to-action of bridging the compassion gap towards immigrants by appealing to people's pathos (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2019). C. Suárez-Orozco (2019) asserts that the more we share the counternarratives of immigrants' lived experiences, the more we come closer to chipping down stereotypes and prejudices against immigrants to bridge the compassion gap. Thereby, the researcher of this study chose to adopt a qualitative life history research approach to explore the (pre-, during-, and post-) migratory experiences of ten former newcomer high school or 1.25-generation immigrant students through in-depth interviews. Uniquely, the 1.25-generation immigrants, ages thirteen through seventeen, stood out as "a distinctive and seemingly vulnerable one, all the more when compared to the patterns of their younger-at-arrival 1.5 and 1.75 compatriots… 1.25ers may undergo a comparatively more problematic adaptation…" (Rumbaut, 2004, p. 1191). Furthermore, newcomer adolescent immigrants experience acculturation stressors (Patel et al., 2016). This study sought to understand the stories of ten 1.25-generation immigrants as they retrospectively narrate their lived experiences before, during, and after their immigration journeys, with specific questions about displacement trauma and interrupted formal education, and the influences these experiences had on their academic and life trajectories. This study also documented the advice each participant offered to current adolescent newcomer students. By exploring the 1.25-generation immigrant students' experiences, this study hope to contribute to literature in the field so that educators may better understand the newcomer high school

immigrant students' needs and adopt practices that can help them succeed in American schools. The discourse of how our educational system can better support adolescent immigrant students is critical because of the polarizing, politicized perspectives on immigration. At the same time, it was this researcher's aim to shine a light on the untold stories of the 1.25-generation immigrant students, told in their own voices. Perhaps, the more we understand each other's stories, the closer we will get to global compassion (Ekman, 2008).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explored two major immigrant phenomena – displacement traumas and interrupted formal education. Then, I discussed the education of immigrant children before, during, and after displacement. Lastly, I reviewed how cultural adaptation influences educational and life outcomes of immigrants.

Phenomena Experienced by Refugee Students

Refugee students are more likely to experience certain phenomena such as interrupted formal education and displacement trauma than are non-refugee students. Displacement traumas, such as PTSD, may be significant for refugee children who experience or witness violent assaults or disruptive events before, during, or after their journey. According the UNHCR report on the education of refugee children, entitled "Left Behind, Refugee Education in Crisis", the current worldwide refugee crisis is alarming. In 2016, 11.6 million refugees lived in protracted displacement (UNHCR, 2016). From this group, 4.1 million refugees have been living in displacement for 20 years or more. There are approximately 6.4 million school-age refugees worldwide, but only 2.9 million were enrolled in school (UNHCR, 2016). This equates to 3.5 million school-age refugees had zero days of school in 2016. According to UNESCO (2015) and UNHCR (2016), while 91% of the world's children attend primary school, only 61% of refugee children attend primary school. The disparity deepens in secondary education. While 84% of the world's adolescents attend secondary school, only 23% of refugee adolescents attend secondary school. When we reach higher education, the refugee education crisis reaches its tragic climax; while 36% of the world's youth enroll in higher education, only 1% of refugee youth make it to tertiary education (UNESCO, 2015; UNHCR, 2016). In Mendenhall's 16-country global survey and case studies, refugee children faced challenges such as discrimination,

xenophobia, the lack of capacity in schools that have issues of overcrowded and untrained teachers (Mendenhall et al., 2017). Mendenhall et al. (2017) warn that we risk losing yet another generation of children to illiteracy, ignorance, and poverty if we continue to ignore our responsibility to help refugee children attend schools and become literate citizens of the world. Many refugee children are identified as SIFE, or *students with interrupted formal education* (Hos, 2016). Hos (2016) suggests that educational institutions should address issues of academic gaps, psychological support needs, and systemic discriminatory practices. There is a major need for mental health services for refugee children and adolescents (Henley & Robinson, 2011).

Displacement Traumas

According to the American Psychiatric Association, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is defined as a "psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape, or other violent personal assault" (Parekh, 2017, paragraph 1). Symptoms of PTSD fall into four categories: 1) intrusive thoughts, 2) avoiding reminders, 3) negative thoughts and feelings, and 4) arousal and reactive symptoms. Studies have found a high level of PTSD in refugees from varied nations and conflicts. Kinzie et al. (1990) survey 322 Indochinese[10] refugee patients at a psychiatric clinic in Oregon to determine the presence of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Eighty-one percent of the patients were clinically diagnosed with depression and approximately 16% had schizophrenia. Of the 322 refugees, 241 or about 75% were diagnosed with PTSD. More specifically, 50 out of 54 (93%) Mien Americans, 21 out of 31 (68%) Laotian Americans, 101 out of 110 Cambodian Americans, and 69 out of 127 (54%) Vietnamese Americans had

[10] Kinzie et al.'s study consisted of 127 Vietnamese Americans, 110 Cambodian Americans, 21 Laotian Americans, and 54 Mien Americans. Of the 322, 213 were women. The psychiatrists used the DSM-III-R Checklist to determine their PTSD diagnosis.

PTSD (Kinzie et al. 1990). The causes of trauma experienced by these 241 Southeast Asian refugees with PTSD included the Viet Nam War (1954-1975), the Cambodian Genocide (1975-1979), traumatic escape, and trauma unrelated to war. Interestingly, seven instances of trauma occurred in the United States after relocation. One finding, which the researchers found striking, is the high rate of PTSD among all Southeast Asian refugee patients in the clinic. A second major finding is the "overwhelming variety of traumas suffered by each ethnic group" (p. 916). A third finding is the chronic state and episodic nature of PTSD symptoms. Most of the traumas had occurred more than a decade before the study. However, only 6% of those who were diagnosed with PTSD got better and no longer met the criteria for PTSD. In other words, unlike depression, PTSD is a chronic disorder among refugees (Kinzie et al. 1990). Kinzie et al. call for long-term treatments, a combination of tricyclic antidepressants and clonidine, and more understanding and empathy from clinicians who work with these patients.

Dyregrov et al. (2000) interviewed 3030 children ages 8-19 years from Rwanda about their war experiences a year after the Rwanda Genocide of 1994. As survivors, these children witnessed scenes of massacres and destruction. Nine out of ten children believed that they would die during the war. One-third of the children worried that they may not live to become adults. The results of the study revealed that a majority of Rwandan children had experienced many stressors. Their lives were affected by PTSD symptoms such as intrusive thoughts and avoidance reactions.

In 2009, Onyut et al. published a quantitative epidemiological study of Somali and Rwandese refugees in a Ugandan refugee settlement and found that there were significant posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and mental health consequences for armed conflict

refugees.[11] Close to 1500 interviews were used for data analysis. From this data, 73.5% of the refugees reported witnessing dead or mutilated bodies. Other traumatic events included witnessing bomb attacks (67.7%), witnessing injury with a weapon (67.7%), experiencing sniper or crossfire attacks (60.3%) and burning houses (60.2%). It is important to note that most respondents experienced multiple traumatic events (Onyut et al., 2009). Onyut et al. (2009) suggest that there is a need for mental health support for refugees:

> As noted, mental illness severely handicaps the functioning of sufferers across a range of domains, reducing their capacity to reconstruct their lives or build up progressive communities. Mental ill health also contributes to poor physical health. As such, untreated mental illness carries an enormous hidden economic cost that may hinder the recovery of forced migrant populations. The identification and treatment of different mental illnesses such as posttraumatic stress disorder and depression among post-conflict populations is therefore a matter of urgency. (p. 11)

Similarly, Tandon (2016) recognizes participants who needed mental illness support in her qualitative, exploratory case studies of five Burmese refugee high school students (between the ages of 14-21) in a Midwestern urban city in the U.S. Unfortunately, due to the refugee families' lack of information about disability rights and the school's negligence, Tandon's study participants' health issues went untreated. Tandon (2016) emphasizes, "Inability to cope with their own illness pushed some of the participants into thinking that they were incapable and unable to succeed, or that they had to limit their ambitions…Participants in this study had little or no power to advocate for their rights, and by not offering intervention or treatment, schools

[11] Onyut et al. (2009) used the Posttraumatic Diagnostic Scale (PDS) to screen for PTSD and the Hopkins Symptom Checklist 25 to screen for depression.

continued to silence their needs and voices" (17). One of Tandon's recommendations includes an improvement in the flow of information (e.g. IEPs, learning disability assistance, etc.) to and from schools to refugee families.

Students with Interrupted Formal Education (SIFE)

Student with Interrupted Formal Education or SIFE is a term coined in 1997 by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) in its effort to define "immigrant students who come from a home in which a language other than English is spoken and: 1) enter a United States school after the second grade; 2) have had at least two years less schooling than their peers; 3) function at least two years below expected grade level in reading and mathematics; and 4) may be pre-literate in their first language" (Advocates for Children of New York, 2010). In the ACF report, the authors acknowledged the systemic gaps in the Department of Education's capacity to serve Students with Interrupted Formal Education. For instance, there was a lack of academic and social emotional support for older overage SIFE. Another major concern was the experience of isolation and embarrassment these students felt at school.

In similar ways, Cooke (2008) questions the lack of educational support for young refugees in London, who were attempting to finish their interrupted schooling. Cooke concludes that poor educational policies and average teacher education do more harm than good. Lee et al. (2017) assert that there is an achievement gap for many Southeast Asian American students. Their quantitative study focuses on debunking the model minority myth, which they believe further widens the achievement gap.

From 2005-2007, Roxas (2008) conducted semi-structured interviews with and observations of Somali Bantu male high school students and their parents in order to study their educational perspectives and resettlement experiences. One of Roxas' findings includes the

troubling reality that these students had tremendous gaps in academic content and experiences with schools. In Somalia, the history of the enslavement of the Somali Bantus, the overt racial discrimination against them, and school fees kept many Somali Bantu students out of school. Additionally, interruptions to their formal education worsened when civil war broke out in Somalia in the 1990s, and Somali Bantus children and their families found themselves displaced as refugees in Kenya's refugee camps for years without formal schooling (Roxas, 2008). Consequentially, most of the participant's in Roxas' study faced academic challenges in the American public school because they struggled with English literacy skills and had sizeable academic gaps in content knowledge (Roxas, 2008). Roxas (2008) illuminates the importance of educational experiences of the parents or caregivers in these refugee households. Parents or caregivers who had some education in Somalia were more likely to be able to advocate for their children's educational support. These parents were more likely to continue their own education at the local community college to improve their English skills and increase opportunities for better jobs (Roxas, 2008). Roxas (2008) concludes that the "lack of experience with formal education coupled with reported trauma-related problems, including hopelessness and depression, suggest that Somali Bantu children may experience low academic achievement and low motivation for formal schooling in the U.S." (p. 7).

Inclusive Refugee Education

In the United Kingdom, researchers argue that refugee education has largely been underdeveloped and understudied (Pinson & Arnot, 2005). In Australia, Sidhu & Taylor (2007) agree that refugee students have been ignored generally. In 2012, Taylor & Sidhu conducted a case study on four Queensland schools known for their exceptional work with refugee students. Taylor and Sidhu (2012) recommend to schools a holistic, systemic, targeted, and inclusive

approach that embraces social justice. The UNHCR's strategic objectives of the Refugee Education 2030 aim to promote equitable, sustainable, safe, enabling of learning, future-oriented, and inclusive educational systems for refugees, asylum seekers, returnees, stateless, internally displaced persons, and for all students, regardless of legal status, gender or disability (UNHCR, 2019).

Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) used mixed methods to study fourteen host countries[12] from 2012-2014 and concluded that educational quality or lack thereof for refugee students has much to do with what the host country perceives as the inclusion of refugees in their country. As such, countries like Malaysia and Bangladesh have no inclusion model for refugee education partly because policies in these countries do not recognize the status of refugees and have not signed the treaty of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. "Without legal state, individuals fleeing to Malaysia are at risk for arrest, detention, and deportation, and thus inclusion is at odds with the national policy context" (Dryden-Peterson et al., 2019, 10). In cases of nonrecognition, refugee education is taken up by non-governmental organizations while the future of refugees in the host countries is not permanent. On the other hand, host countries, like Chad and Rwanda, that embrace long-term refugees, work to increase inclusive education and a sense of belonging for refugee students. Still, Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) warn that inclusion does not necessarily equate to quality education. Furthermore, Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) suggest that research must not discount the plans refugees make for their own futures, be it to stay permanently in exile or go back home. Dryden-Peterson et al. (2019) explain, "…no matter the length of exile, our interview participants emphasized the need for educational spaces that are

[12] Bangladesh, Chad, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Pakistan, Rwanda, South Sudan, Sudan, Uganda, and Yemen (Dryden-Peterson, 2019)

free from exclusion and discrimination and for post-schooling opportunities that allow young people to use their education in pursuit of livelihoods and meaningful futures over the duration of exile and beyond" (p. 17).

A Longitudinal Perspective on Children of Immigrants

In 1992, Portes & Rumbaut launched a longitudinal, mixed methods study of the 1.5 (those who immigrated at the age of 6 to 12)- and second-generations immigrant students in the 8th or 9th grade from 49 schools in the metropolitan areas of Miami/Ft. Lauderdale, Florida and San Diego, California. The sample of the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) study was comprised of 5,262 teenage students who were U.S. born or have lived at least five years in the United States and have at least one foreign-born parent. The first survey collected the baseline information on the students' families, demographics, adaptive experiences, language use, self-identities, and academic goals (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). By 1995, when the study participants were either about to graduate from high school or start their 12th-grade, the second part of the study was conducted with follow-up questions. 4,388 or 81.5 percent of the original study participants (including those who have dropped out of school) completed the second phase. Also in 1995, the researchers included a parent survey that examined the families' reception and adaptation as immigrants, neighborhood characteristics, and aspirations for their children. 2,442 parents participated in this second phase (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001).

By 2001, when the study participants were in their mid-twenties, the third survey was conducted with 3,613 study participants or 68.9 percent of the original sample and 84.3 percent of the second phase sample (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018). In this third and final phase, participants were asked about their adaptation outcomes, including educational attainment, employment and social statuses, identity, religious affiliations, and future goals (Portes & Rumbaut, 2018). Portes

& Rumbaut (2014) conclude that differences in adaptation outcomes correspond to the human capital and modes of incorporation[13]. The researchers concluded, "Even children of families with no money and little or no human capital can move forward, riding on their own determination and strategic support from their families and significant others" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014, p. 303). Males, Mexican Americans, and those with a disadvantaged upbringing (e.g. very low family socioeconomic status and a negative context of reception) achieve less educationally and occupationally. In sum, the study found that student participants who had good high school GPAs, high educational expectations in high school, strong family socio-economic status, and two natural parents tend to attain educational and occupational goals and experience upward assimilation.

Theoretical Framework of Compassionate Empathy

The reception that refugees, asylum-seekers, immigrants receive upon arriving into the United States needs to be contextualized in terms of the current immigration policies, economic realities, and xenophobic attitude of the nation (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2019). C. Suárez-Orozco (2019) urges us to "break the pattern of stereotyping and prejudice…by bridging the so-called 'empathy gap' between 'others' perceived to be substantively more different than they really are" (Kindle location 2841).

Empathy is the affective reaction to someone else's feelings and a motive for altruism (Hoffman, 1975). Hoffman (1975) theorizes that, in the earliest age of our cognitive development when we have not yet acquired a sense of the other as separate from ourselves, it is innate in all of us to feel empathic distress. That is, "we may involuntarily and forcefully

[13] Portes and Rumbaut (2018) define modes of incorporation as: positive (.e.g. refugees, asylees receiving government resettlement assistance); neutral (e.g. nonblack immigrants admitted for legal permanent residence; and negative (e.g. black and unauthorized immigrants).

experience emotional states pertinent to another person's situation rather than to our own—that we are built in such a way that our own feelings of distress will often be contingent not on our own but on someone else's misfortune" (p. 3). As we grow and can separate our own self distinctly from others, we develop sympathetic distress when we feel concern for someone else in pain, and with our more developed empathic distress, we desire to take action to relieve this pain (Hoffman, 1975). Hoffman (1973) explains that, as humans, we feel for others because we can understand the plight of others. However, there are some of us who, by our own socialization or status in life, who may have had only superficial contact with others who are less fortunate are incapable of feeling sympathy, much less empathy. Those of us who do not act will "experience sympathetic distress or cognitively restructure the situation so as to justify inaction, for example, by derogating the victim or otherwise convincing [ourselves] that the victim wanted or deserved what he got" (Hoffman, 1973, p. 37).

C. Suárez-Orozco (2019) asserts that in order to improve the outcomes for immigrants in the U.S., we need to bridge the compassion gap. C. Suárez-Orozco (2019) explains that between the xenophobes and pro-immigrants, there is a group of people who are the "unentrenched persuadables," who can be reached with compelling immigrant counternarratives, counterfactuals, and "a moral argument about a broken immigration system that needs to be fixed in order to treat people fairly" (Kindle location 2868) that appeal to both the heart and the mind. With compassionate empathy, educators and policy-makers may recognize, empathize with, and take actions to eliminate the barriers that immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees face in educational institutions.

Research Aims & Research Questions

The first aim of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of former 1.25-generation immigrant students in order to inform educators in the ways in which they can support and educate current immigrant students. The second aim of this study was to elicit advice from former adolescent immigrant students to current newcomer high school students. The third aim of this study was to provide a platform for the 1.25-generation immigrants to retrospectively narrate their lived experiences in their own voices, so that, through research and writing, we can help bridge the compassion gap. To these ends, this research study aimed to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1. How do participants describe their (pre/during/post displacement) experiences?

RQ 2. In what ways have experiences before, during, and after immigration influenced the academic and life trajectories of high school immigrant students?

RQ 2a. What is the role of trauma in their adaptation?

RQ 2b. What is the role of interrupted school in their adaptation?

RQ 3. What advice do former adolescent immigrant students have for today's high school newcomer students?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY & DESIGN

Life History Research Design

By using a life history research design, this study explored 1.25-generation refugee or immigrant students' experiences with the goal of shedding light on ways to support them in the United States education system. By engaging participants in semi-structured, in-depth interviews, this study explored how participants make meaning out of their lived experiences as former immigrant or refugee high school students and understand the influences of the phenomena of interrupted formal education and displacement trauma. Merriam & Tisdell (2016) explain, "The key to this type of qualitative research is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning, middle, and end. Other terms sometimes used for these stories of experience are biography, life history, oral history, autoethnography, and autobiography" (p. 34). Life history research design may be the amplifier with which the scholarly audience can listen to the perspective and points of view of people marginalized in society (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, Seidman, 2019).

Sample

This study interviewed ten former high school refugee or immigrant students. Using nonprobability, purposive sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I set selection criteria to recruit the former 1.25-generation immigrant students. I defined the sample population as 1.25-generation immigrant students to be persons who 1) entered the United States as an asylum-seeker and then were granted refugee status, or have made United States their usual residence or home; 2) and were between the ages of 13-17 or adolescence at arrival. The experiences of this particular population – the 1.25-generation immigrant (those who immigrated in their adolescent years from age 13 to 17) - were unique in their adaptation into the American culture, language

acquisition, and academic outcomes compared to other refugee children who entered the United States at an earlier, pre-adolescent age (Rumbaut, 2004). Another sample parameter was that participants was at least the age of twenty years old, so that enough time have passed for retrospection. The reason for choosing a retrospective approach was that I believed any group of current high school refugee students would not have the language or perspective to process their own experiences in the present moment. I wanted to interview former refugee or immigrant high school students who were, at the time of this study, living their lives as adults in the United States. I hoped that the study participants may now have more precise language and self-reflection in retrospection to be able to make meaning out of their experiences (Seidman, 2019). Further, I believed that the richness of their adult lives would uniquely influence how they make meaning out of their adolescent experiences. As Orellana & Phoenix (2016) conclude, "Our longitudinal analyses show the power of narrative as a sense-making device and the value of analytically interrogating these tensions in the service of holistic understandings of childhood and its relationship to adult life" (p. 194).

The ten participants were made up of five females and five males, ranging from twenty to fifty-eight years old. Five of the participants arrived in the United States with refugee statuses. All participants were immigrants who arrived in the United States as teens; in other words, they were all 1.25-generation immigrants. Seven came from Việt Nam, two from México, and one from the Philippines. All were college-going students or college graduates, except one. One was a school district coordinator. Two were college students. Two others were engineers. Another two where information technicians. And three were seeking out their next career or dream. These former 1.25-generation immigrant student experiences, however different and exceptional, are worth listening to, learning about, and empathizing with.

Access to Former 1.25-Generation Immigrant Students

To recruit the study participants, I reached out to friends and family via text, email, and WhatsApp messages. I also posted the recruitment flyer on Facebook and at coffee and market places. One participant reached called me after seeing a flyer at a coffee shop. Another emailed me after my colleague encouraged her to participate in the study. Two, both friends of friends, commented back on my Facebook post. Two acquaintances replied back to my email message. Three, I personally reached out to, one-on-one. And one, my mom convinced to participate. I personally knew five out of the ten study participants. Each participant was offered $50 in cash; four of them did not take the cash.

Data Collection Methods

The method of data collection was semi-structured, in-depth interviews. I interviewed ten participants who are now adults living in the United States. The interview consisted of three parts:1) immigration journey; 2) educational history; and 3) reflection on life. Before the interview, I asked all participants to bring with them an art piece that they've created, a collage, or an artifact that represents their experience. As Merriam & Tisdell (2016) put it, a researcher-generated artifact is a "valuable source of data and can provide another avenue of expression that can be captured in symbols as well as words" (p. 174). Four out of the ten participants brought and shared their artifacts. I interviewed seven of the participants in person at the library, coffee shop, park, mall, and my home. Two, I interviewed over the phone, and one by Zoom, an online conference meeting platform. I conducted one interview with each participant, ranging from thirty-seven minutes to three hours and fifteen minutes long. I used the Voice Recorder App on a Microsoft Surface Pro tablet to record each interview. Once completed, I uploaded each voice recording to an online transcribing program, Rev. Once the transcriptions were completed and

reviewed for accuracy, I shared each transcription with each participant, asking for a member check. I took advantage of Rev's option to share the transcription as well as the uploaded voice recording via email to the participants. Additionally, I asked all participants a couple of follow-up questions via email and text messages.

Data Analysis Methods

Merriam & Tisdell (2016) advise that data collection and analysis should be done simultaneously in qualitative research. After each interview, I: 1) reviewed the purpose of my study; 2) reviewed data by listening to the audio-recording against the written transcription to look for errors; 3) inductively developed categories based on interview protocol sequence of questions; 4) drafted each participant's narrative into vignettes of their lives by categories; and 5) organized and coded emerging themes across each interview in tables, using Microsoft Excel. I repeated this process after every interview. After the last interview, 7) I analyzed these themes collectively to construct findings.

Ethical Issues

My main ethical consideration was the potential post-traumatic stress my participants may feel as they relived distressing memories of traumatic events before, during, or after their displacement journeys. I provided mental health support to my participants by offering mental health resources through a list of mental health and counseling services. My other priority was to keep all identification information confidential, use pseudonyms, and remove or obscure any identifying information. I kept all notes and study materials locked in my home desk. The Surface Pro laptop that I used had a face-recognition mode that only I can unlock.

Credibility & Trustworthiness

I understood that a possible threat to the credibility of this study was my own bias. As a refugee myself, I had my own experiences and assumptions about what it was to be a refugee or immigrant in America. However, my experience was not the only refugee experience. I provided detailed descriptions and quotes to support my conclusions. Finding participants who were from different migration periods helped me compare themes from across different groups of immigrants. My qualitative interview data of ten participants cannot be generalized, but the internal generalizability can be examined from the "*variation* in the phenomena of interest in the setting or group of people studied" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 137). I included enough details so that readers can come to their own conclusions as they read.

Positionality and Management of My Role

I am a Vietnamese American who have lived most of my life in Southern California. At the end of this study, I had spent eighteen years as an educator. It is important to note that my mother was born during the Việt Nam War to a Polish American military father and a Vietnamese mother. Because of this fact, my mother was able to petition for entry into the United States through the Amerasian Immigration Act of 1982. As refugees, we did not endure the displacement traumas of boat people. As refugees, my parents, younger brother, and I began our lives in the United States by the grace and charity of others, including the government. As refugees, our first home in American was someone's garage. Next, we moved into a gang-infested apartment complex. Then, we rented a house. After years of saving, my parents bought their own home. At the surface level, my family lived the American dream and I fulfilled the model minority myth.

I grew up in the 90's in Santa Ana, a city filled to the brim with immigrants and poverty. My arrival at UCLA as a first-gen student in '97 was a culture shock. Although I was top of my class at my high school, I was very much aware of my lack of cultural capital; I was unprepared, unconnected, and unsettled. But, I stubbornly made it to the finish line and proudly began my career in education. I will happily spend the rest of my life paying off my graduate school student loans.

I taught high school English for 14 years and then transitioned out of the classroom as a literacy coach for 2 years. I then took on the leadership role of high school assistant principal. I worked in a total of two districts, both of which served students of color and English Learners. I worked closely with many newly-arrived (also known as Newcomer) immigrant students. As a refugee who grew up surrounded by other refugees and immigrants, I experienced and witnessed the struggles and misalignments of adaptation and acculturation. As I approached the end of the second decade of my career, I became more convinced and frustrated that, in many cases, we were doing more harm than good because of our lack of knowledge about, resources for, and empathy towards immigrant students.

My positionality – as a 1.75-generation refugee (I came here at the age of five), a 1st-generation college student, educational leader, cisgender female, heterosexual wife and Buddhist mother – colored my study. Bourke (2014) writes, "To achieve a pure objectivism is a naïve quest, and we can never truly divorce ourselves of subjectivity. We can strive to remain objective, but must be ever mindful of our subjectivities. Such is positionality" (p. 3). My position helped me connect with my study participants (i.e. former high school immigrant students). On the other hand, I had preconceived notions of what it means to be a refugee student that may not be true for all immigrant students.

Because my study participants were adults who are former teenage immigrant students, my role was not a deterrent to their participation. In fact, my participants were more trusting of me because they knew I was an educator. I shared with my study participants that I was a graduate student working on my dissertation around the topic of understanding immigrant adolescent students to better serve them.

CHAPTER FOUR: LIFE STORIES OF TEN FORMER IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

The findings from the interviews of this study were organized in the next two chapters. Chapter Four shared vignettes of the lived experiences of the ten participants in mainly their own voices, using direct quotes. This chapter interconnects themes into a storyline or narrative from each participant's interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). After data collection, my analysis began with drafting of each life history story by organizing the interview data into specific moments, such as the immigration journey, that each participant experienced or topics, such as education history, that asked each participant to elaborate upon.

To protect the privacy of participants, all participants' and people's names have been replaced with pseudonyms. School and city names (with the exception of Sài Gòn) have also been changed. Dates, countries, states, counties, or regions remain the same. It is the hope of this study that the narratives of these participants' lives vividly bring to life their experiences. The participants become the storytellers, weaving together pieces of their lives in their own voices. Because a few of the participants spoke in both English and Vietnamese, some quotes have been translated from Vietnamese to English, perhaps losing a part of the participant's voice, colloquialism, and expression. Later, Chapter Five presents the themes that emerged across the individual life stories as they relate to the research questions of this study.

Will Nguyễn

Will Nguyễn, a refugee who entered the United States in his teen years, admitted that he still struggles with English presently; he spoke English with a heavy accent, made common grammar errors, and used simple vocabulary. During this interview, he mostly spoke in Vietnamese at the start, especially when he spoke about Việt Nam and his journey in great

details. As the interview questions transitioned to life in America, he began to code-switch, using more English. The quotes in this interview reflected the linguistic change as Will switched from a stylized, poetic Vietnamese to simple English.

Personal Background

Will Nguyễn was born in a coastal town, sandwiched between a mountain range and the Pacific Ocean, in Việt Nam in 1970, five years before the Việt Nam War (1955-1975) ended. Will came from a prominent family of urban-city entrepreneurs on his father's side and a well-to-do, country-living family who owned land since the feudal society before the French colonization (1858-1945) on his mother's side.

> We were a well-loved, well-respected family. Everyone knew us. We lived right next to a major market plaza. One of my first memories before going to school was walking down to the noodle and rice shops and eating my heart's content. Everybody knew who I was. I was "Uncle Thiện's son." I was nicknamed "the Spaniard" because of my curly hair and bigger frame. Instead of paying, I would leave a palm print for the shop owners on pieces of paper. My dad would come by later to pay for all my bills. That's how life was back then.

During the Việt Nam War, Will's father was a ranking officer of the United States-backed Republic of Việt Nam, which was fighting against the Việt Cộng, supported by the Communist China and the former Soviet Union. When Sài Gòn fell in 1975, everything changed in Will's life. The Việt Cộng isolated the country - newly named the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam - from the world and initiated many social reforms, including the confiscation of land, properties, and any material wealth in an effort to redistribute wealth. All private commerce was forbidden. Many families suffered, including Will's family.

> People hid gold bars in walls, in floors, in their gardens, anywhere possible. Money was not worth the paper it was printed on because [the Việt Cộng] printed out new bills. But even so, we couldn't use our gold to buy anything because there was nothing to buy. And if word got around that you have gold, you'd be sure to get a visit from the local officials who will tear your house apart to confiscate everything. It felt like the Việt Cộng just wanted to keep punishing the whole entire country.

Things worsened when the Sino-Vietnamese War (1979), also known as the Third Indochina War, broke out between China and Việt Nam. One of the outcomes of this war was the order that all Chinese descendants living in Việt Nam must leave the country.

> My aunt married [an ethnically] Chinese man. Even though his family has been in Việt Nam for many generations, like many others, his entire family was ordered to leave the country. So, my aunt left Việt Nam with him in '79. Now, at this same time, many Vietnamese were escaping the country. Many of them died at sea. Many were caught and imprisoned. Many were taken in as refugees all over the world. It's ironic and bittersweet that my aunt's family and other Chinese-Vietnamese were forced to leave with legal papers in hand. Well, this changed my life forever, too, because Aunt Nguyệt's departure ignited a desire in my dad's heart. He'd had enough of the new reforms and destruction of everyone's freedom and way of life. He wanted to leave, too.

Filled with many heartaches and triumphs, Will explained that his life has been shaped by catastrophic wars and his father's persistent decision to escape from Việt Nam.

Immigration Journey

Wanting freedom, a better life for his four sons and two daughters, and spurred by his sister's departure, Will's father began to secretly plan an escape by sea in 1981. However, this first attempt failed.

> On a moonless night, the eight of us hid behind a fallen log on the sandy beach and waited for our boat to come. There were lots of patrols on the beach at that time because so many people were doing exactly what we were trying to do that night. By the grace of Buddha, no one saw us. Unfortunately, our boat never came. My dad was conned. He had paid someone for access to a boat, but that person took his money and ran. Before sunrise, we returned home. By then, the whole neighborhood knew we had tried to escape. Before sunset, officers took away my dad and mom and imprisoned them. Everything fell apart. My siblings and I were sent to live with my paternal grandmother. It was a really miserable time for me because I was always getting into trouble and hanging out in the street. It wasn't until my maternal grandmother visited us, saw our living conditions, and decided to take all of us to her home in the countryside that my life improved. My maternal grandmother was a lot poorer, but life in the countryside was so much happier and fulfilling. I got a chance to have a childhood again and go back to school.

Will's mother spent close to two years in prison while his father was imprisoned for three and a half years. As soon as he was released, he put into motion their second escape plan. Doubly determined, Will's father poured every last ounce of hidden gold he had into surreptitiously building his own boat. Under strict guidelines of his probation, Thiện Nguyễn could not leave his mother's house; he had to petition for permission to go visit his children in

the countryside. On the planned escape day, both of Will's parents petitioned to go see the other. Will, his siblings, and his mother headed to the harbor to meet his dad. There, their newly-built boat awaited them, with a month's worth of food and supplies for three families. The plan was to have twenty-seven people on that boat, but that did not go as planned.

> My dad had agreed to take along the families of two of his closest friends. But one of his friends took money from others and guaranteed them passage on our boat, too. From twenty-seven people, we now had 106 people on the boat and it was too late to do anything about it. It was so chaotic, frustrating, and scary. At one point, when I was struggling to climb the rope to board the boat, someone inside the boat reached for my backpack, which was filled with twenty-four cans of evaporated milk that my mother had carefully packed. He told me, "Give me your sack and I'll help you up." I could see the desperation in his eyes. He could have easily taken my backpack and then pushed me into the sea. I looked around and couldn't see my parents in that chaos of people climbing over one another to board the boat. I hung on tighter to my backpack and, fortunately, someone else saw me at that moment and helped me up.

But the trouble did not stop there. Right before the boat was to set off, Will's family couldn't find his eldest brother, who had left the group to look for their dad.

> My dad promised my mom, "Give me fifteen minutes. If I don't return, just go. I promise you that I will find Đức and we'll make it back to you, even if it's on another boat!" Those were the longest fifteen minutes of my life. My dad, he is always the guy who makes sure everything goes right. He had a hot temper...the [bad] language he used, but he's always the last person. He doesn't express his feelings...he loves [us] so much.

Thiện jumped off the boat and went searching for his son. Will was relieved to see the silhouettes of his father and brother before the fifteen minutes passed because he knew that surely the captain of the boat would have started the engine to leave with or without them.

But once again, more trouble awaited them. Soon into the voyage, the little boat had to battle an unexpected storm at sea. The quick-witted and skilled boat captain turned the boat parallel to the crashing waves, defusing and disbursing some of the energy of the storm against the boat's side walls. Meeting it head-on would have been a death wish.

> I have no doubt that the captain, in part, saved everyone's lives through that storm. I witnessed all this because I was one of the few who didn't get sick. Most everyone else huddled down in the hull of the boat while I hung on for dear life on the deck. There were too many people throwing up, so sick they couldn't move to help themselves. I didn't feel sick, so I stayed up on the main deck, watching the waves and night sky. You can't imagine it. The boat rocked side to side, riding the waves. Rolling and curling, the waves covered the night sky and then rolled back like a curtain. Again and again, it was like a dance. One minute, there are the stars and moon. One minute, total darkness. And every time we rolled with the waves, tipping to one side and then another, almost at the brink of overturning. Just almost. And oh, the eye of the storm. So quiet. So dead. Like nothing exists anymore. You're in another dimension. But all of a sudden, I hear rough scratching and slapping sounds on both sides of the boat. Two massive black whales were swimming alongside our boat and helped buffer it from the storm waves. To this day, I believe the whales led our little boat out of that storm into calm water. Yes, the captain and those two whales saved us.

By the next day, in calmer water, Will made use of his canned evaporated milk by feeding the sick. The exhausted captain, who stayed alert and worked through the night, turned off the engine and rested. Will's adventures proved true Shakespeare's sage words, "When sorrows come, they come not single spies/But in battalions." The wind pushed the little boat into a fringing coral reef.

> We were stuck. The more we tried to steer the boat out, the more we were scratching the bottom of our boat. The boat was going to break. Finally, my father said to everyone, 'Jump out of the water. Hold onto the side of the boat.' He thought that if we could unload the boat, it would rise above the coral and make it out to deeper water. But, no one was going to do it. 'If you don't do it, everybody is going to be dead. We need the boat to float. So everyone needs to jump out now!' Once again, no one listened. My father got into a heated argument with one of his friends. The same terrible guy who sold passages to others. He got so mad and they yelled and yelled. So, I jumped first. I just jumped. My brother jumped second. My mom. So people saw that and they started to follow. The boat was floating higher, but the captain was still unsure which way to go without hitting the reef. So, I climbed back up on the boat and leaned out as far as I can at the front of the boat. I looked down and saw deep-blue water and light-blue water. I knew light blue water meant shallow water, and I didn't want to go there. I shouted to the captain to look at my arm. When I put out my arm, he must steer that way. I looked at the water and I held my hand out like this [gesturing with arm outstretched]. The captain moved the boat inch by inch.

It took thirteen-year-old Will, the captain, and everyone on that boat three hours to make it out of the coral reef. As soon as they escaped the coral reef, they landed on the island in the center of it.

> We're so happy. We're done. We're just done. We're tired, just done. We hit the island, but it's a Chinese island. People on the island saw us coming for hours now, I guess. So they were prepared. They took out big machine guns and shot into the water. Oh, we thought we were going to die right there. We put up white shirts to show signs of surrender. Some people on the island boarded our boat and because we had Chinese-speaking Vietnamese on board, we were able to communicate. We traded gold for one pallet of rice and diesel oil for the boat. They pointed us toward the North and we left. Six hours later, we hit Hong Kong. We hit Hong Kong at night time.

Although it was Hong Kong, Will and the boat people – mesmerized by the neon lights and skyscrapers – exclaimed that they had arrived in the U.S.A.

> We thought it was the United States because there must have been fifty… no, one hundred skyscrapers. There were so many lights everywhere! When we arrived in Hong Kong, we actually drifted into a harbor. We were so distracted by the beauty and lights. Someone yelled, 'America! Yeah! Yeah! Freedom!' [Laughs] Minutes later, we were surrounded by police boats. They proclaimed that after July 1, 1981, Hong Kong was closed for refugees. Everybody who comes after July 1, 1981 has got to go to a closed camp. Everyone was ready to accept this fate, except one family. Remember I told you my father started this escape plan with two other families? One almost got us killed with his greedy, selfish ways, and the other one was the friend who decided to not stay in Hong Kong's closed camp. I remember there were nine in the family. Very sweet

and respectable. The man said, 'I'm looking for freedom. I've not come all this way to be imprisoned.' And he kept going. So half of the boat people stayed in the Hong Kong closed camp with my family, and the other half kept going out to sea.

Later, Will found out the rest who journeyed on by sea made it to the Philippines and finally to the United States.

Refugee camp life. For Will's family and the other half of the boat people, they were all sent to a closed or refugee camp on a peninsula of one of Hong Kong's many islands. There, his family would spend about two years as asylum-seekers before receiving sponsorship to the United States.

> For the first week, we were kept in isolation from the rest of the refugees in the closed camp. We had to stay in our own building. They gave us little food, just milk and soup. No solid foods at all so our stomachs could get back to normal because we haven't eaten for so long. Also, they washed our hair with special chemicals to get rid of lice. After seven days, they let us join the rest. There must have been thousands of us there. We each received new clothing, a blanket, a towel, a big cup...about a half-liter...and a bowl. That's life's essentials right there! We slept in barracks, like soldiers. There was always a team of paid cooks who fed us three times a day. Some memories stay with you no matter what. I remember the sweet bread and creamy milk they gave me every morning. I loved that milk. I remember a temple and a church. There was an organization called Gia Đình Phật Tử where I made new friends and learned so much about Buddhist songs and prayers. They also taught English classes, but I never paid attention to that. Everybody in my family went to learn English except me. I figured I had my whole life to learn. I wanted to play soccer instead. So, from

dawn until twilight, except for eating time, I played soccer with the teenage boys at camp.

For Will's family, there were opportunities to earn money. Thiện, Will's dad, sold popular Vietnamese songs using a small cassette recorder. He also hand-painted postcards. Will's mother, Minh, sold clothes that she saved up from Hong Kong's distribution. Will worked in the kitchen. The family not only survived, they thrived in the refugee camp.

By the second year, the thousands of refugees have reduced down to hundreds as more and more families received sponsorship to go to their new country. Through letters, Will's father kept in contact with Aunt Nguyệt, who had made it to the United States. With the help of others, Aunt Nguyệt was able to help her brother's family come to America. In time, Will's family was one of the families whose names were called from the loud-speaker. They set off to the Philippines for six months, as part of the refugee processing system. Finally, in 1986, Will and his family flew across the Pacific Ocean to LAX.

Acclimation to New Life in America

Los Angeles, the city of Angels, was a rude awakening for Will, at the age of sixteen. Will missed all the friends and sweethearts he had at camp. Unable to communicate well in English, Will struggled to make new friends. Relationships became strained with his aunt's family. Within days, his family's hard-earned money was quickly used up. Will's father had to find a job to afford the apartment they just rented.

I was naive to expect more. Maybe that's what happens when you build up expectations...when you build up a dream for so long. We couldn't depend on my aunt to help. One day, my mom pulled out five dollars from her pocket. That's all she had

left. Thankfully, my dad had never let us down. My dad was amazing! [grinning broadly] He found a job right away. With very little English, he walked the streets of L.A. and found a job. We were so proud of him. He went into a signs and banners store and convinced the Korean store-owner to hire him. My dad can draw most anything; his writing looks like printing. He's that good. In those days, they didn't have a printer. They had to use stencils. My dad, he drew everything freehand with ease and speed. And you know what, after a month's time, my dad decided to go at it on his own. He started his own sign-making business. That took guts and determination.

In 2019, almost a year before this interview, Will's father passed away. Forever proud of his father, Will has spent a majority of his adult life making up for the four years of lost time between them when his dad was imprisoned. Will believes he is the man he is today because of his father's compassion, wisdom, and courage.

Education History

In 1975, Will Nguyễn began first grade in Việt Nam under the new order of the Socialist Republic of Việt Nam. He professed to be an average student, always more interested in playing outside with his friends than studying in the classroom. When the Sino-Vietnamese War began in January of 1979, the country closed all schools. Thus, Will stopped school in the middle of fourth grade. Even though the Third Indochina War lasted for a few months, his family did not have him return to school because they intended to escape from the country. When this first escape plan failed and his parents were imprisoned, Will continued to stay out of school even when all his siblings returned to school.

When my parents went to jail, I lived with my uncle and grandmother. My uncle made a comment one day that I would be of more help making money than going to school. I

took that to heart and sold lottery tickets in the streets. This was what lots of poor kids did to make money. When my maternal grandmother found out that I was ditching school and selling things in the street and my two-year-old sister was sickened because of malnutrition, she took us all to her home in the countryside without delay. There with my maternal grandmother's love and care, I flourished. She put me back in school and I began sixth grade.

In war-torn Việt Nam, going to school was not compulsory. Will missed approximately two years of schooling during that time. When he began again, Will excelled in writing and poetry.

The way they taught in Việt Nam was mostly through repetition and rote learning. Like I said, I was never a good student. But one day, my teacher gave me a 10 out of 10 on an essay I wrote. You never ever get 10 out of 10. Not a single time does that happen to any student. It's just unheard of. But she gave me a 10. She believed in me. I don't think it was worth a 10, but that action from my teacher gave me the confidence that I never had. All of a sudden, I was really, really good at something. Or, at least, that's what I was told. From that point on, I was the best poet, the best essayist, the best student of the school, second only to this one classmate who had perfect penmanship!

Although Will improved academically, he was bullied by the country boys. New to the village, loved by the teachers, no father in sight, Will was an obvious target. Every day after school, he was chased home. One time, they blocked both sides of a bridge. Between the option of getting beaten up or jumping into the river, Will chose the latter. He jumped into the river, swam with the current, and made it safely home to his grandmother's house. Will began to train in martial arts to learn how to defend himself. He stood his ground and fought back. From then on, the country boys stopped picking on him. But nothing could erase his memory of his younger

brother, Hòa, beaten up black and blue from head to toe. Will felt guilty because he understood that they did that to his brother as simple revenge towards him, "Some memories haunt you for life."

Will continued to do well at school, tapping into his love of poetry, he remembered every poem, every lyric, every song he could get his hands on. He also became a great soccer player and led his school team to championships. When he finished ninth grade, his father returned and planned the second escape. They succeeded, leaving Việt Nam forever, but all the kids in the family lost two years of formal education. In the Hong Kong refugee camp, Will never took interest in learning English, but expectations changed when he arrived in the Philippines.

> I had a beautiful life for six months in the Philippines. It's funny...they made us learn English this time so I couldn't get out of it. The reason I didn't want to learn English back then was because I didn't like to talk to people. I didn't express myself because everything I learned from my dad. My dad didn't talk much. That's why I didn't want to learn English. But, finally, I had to learn English to some degree in order to go to the U.S. I learned by listening to others and then I mimic them. I listened, I repeated, I answered. A lot of times, they didn't understand what I said, so people corrected me a lot. Even now, too.

High School in the United States

When Will arrived in Los Angeles in 1986, he was placed in the 10th grade, Spring Semester. With his 9th-grade transcript from Việt Nam, he convinced the counselors to give him credit for 9th grade, but was told he needed to take summer school to make up required classes that he missed, including a whole Fall Semester of 10th grade.

One of his best memories was going to Homeroom, which was divided by surnames. It felt like all the Nguyễns on campus were in the same room together. Comforted to see fellow Vietnamese students who could understand him, he looked forward to Homeroom each day, "We just go there for like five or ten minutes, but we can all talk Vietnamese because I didn't learn [much] English yet." One other positive memory was playing soccer for the school team.

> I love soccer, so of course I had to play. At first, I just played with my friends at school, so we were all Vietnamese. Then, we challenged other teams at school and started winning. My friends told me to go join the school team, so I did. There were so many good guys. They came from different countries. There were Mexicans and Koreans, and other Vietnamese. We all love soccer so much. The soccer team brought all of us together who would never have spoken to each other at school. That's a good thing.

Will reflected that he loved to go to Homeroom and temple on the weekends because those were the places that he could truly communicate well. With soccer, he did not have to talk much; he communicated with his body and his moves. In soccer, everybody played by the same rules. When he played soccer, he felt an equal to others.

Even so, Will managed to get into as much trouble as when he was in Việt Nam. One day, another Vietnamese student challenged Will after school.

> I was crossing the street and someone smacked me on the head from behind. I turned around and saw the big brother of a kid I argued with. I told him don't do that. I tried to keep walking, but he smacked me in the head again. So this time I told him, "You hit me again, I'll hurt you." He didn't listen, did he? He smacked my head for the third time and I turned around and swung. I hit him square in the face. Blood [projected] from his nose and splattered on my white shirt. Everyone was watching and thought I was hurt

because I was covered in blood. The boy fell to the ground. He was out cold. Cars were coming, so I dragged him back onto the sidewalk. By then, the principal and teachers had run over. I didn't get in trouble. I was just defending myself and half of the school saw it.

But, Will could not fight off all his troubles. Insecure with his English language development, Will avoided talking to teachers and other non-Vietnamese students.

I didn't speak English [well]. I was scared. When [teachers] looked at me, I was scared. I didn't want them to call on me. I didn't want to talk. So I studied and I studied the textbook like crazy. I always ask my teachers what we will learn the next day so I can go home and prepare for it. They didn't expect me to do that, but it helped my confidence that I know what they were talking about. To this day, I tell my sons to study like that. Learn first, then go into class and hear the teacher lecture. You can ask more questions if you've already thought about it before your teacher teaches you. That's the best way to learn. For me, I had to do this because it wasn't easy for me to understand the reading. I couldn't read it just one time, two times, or three times and get it. I had to stop and look up words in my big heavy English/Vietnamese dictionary. So a small [passage] took at least an hour. A chapter would take hours to read. And another thing, I always sat with the best Vietnamese student next to me so he can explain to me what's going on. I always set a goal to be like the best Vietnamese student. If he has a B, I want a B in that class. Some of these Vietnamese kids came here way, way earlier than me. They have so much more time to learn than me.

Will recounted having to take English as a Second Language or ELS classes and then moving up to regular English classes. When questioned about school services that were helpful,

he could not recall anything. Will felt that even the counselor who worked with him was not as helpful as he had hoped.

> They don't go to me. I have to go there and ask for information. I forced them to check my [graduation] checklist. Here's my question to you. If I didn't go seek my counselor out, then when would they seek me out? How would I graduate on time? I didn't know anything about [graduation requirements]. It's like the very beginning when I showed them my transcript from 9th grade. That wasn't enough. They made me take a placement test for math and science before giving me full credit for 9th grade...well, except for English, History, and P.E.

Will believed that counselors and school staff should have reached out to newcomer students like him more actively. He expressed the feeling of having to "do everything by myself. They should have told me, 'This is what you need to graduate.' But they didn't. I had to force them to review my transcript."

At the end of senior year, Will graduated with his class. He accomplished what he set out to do, graduate as soon as possible from high school and become an independent adult. He regretted not inviting his family to his high school graduation. His older brother, Đức, did not complete all his graduation requirements, so he could not participate in the graduation ceremony. Đức and Will were supposed to graduate together in the same year. To make this outcome less noticeable, Will did not talk about the graduation ceremony in front of his family, "I wish I had them there. I just took the bus that day and went all by myself [to the graduation ceremony]."

Life after High School

After high school, Will had a clear plan, "So my plan is two years in community college. After two years of community college, I will try to go to USC." But this plan did not pan out. He recalled having a hard time getting to class on time because bus transportation was unreliable. When he did make it to class, he struggled to understand, "It affected me a lot. When I went to class, the professors were talking and I didn't understand. Teaching in high school is different than teaching in college." So, he pored over the textbooks, but that did not help either.

> I didn't get it. The textbook, the lectures, the test. They didn't match at all! I didn't understand. It was so sad, so sad. What was I going to do with my future? I didn't see nothing in my future.

Then, a friend asked him to join the Navy with him. It would provide decent pay and a future.

> I felt stuck. I was ready to forget everything and start again. Let's forget about high school. Let's forget about college. I will learn English for four years in the Navy. But then the day came, the recruitment officer came to our houses, my friend was not there. He ran away. He hid. I joined anyway and my friend never joined. [laughed]

Will did boot camp twice. The first time, he could not pass the written exam. So, they extended his boot camp at Camp Pendleton and he graduated with the next cohort. During his time in the Navy, Will was first stationed in South Korea. When the Somali Civil War escalated and hundreds of thousands of Somalis died of disease, starvation, and the civil war, Will was sent over to Somalia to dig graves. Then the Gulf War (1990-1991) broke out and he was shipped to the Persian Gulf, serving in both Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm. These experiences widened Will's worldview. However, one thing came back to haunt him, as so

many memories do. He could not pass the engineering examination to move forward in his military career. He tried four times to pass one exam. All four times, he could not get past the English language. Finally, he left the Navy with an honorable discharge, but with what he perceived as few accomplishments, "It hurt me so badly." Will shared that after he left the Navy, his life trajectory took a disastrous dive. He found his partner had a change of heart while he was away, his family lost their newly-bought home, his parents divorced after thirty-something years of marriage, and he got into trouble with the law twice. "In my twenties, one bad thing after another bad thing..."

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold.

Experience & Perception of Trauma

Will openly shared several experiences that he perceived as traumatizing. He spoke again about his parents' imprisonment after their failed attempt to leave Việt Nam. Just ten years old, he roamed the streets, refused to go to school, and rebelled against his uncle's orders. That was his way of coping with the loss of his parents. When he finally got to the United States at sixteen years old, he experienced another loss. In the refugee camps of Hong Kong and the Philippines, they had a large community of people who were surviving together, living out each day with hopes and dreams of a better future. However, at first, Will did not cope well with this transition.

> Part of the reason why I decided to join the Navy was because my parents were really struggling to provide for all seven kids. They fought all the time. And school was fun and I had good memories, but I could not be the best student who can go to college and graduate. I didn't have the English skills I needed.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Path

Will reflected that although the acclimation to American life was filled with rough experiences, the journey with 105 others on a small boat was not only unforgettable, it also revealed to him how resilient he could be.

> I know how much my parents gave up. When my younger brother, Hòa, was killed, my dad said, 'If I know, I stay in Việt Nam.' But for me, I wouldn't change a thing. I always remember the journey to here. I will never forget it because I was with my family, with my dad. I remember that journey. Every time I fall down, I get up again. That's it. For all of my dreams that I couldn't do, now my sons can. I focus on [my sons]. I can prove to the world when my sons become something. That's why I am so happy to be here right now. I don't think like my dad. In Việt Nam, it was hell. America is heaven.

Will believed that his son's future successful lives will prove to others that he made it, too, 'I'm not [who] they think I am.' Still haunted by his perceived failures, Will hoped for redemption by living vicariously through his children's accomplishments.

Career & Life Aspiration

After discharging from the Navy, Will joined his father's business of sign-making. He then started a family, moved to Riverside, and worked himself up to a management position in a trailer truck-building company. But this did not last long. When Will's relationship failed and his parents' separated, father and son moved away from others and continued their sign-making business. For years after that, they depended on each other; Will's father lived with him until he recently passed away.

In his mid-thirties, Will moved back to Los Angeles, married, and had his second son. There were years of unsteady income and the family struggled to make ends meet, living

paycheck to paycheck, and sometimes just on one paycheck. In time, things improved and stabilized. At the age of fifty, he bought his first home.

Presently, Will affirmed that he was happily married with two sons. No longer making signs and banners, Will considered seriously going back to college and finishing what he started thirty years ago. He was excited about becoming a counselor or parole officer.

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

Will insisted that high school newcomer students should really focus on studying and not lose time socializing with friends.

> If you come to America right now, the best way is just ask and learn, ask and learn. If you see a good student, you ask and learn from them. Right now, you focus and study in class. If you love something, like football or soccer, go ahead and enjoy it and play it. But don't go out with friends and waste time and get in trouble like I did. Remember, when you come to this country, you're already behind. You have to catch up by asking for help and learning ahead so that you can keep up. You need four years of English, three years of math. Whatever [this requirement] is. Make sure you get those [done]. Don't take classes you don't need, like AP Calculus. You don't have time for that. You don't want to fail classes and lower your GPA. All those higher classes, you're supposed to take in college anyways. And don't forget to learn ahead.

Eager to share, Will made a list of advice for high school newcomer students:

1. Study harder than everyone else.
2. Ask for help from good students and teachers.
3. Learn ahead so that you're ready with questions.
4. Don't take classes you don't need.

5. Learn from criticism and change for the better.
6. Believe in yourself so that you can do anything.
7. Don't be scared to be the leader.
8. Don't give up.

By the end of the interview, Will summarized, "I'm happy right now. I'm hard to like, but get to know me and everybody loves me. Still, I don't get my goal, my dream. I want a chance to build my own company and help people. I don't have a chance [yet]. Build barrack buildings for poor people, for the homeless. That's my dream. I have a lot of stuff already, ready to go. Equipment I buy already, but the place, the finances, not yet. My [short-term] goal is to go back to class and learn to become a parole officer or counselor."

Full of dreams, Will continued to reinvent himself. Even as he told me he was happy and satisfied, there was fire in his eyes as he spoke about the future.

Bella Rodriguez

Personal Artifact

Bella Rodriguez brought her high school yearbook, with her name embossed on the front cover, as a personal artifact. Bella graduated from high school in 1992.

> I bought the yearbook because I felt, like I mentioned there, I have different things that I could have brought, but I feel that everything that I went and lived through my high school years, it's in there...and right now in the car, my daughter was looking at it...and as we were looking at the pictures right now, I thought about how I only came to high school in the second semester of ninth grade, but the ninth grade was in middle school.

> When I went to high school, I went into the tenth grade, and in the little time that I was there, I'm in several places in this yearbook.

Several pages were marked with post-it stickers. Bella turned first to the Color Guard page. A younger version of Bella smiled back through the black and white picture with the entire Color Guard team. Next, she flipped over to the Knights and Ladies Club page, "It was a club and I probably didn't understand what they were talking about, but it was nice that they took us in and they embraced us. But other than that, I'm sure it was some type of community service." Bella also pointed out key staff members who made a difference in her high school life.

> [Mr. Jones] definitely made a huge impact in my life. He was band director...I was not [in band]. So what happens is that the color guard and the band director, he was running the whole thing. We were like a huge family, and even though I didn't speak the language, he embraced us. He retired and he recently went back to sub at high school and he's doing the same thing...That was Miss Henderson. That was the ESL teacher. Let's see...That was actually the counselor, Miss Dubois. I was just talking about her the other day because I remember during my senior year, she'd call us in and she was talking to all the students, and trying to decide what we're going to be...I told her that I wanted to be a flight attendant. And when I said that, she didn't say no, that's not a good idea. She said, 'Oh, so you want to be a waitress in an airplane?' So when she put it in those words, I was taken aback...I don't want to be a waitress in a restaurant or an airplane like that. I don't want to be a waitress. So that kind of made me change my trajectory.

Emblematic of the yearbook she brought as her artifact, Bella's memories of coming to the United States are filled with fond memories of the times she spent and the relationships she developed at her high school.

Personal Background

Bella Rodriguez lived her childhood in a small town in México. Every morning, Bella was off to school, but by the evening time, she was back home in her little town where everyone knew everyone.

> I remember coming from school because I used to take a bus… to [my town] and I would eat, I would do my homework, and then like from six to ten o'clock every day, I would be playing basketball and the little town's park. And everybody was there around that time, like all the kids and the young adults and everybody. They would come in and reunite there and everybody was playing basketball. [T]he young adults at that time, they would make the teams and us, the little ones, they would put one little one here, one little one there. So that's how we learned how to play good basketball, because we were playing with adults.

Bella expressed that there was a sense of community in her little town. Everybody she knew was born there and knew each other well. Her entire family was there. Even as she lived in extreme poverty, Bella's eyes lit up with glee as she took herself back to that time in her life.

> And then the food! I love the food! I grew up very humble and extremely poor. Like I tell my kids, my house didn't even have a floor. It was dirt and the walls were made of wood; it was whatever we could find to put on top. Whatever piece of furniture, we would make it look beautiful… just kind of like survival… but I was happy. I was very happy.

It was Bella's mother, Ariana, who always wished for a better life, "[W]e didn't have a home like I described it. That was the type of problem we had. And she always wanted better for us… to have a better future, to have a better life."

Immigration Journey

In 1987, when Bella was fourteen and a half years old, her mother, younger sister, and she journeyed together to cross the border between México and California. It was a long-term plan that the entire family shared. Even so, Bella was not ready to leave her father and the life she loved in México behind.

> So I remember being so happy in México and when I finished sixth grade, my mom had this idea that she wanted to come to the US looking for a better life. You know the American dream, which is like anyone else. And so... but her idea was for her to come first and then she would take us. So she did, she came first and every year she would go back and come back and go back. So on the third time that she went back in December she told... Well, my dad told her to just take care of the kids… And just at that point, I guess they were not in good terms anymore. And so I didn't want to come… I was crying that I didn't want to come and my sister was younger than me and she was like, Oh yeah, you know, whatever. But I was so unhappy, I was so happy México that I didn't want to come. And then the fact that you watched those movies where people are immigrating and the big trailers and then they get killed. So I was so afraid and I was like, no, no, because of course we'll come illegally… And so I remember the night before my mom was leaving. It was all said and done that I was not coming. And I asked my dad to buy me some socks and he refused to buy me socks. So I got upset and I said, 'Okay, I'm leaving.' So I'm here because of socks! [laughed joyfully]

Bella recalled her uncle, a bus driver, dropping them off at a remote town. Mother and daughters then took another bus to a city right at the edge of the border. An old elementary school friend of her mother was a known coyote. That day, he took them into his home to wait for nightfall.

> Have you been to those outlets that are right as you cross the border? Back in the day, they were not outlets. There were apartment complexes. And so, there was just like a riverbed and they just dropped us out. Someone dropped us out there and we just went over like this and went to the apartment building and that was it. But I always make fun that, you know, they call illegal people 'wetbacks.' So that night it was raining. I mean it was not like pouring, but it was raining. So I will say it was just meant to be. Yes. And so that's how we ended up in South Central.

For Bella, the crossing over to the United States was somewhat anticlimactic. From the apartment complex, it was a short walk across the dry riverbed to the other side of the border. No fences. No walls. On the U.S. side of the border, in another apartment complex nearby, another family awaited their arrival.

> So you know, they already have their connections. So my mom's friend already had, I mean he was going out there, so they rented, there was actually a family. So they could rent that apartment and those are like their connections. So when we got there, like they gave us dry clothing and they fed us again and then he drove us to L.A.

Acclimation to New Life in America

In the first year that Bella arrived in the United States, she spent much time crying and missing her old life in the little town,

> Right then in that moment, you have a better roof, you have a nice bed, you have a floor. It felt like it was like a golden jail kind of thing… You know life is better, but I wasn't happy. In México I was poor but I was happy [because] I had my freedom. I had the freedom to step out of my house, to go to my family, to go to play with my friends, to play basketball from six to ten at night. And I can walk home at 10 o'clock at night and

> nothing would happen to me… I wanted to go back. I cried and cried… The other thing was you know, like in México, you kill the chicken and you eat it, you kill the cow and you eat it… it's all fresh and organic… When I came here, someone told me, 'Oh, that meat has been in the freezer for months.' I didn't eat meat for one whole year!

Thus, for a whole year, Bella ate only ham sandwiches. 'I gained ten pounds!' she laughed.

With time, Bella began to fit in and move forward.

> I always had that mentality of what I need to do. I'm not going to drown myself. You know, just crying. I cried things out and then I let it go. Then I was like, 'Okay, what do I need to do?'... And then once I transferred to [my high school] there was a big connection like joining the flag team even though I didn't speak the language.

When she went to her 20th year reunion, Bella asked her longtime friend, Jennie, "Did you know that while we were in high school, I didn't speak English?" Jennie was incredulous and admitted that she did not know Bella was unable to speak English well.

> You know, but it was all of us. It was not just me like my entire group, like my good friends… nobody knew that we didn't speak English. So they just embraced us and I remember trying to speak English and not having the right grammatical structure… Tim, who was the drum major in the band and other Mexican American kids that knew the language would tell us how to speak. They would tell me how to say it the right way… but in a nice way. So, I never felt, I never saw a lot of discrimination and I know there's a lot of differences. But I never felt that with this group.

Through Bella's positive mindset and high school friends, Bella found a place that she once again belonged. People like Ms. Mitchell who let Bella use her car and insurance paper to take

her DMV test that gave Bella comfort. When the DMV clerk asked for Bella's social security card, Ms. Mitchell simply said, "She forgot it." That was all she had to say.

For Bella, making it in America meant doing what is necessary to jump through the hoops and roadblocks in the system. Living in a society that did not accept her as one of its own, she must reinvent herself and find new ways to solve every problem in order to survive and thrive.

Education History

In her early years while still in Mexico, Bella attended Kindergarten through second grade in her little town. However, by third grade, because her dad wanted a more rigorous education for both his daughters, he had them test into a high-performing public school in a metropolitan city nearby with very affluent students. Bella had a long-lasting impression of the students in this more privileged school, "Some of them were like, "Oh, what did you do this summer?" I just played basketball and they were like, "Oh, yeah, we went to Paris."

Although her family did not have to pay to attend this city school, she had to test to get in, "Good schools in México, if they're public, you have to take a test and if you don't pass the test, then you go to [another school]... Then of course, there are private schools, too. But, they're super expensive."

One fond memory she had was being recognized at school. At the end of the quarter, students would get recognized in front of the entire school in a flag ceremony for the academic performance, "I felt like it was more honorable over there [to be a top student]."

Bella continued her education in México's prestigious public school all through the first semester of ninth grade. By December of that year, she crossed the México/U.S. border and

immediately continued ninth grade, second semester in South Los Angeles, California. As an immigrant student, Bella did not have any time major interruptions in her formal education.

High School in the United States

Almost fifteen years old, Bella arrived in the United States and entered the second semester of ninth grade. Living in one of the poorest neighborhoods of South Los Angeles, her mom quickly realized that a change was needed, "[T]he environment was not really what my mom wanted for us… [There were] a lot of prostitution. So we lived in an apartment and the minute we came back from school, we had to go into the apartment and didn't get out until the following morning. And so, she didn't like that. So when we finished that year of school, the ninth grade, we moved [to another city about ten miles away]." Still, she did not end up going to school in her new city at all.

> Back in the day, the school was capped, like it was overpopulated…So what they were doing, they were busing students to faraway schools. [T]hey asked my mom, 'We have Colinas High School and we have Brightington…' [M]y mom looked at me and she asked me in Spanish, 'What school do you want to go?' And I said, 'I don't know.' The only one that I understand is Colinas. Like I couldn't say Brightington… That's how my education was decided – based on what we knew how to say. So I went to the Colinas High School and it was like 45 minutes to an hour [bus ride each way].

Thus, Bella was bused to a high school where the student population was much more diverse, mostly of Caucasian and Armenian American students. She described that on her first day, all bused students were placed in the library because they did not have class schedules yet. On that momentous day, Bella met her lifelong friends, Leslie and Sonia in the library. By lunchtime,

they were bosom buddies and Leslie introduced Bella to her cousin, Omar, whom Bella later married.

Bella noted that the bused students were recent immigrant Latinx and Asian American students from the poorer neighborhoods of South Central, "[I]t was a very diverse population. The majority were Anglos and then the bused [students] were the ones that brought in the diversity." With the exception of Mr. Jones, the band director being a black man, the faculty was white. Generally, Bella enjoyed her high school life. With limited English, she still involved herself in school activities and organizations, like the Color Guard. Even so, Bella explained that not knowing English well enough excluded her from fully participating in school.

> I had a great time in high school… I also played Varsity basketball… But, I let it go after like a few games because I didn't understand the language. It was so difficult for me to understand. [pause] But here what prevented me from fully enjoying the game was the language because I said it was like I didn't understand English and then I still had a hard time understanding like different versions of English, like the African American accent and most of the girls in the varsity team were from that background. And I couldn't understand. I mean, I didn't understand English clearly. So even a few words here and there or other commands because in the flag team, I didn't know English, but I learned the command language. You know, what I needed to know within that setting.

Bella circled back to the positive people and high moments in her high school years.

> A really high point for me was also the fact that my counselor when I said I wanted to be a flight attendant, she kind of shifted my thinking about what it was that I really wanted to do in life. Also, there was so much support from the whole band. They made it fun. It

> was so much fun. I remember traveling with them to Vegas. Mr. Jones did so much for us, for the whole group. He included us. He could have said, 'Oh, no, you're not speaking English.' But, he included everyone. So we went to Vegas. We went to Lake Tahoe, Salt Lake City. He exposed us to Disneyland, like with the band. Like everything was free like we participated in the Hollywood Parade… So he exposed us to things that otherwise if I had not joined this group, I would not have known about. And I remember at one point he wanted to take the band to Vancouver, but then we... the issue of how are we going to come back here? And then he's like, okay, we're not going. So no one ended up going.

The camaraderie and connectedness of the band members motivated Bella to perform better and do well at school.

Bella was given two hours of English courses each year of high school, so it was up to her to go to summer school and catch up on other required credits in order to graduate on time with her class. It also helped that Bella's math skills were exceptionally more advanced than her peers. Even though she could not understand what was being said, she was able to decipher the math problems, "I was able to pass that class because I was just looking at the teacher, how he was moving the numbers and how he was getting the answer because I already had that background knowledge." Bella graduated with honors from high school and received a $500 scholarship that helped with the purchase of an old, two-toned car that was "almost running, not running."

Although Bella struggled to learn English throughout her high school, she came out of it a more connected student, still committed to her educational goals.

Life after High School

Because Bella did not have a green card or social security number, no recognized documentation in the United States, she did not know if she could even sign up to go to college. However, she was helped by her high school counselor.

> It was my last year in high school, so to go to college you needed to have your green card or social [security number]. So I didn't, but then there was a law that if you signed up to go to college when you were still in high school, then they were not going to ask you for that. So my counselor was very key in signing up, not only me, but all the students that were in the same boat… And so after I graduated, I enrolled [at the community college] full time, but I was still taking English classes.

At first, Bella struggled in college, feeling that she was not being challenged to her full potential, especially in the ESL classes. When Leslie, whose legal immigration status was in the process of being granted, suggested that Bella attend Camino Community College with her, Bella thought that she was stuck where she was because she would not have been able to apply for financial aid without documentation.

> I wouldn't be able to come because I didn't have a green card. And [Leslie] said, "Well, they just asked me for my reference number because she didn't have a green card yet, but she had already submitted her papers to get processed and they gave her a reference number. And so I said, 'Oh, okay. So how many numbers are those? Show me your number?' So, she showed me her number and then I invented my own number.

She was quick to add, "Well, when I [was in] college, I remember not being fluent in English. I was able to survive, but I was not comprehending everything." She recalled taking a political science class three times, but still not passing, "I was probably reading, reading, reading, but the

comprehension of the English language was not there because it was more than reading for information...So it took me seven years to transfer to the Cal State."

Not only was English fluency a problem, but even getting to school was a hardship. Taking the bus to Camino College would take about three hours that she could not spare. Thus, Bella scheduled her classes at times that she could hitch a ride with Omar or one of her good friends, "I would schedule my classes during their same schedule. So that way, I would have a ride to school and then a ride back… If they dropped classes, I had to drop my classes."

Even through all that hardship, Bella was able to complete her general education courses and was ready to transfer. However, she hesitated.

> [I]t took me a while. I was afraid to transfer… I always thought, 'What if they discover I lied and they're going to charge me all this money?' So needless to say, it took me about seven years to transfer from [Camino Community College] to Cal State. And like after that seven years I was about like twenty-three years old. I married my husband and so he is a U.S. citizen and within like six months, I had a temporary green card and then I transferred to Cal State… in '99.

Bella achieved her educational goals and earned a Bachelor's degree in Urban Learning, with a Minor in Education in two years after her transfer. Later, she obtained a Master's degree in School Counseling and Leadership, "I'm about to finish my doctoral program in Educational Leadership."

However, looking back, Bella Rodriguez wished she knew "more about how to navigate the education system." For years, she lived with the fear of "being discovered that I had lied to

enroll at a community college…[but] even if I knew how to navigate [the educational system], I was still afraid."

Experience & Perception of Trauma

Bella openly admitted that she dealt with depression for a long while through high school, but on the outside, she looked like a strong, determined student, "I think I was depressed for a long time, but I have always considered myself to be a functional depressed person. Even if I fall down, I keep going. What else do I have to do?"

Bella began to date Omar in eleventh grade. She developed a close relationship with Omar's mother, who helped her through her depression.

> His mom was very key in pulling me out of that hole, you know, in really believing in myself and making me more assertive… back then, she was so helpful because I didn't know anything. And like every day [we talk] and she's so wise too. But she was very key and made me believe in myself because my mom was always working.

In her own family, Bella shared that they never spoke about their traumas and feelings of loss. It hurt Bella that her sister, Elizabeth blamed her for the experiences they both went through in México when her mom was gone in the states making money and her father left both sisters with their aunt, who did not take good care of them. Perhaps, because they were so poor, their aunt did not share any meat with them. So, when Bella's mom sent money home, she recalled eating well. Years later, Elizabeth would accuse Bella of spending all that money on her friends, "My sister said, 'Oh, you know, Bella used to spend all that money on her friends and blah, blah, blah, blah.' I don't remember that. I remember getting money and going to the mercado and just eat and eat and eat."

But, other than blaming one another for things in the past, Bella shared that they never talk about [their experiences]. She used to cry by herself. Then, as she got more involved in high school, Bella made more connections with new friends and that helped.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

For Bella, the actual physical immigration journey was short and carefully planned. The struggles with poverty in México and South Central, her mother's ambition for a better life, and her father's determination to give her the best education possible were the experiences that made deep impressions in her professional drive and life goals.

> I feel that my dad instilled in me the importance of education. So I think I brought that in with me because I remember my dad since I was little, he used to say you're not getting married until you have a degree… No one in our immediate family was educated. He had eleven brothers and sisters and out of all of them, he's the only one that had a technical career. He was a tourist guide so he went to school like a trade tech kind of thing, like a two year college. And that was the most with the immediate family.
>
> And then the other thing also... You know, my mom was like a go-getter… there were no obstacles for her. [S]he always found a way to do things. I think I have that of her. Like nobody tells me, if you tell me no, I'll find a way to do it. [W]hen some people try to do things even at work, like I wasn't able to do that, like I always find a way to do it.

Bella added how much she was bothered by the extreme poverty that she experienced in her childhood while observing her rich schoolmates in México or at Colinas High School.

> I mean we were always struggling with money… [T]here was a lot of 'there's no money for this, there's no money for that'… Oh, I don't want to live like this for the rest of my

> life. That was always in my head. And the other thing is that I had already been exposed in México to what 'rich' looks like, you know, my friends from middle school in México. I knew what the possibilities were and I knew the extreme because I was living in the extreme and I knew what could be the potential.

The contrast of privilege, wealth and security against the backdrop of her own family's life was a constant familiar ache for her. Bella used this pain as a motivation to move up the social ladder into a middle-class life.

Bella believed that if she would have stayed in México, she would have completed her educational goals, too, because she was so passionate about acquiring higher education. The only difference is that she would not have been able to have a financially stable life because there was so much corruption in the country, "Even if you have higher education [in México], you don't make enough money." For instance, if you go into education, you must work two jobs, like many of her teachers did. During the day, teachers teach. By evening time, they must also tutor to make enough income.

> You know, I came from nothing… humble beginnings, and I still appreciate my life. I appreciate that I have the freedom to have some luxury in my life if I choose to. I'm still not that type of person that would spend $1000 on a purse, but it's not because I can't, but I don't want to. I have other things and if I had stayed in México, then that would not be possible. So definitely being an immigrant and being able to be here has given me the opportunities that otherwise I had not had in my country.

Career & Life Aspiration

Bella's entire career has been with one of the biggest school districts in Los Angeles County. She started as a Teacher Assistant, even before she had legal documentation. Next, she

taught as a preschool and second grade teacher. Then, she worked at the district level with Pupil Services as an Attendance Counselor and was part of the School Attendance Review Board. She continued her career as a Parent Educator Coach in her district. Then, Bella became an Assistant Principal, "And right now, I'm a Title I Coordinator. So I oversee the Title One funding for 68 schools."

Bella lived with her husband, three daughters, and mom. When they bought their house, in which they've been living since 2001, one important aspect was parking space. Having spent most of her teens and twenties in South Central, finding parking spaces was always so difficult because everyone's garage was converted into a living space for others to rent or another family member to live. So, all the neighbors parked their cars outside. She noted that these are the little things that mattered. At the time of this interview, Bella was completing her Doctorate in Education.

> Since I was little, I always wanted to have a doctorate degree. And then I joined the program like three years ago. Prior to joining the program I had already said that's it, I'm not going to pursue that. I need to focus on my children. I need to make sure that they're successful. I don't want to be selfish. And so when I started working as an assistant principal at a high school, the principal has his doctorate degree, and he said, 'You should sign up.' I'm like, 'what do you know about me?' And so I shared with him my story and he said well that's an easy way out. And I think that's what I needed… So then I started looking into it and I had to take the GED and I couldn't sign up for it. I tried and I tried for hours and days and I would come back and say, "You know what? It's a sign from God that I shouldn't sign up. I already tried many times, days, I can't sign up.' And he

said what he would always say, ‘That's an easy way out! Get into your office and call them and sign up.’

Bella recognized that she would not be able to achieve her Ed.D. without the support from her mom, husband, and daughters. She asked her mom to move back in with her to help take care of things at home. Omar was completely supportive with all her choices. But it took her eldest daughter some time to adjust.

> My oldest daughter had a really hard time. Even now she throws it at me and says, ‘Well, you wanted to have a doctorate degree? You're always stressed out.’ I had to stop that because she was stressing me out even more. So I told her, I said, “Enough of that. This is one of my dreams. I had it for a very, very, very long time. If you had a dream, I would never ask you not to pursue it. So I don't want to hear that again.’ And so she did. She stopped. So for the last two months or so, I think she said something similar to that, but in a nicer tone. But it was more like, ‘Oh mom, you wanted to have a doctorate degree, so you're almost done.’

Satisfied with her life, Bella felt more empowered when she joined the doctoral program. Driven and unstoppable, Bella also joined a Principal’s Program concurrently, “In order for you to get [promoted to principalship], you need to go through this in-house program. See, it is required. So when I told my husband that I was joining, he just looked at me and he said, ‘Well, so I guess the doctorate program is not challenging enough for you.’” Once she completes the Principal’s Program, she will pursue the principalship. After three years of being a principal, Bella will look into a higher role such as working in Human Resources, or becoming a director or assistant superintendent. In addition, she would like to teach a class at the Cal State level.

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

For Bella, she was cogent that her message to high school newcomer students may differ depending on what their immigration status may be because, as she explained, each immigrant cannot and will not experience life and school in the United States the same way.

> [I]t all depends...are you coming to the U.S. legally or illegally? It makes all the difference. But I also, you know, working in the education system, I always tell my students, you know, even if you don't have the legal status, like that shouldn't stop you from your dreams. You know, you just find a way… So maybe I guess [find] a mentor at the school, someone that understands what are the issues that someone that has just arrived to the country is going through and trying to help them navigate, because more than anything there are going to be failings.

Bella insisted that newcomer students need to persevere.

> I feel that perseverance is very key because there are going to be many obstacles. And see, the thing for me is that even if they were obstacles, I never saw them as obstacles. So It's like, 'Oh yeah, I have to jump. Oh okay. I just have to keep going.' I feel that I would tell them don't drown. And the little obstacles that you have, find a way. You'll always find it. And there's always a way.

She encouraged newcomer students to come talk to counselors, teachers, and educators, anyone who can make them feel connected to the school "because all you need is one connection or someone who believes in you."

The following is a list of Bella's advice:

1. Follow your dream.
2. Find a mentor who understands what you're going through.

3. Find a way. Persevere.
4. Connect with counselors, teachers, staff.

Đraco Đinh

Personal Background

Đraco Đinh was born in Sài Gòn City, in Việt Nam. Growing up, Đraco had very fond memories, "I did have a very beautiful childhood in Việt Nam… [P]rior to 1975, it was a beautiful country and I like everything I saw. The poverty… as a kid, I didn't see any differences." His was an ancestral house, so several generations of relatives lived together. Đraco himself was the seventh out of nine siblings, five boys and four girls. Fearful that their sons would not survive conscription into the Army, Đraco's parents devised different escape trips.

> Basically my parents decided to divide the family in multiple ways of escaping from South Việt Nam. So I, my sister and her husband escaped [by sea]. My older brothers escaped in another region. A year later, my parents and the remaining siblings escaped a different route. Eventually, we all united here in San Diego, California.

Immigration Journey

Đraco was about fifteen years old when he left Việt Nam with his adult sister, Phượng, her husband, and two children. They set out together by sea, like the hundreds of thousands of other Vietnamese boat people during that era. Đraco recalled the trouble from the start of the journey, "It was a small wooden fishing boat that should comfortably accommodate probably ten to twelve people, but there were 325 people crammed into that single boat. Like a sardine can." Sick and delirious, Đraco was in and out of consciousness during the sea voyage.

> I should have been dead. I should have been dead at sea but I didn't… And all I had to do was roll over and I'd be off on the side of the boat and nobody would even care or have strength to help me. The boat [didn't] stop. Somehow, some way, I regained my consciousness and realized I was still on the boat even though I could hardly walk.

Đraco felt tremendously lucky to have survived the sea voyage. The sea journey lasted three days and four nights. Grateful for his life, Đraco affirmed, "The captain of the boat was brilliant. Very brave man. Uneducated but very brave man. And we were right on track. We had plenty of fresh water left and some dry food left. We didn't encounter any pirates. We encountered a minor storm, but nothing major…"

By the fourth night, the boat's engine was showing signs of distress. Serendipitously, their tiny fishing boat landed in Malaysia and was immediately met by coast guards.

> We landed in Malaysia and it was not a friendly welcome but we landed with the coast guard there. And eventually, we passed into the shore and the boat was basically ruined with all the saltwater that collected into the engine. And so yes, we successfully landed without their permission, per se, but I must say that now that you ask this question, it's been over 40 years and I still remember that day as if it happened yesterday. [I remember] vividly because as a kid, I didn't really know the word humiliation, until that point. Because basically the patrol officer lined everybody up, [including] women and children, and slapped everybody in the face. Just a gesture of humiliation more than anything else. And we just stood there helplessly and accepted the punishment.

Refugee camp life. Once in Malaysia, the boat people were taken into a refugee camp on a deserted island.

> And it's surrounded by rivers and they patrol the rivers so once you cross the river, you're supposed to stay at the refugee camp until either you get sick or get permission to leave the camp [with sponsorship]. Altogether, I stay there for eight and a half months. It got to the point [where]... I started losing hope because the Australians, the Swiss, the U.S. [representatives] were sponsoring people left and right but somehow my name never got mentioned… I started losing hope and so I spent almost all my time chopping down wood in front of the jungle. [Finally] one day, they called my name and I thought, 'Well, it must be a mistake.' I dashed out and lo and behold, our family was called. About three weeks later, we landed in Virginia, USA.

Acclimation to New Life in America

A Lutheran church in a rural area of Virginia had sponsored his family.

> We were the first Asian Vietnamese in that entire region. But my impression is still very favorable to the point that the people in that town, all white folks, and yet they did not look down upon us. They offered a helping hand. They carried us through the paperwork and legal immigration and introduced us to the first job ever. So it was a farming area, but it was a wonderful atmosphere to grow up in, at least for the first six to eight months [except] winter time.

Coming to Virginia, the world was completely different. For the first time, he experienced cold weather. For the first time, Đraco struggled with loneliness.

> Scared. Cold. Hungry. But mostly scared in the sense of loneliness. Especially during the winter time when about 4 PM, all the skies are getting dark very soon and when you turn on the TV, nothing but English-speaking. No Asian friend of any kind and no one else to talk to in your common Mother language. So it's a sense of very scared loneliness. I didn't

> even know how to use a phone. But we take it day by day. I started a job at the local factory as a janitor. So did my sister and her husband. So day by day, we adapted to our new life and new schedule. But it wasn't easy.

Less than a year later, no more than about fourteen years old, Đraco began corresponding with friends from the refugee camp. Someone suggested that he move to California where the weather is [warmer] and there were definitely more Vietnamese immigrants, "[In California], there is an ESL program so we can learn English and so on, and so forth. So I asked my sister, 'Can I leave?' And I bought a one-way [Greyhound] ticket from Virginia to California and I have been here ever since."

Đraco moved into his friend's home and shared a room with him and enrolled in high school, "But knowing that I have no, any other relative connections beside this friend and with no money in [my] pocket. It was quite a learning experience for me. I did the school work because this is the only way that I can channel my energy accordingly."

He also took on a part-time job washing dishes and did not rely on food stamps or the welfare system, "I [felt] pride that I want to be independent and I don't want to rely on social welfare even though they offer social services at that point. But somehow I get by. So I guess you learn to survive as you go out in the real world."

Đraco traveled across the country to escape from his loneliness. However, when I arrived in California, things did not improve right away. In fact, he faced more isolation.

> [A] lot of Asian immigrants populate California already, so the attitude of the general population toward the immigrant, I think, was not as friendly as it should be like it has been in Virginia. And I was dumbfounded by so much of a drastic change. The travel across the country took a couple of days, two, three days. But then it's like black and

white. At first I was almost taken by surprise when... I didn't do anything. I was a kid. What did I do? Why the cold shoulder treatment? Why the stares? Why the look?

Đraco reasoned that others only saw his Asian-ness and cannot get past the memories and aftermath of the Việt Nam War on Americans.

Within three years, his parents and the rest of his siblings were successfully sponsored by Phượng, who was assisted by a Vietnamese organization in Washington D.C. Đraco added, "At that point, as you can see, that the immigration was very lax and not as strict or stringent as they are now." The entire family reunited in San Jose, CA.

Education History

Đraco attended school from primary to eighth grade in Việt Nam. Đraco readily professed that in Việt Nam he had hated school.

> I learned how to fight. Because I despised school, I despised authority even though I was sent to a private Catholic school. Expensive, but I despised that whole experience altogether. I was like, 'Why do we have to learn French? Why French so superior? Why don't we learn Vietnamese?' And speaking French, speaking English show you are sophisticated or show you are educated and so on, so forth. It means you are a scholar. But speaking Vietnamese, you're not.

By his disinterest, Đraco retaliated against the Catholic school system in Việt Nam, because it tended to support the colonial, Eurocentric ideology that the Vietnamese language was commonplace, whereas French and English were superior cultures and languages to learn.

When Đraco escaped from Việt Nam, he lost about a year of schooling during the time of the refugee camp and the first couple of months in Virginia, "Didn't care for it. It became an

afterthought at that point. Now how do we survive? How do we function? Where we can find food?... But at that point, I was very much in survival mode."

High School in the United States

In California, Đraco entered 9th grade. He was grateful for his supportive teachers, especially his math teachers, "even though we could not communicate or converse in a meaningful way because I had to use a lot of broken English, spaghetti English, and a lot of gestures to get my point across…. They were very supportive and to me that is very encouraging in terms of overcoming the stigma, overcoming the inferiority complex…They [showed] their kindness...understanding, and they have encouraged me along the way."

Learning English was a tedious and very slow process for Đraco. Just one page from the U.S. History textbook took hours to understand. With a Vietnamese-English dictionary, Đraco would translate every word he did not understand. Then, there was the problem of making sense of idiomatic phrases, figurative language, and colloquialism. Humble and positive, Đraco reflected, "I was struggling for many years but I had the deepest sense of appreciation for my command of the English language even though there's still room for improvement."
Rather than wallow in his loneliness and sorrows, Đraco focused his energy on doing well in high school.

> And day by day, it doesn't come easy. But day by day I think that looking where we came from, our disadvantages and our future ahead of us, it was a driving force for us to better ourselves. To excel in all the areas, mathematics, English, this and that. Even though we had limited command of English language, we need to overcome that as well and be able to mingle with the mainstream, if you will. And to me, up to this point talking to you, it's still fresh in my memory, it's still a motivational force now up to this very point of my

life. So I think that all the immigrants must have shared similar experiences and attitudes.

Đraco felt that it was essential that he focused his attention on learning English over math and science.

> I truly believe that you've got to be able to converse, communicate effectively in the language… I put great effort on learning English…[because] if I cannot communicate my point across, I'm useless. Either that or I got my salary, my wages, my chances of promotion [are] going to be minimized in many capacities. [T]herefore, [helping immigrants] to communicate effectively is first and foremost, I think that is a vehicle, also the key to open all the doors afterward. And yes, it didn't happen overnight but it did happen. And even though talking to you now I still speak with an accent but I'm okay with that. As long as I can get my point across of what I want to convey, I'm okay.

Đraco's high school only offered one hour or period of English Language Development class. Thus, Đraco made the effort to attend the adult ESL classes at night during his high school years as well as after high school.

In ninth grade, Đraco recalled a group of Vietnamese peers who arrived in America at least five years earlier than him.

> [T]hey spoke English like there was no tomorrow...Wow! I wish I could talk like that. But then, two, three years later when I'm able to build a repertoire of vocabulary and grammar and stuff like that, I began to listen more carefully to what they were saying, those 1975 people. I realize that they just repeat the same thing over and over again, nothing else… At that point I didn't know any better so I was impressed by their ability to converse, but then English or any other language is no different. You have to

> learn it and practice on a daily basis otherwise you just learn by rote. And the same set of words they repeat over and over again to the point that it [became] really boring and tedious. It gave me a lot of confidence that, hey, I can do better.

Đraco reflected that he was quite grateful that he struggled so hard to learn English, "Adversity reveals itself, reveals oneself to oneself. And I took that as a motivation...It helps to build who you are and to face any upcoming problems or challenges that life will throw at you… So, to think that I'm speaking to you now, I'm forever grateful for the experiences that I went through."

Life after High School

Đraco accounted that he owed his school success to his hard work and dedication, "I guess from early childhood… I never cared much for schooling because I despised being brainwashed and learning by rote. And I'm more of an independent thinker and thinking outside the box has consequences, being in the Asian culture, as you already know."

Even though Đraco asked for advice from his counselor, he did his own research and explored his options, too. He went to college and graduated with a Bachelor's in Information Systems.

> And that's pretty much the extent of my formal education. The rest of the way, I must say is mostly self taught. I taught myself many other topics because I knew for me to propel in my career path, I needed to be more well-rounded. I needed to be more knowledgeable in certain aspects besides just that little aspect… I educate myself along the way… I learn what's working, what's not working and then try to compare notes and so on.

Đraco did not want to become an engineer, but to please his parents he "went through the motions and graduated."

Experience & Perception of Trauma

As Đraco considered the losses and traumas in his life, he sighed, his voice cracked as he responded.

> I think you touched a soft spot here. Let me answer the question in two parts. First, just my immediate family members… We didn't lose a soul except for our properties. We went from the middle-class to basically penniless. So what did we have, we had our health, we had all the family intact. So in that regard, we just have to rebuild it… For the second part though, when I was at the [refugee] camp, there were many tragic stories from the various waves of people that landed… They encountered pirates or storms along the way and so on, so forth… As you may have heard many families left together but by the time they landed on shore, only a few families remained. Or they encounter pirates along the way. Normally, they get all the possessions [taken], but also their dignities and [pauses] and all the tragedies that you can imagine.

Đraco subtly and painfully eluded to the violent crimes that occurred at high sea, including rapes and murders. Not only that, others perished by starvation or sickness. Many boats were swallowed whole by the deep dark sea without a single survivor. Đraco remembered listening to others sharing stories of their journey, "As a kid, you listen. And you can see - especially the young women - you can see that they have come through something tragic."

Đraco admitted feeling a sense of anger and hatred for the pirates for all the atrocities and crimes they committed, "I don't know how to channel those angers and frustrations because it didn't happen to me, but it happened to my own people… [P]art of negative energy stayed with me for a long period of time and I hated it."

Đraco and his family's immigration journeys all differed, not only because they were divided up and experienced separate adventures, but they all have their own perspectives and views about their trials and triumphs.

> That's a very tough question to answer because first of all, each of us has a different set of personalities and attitudes and ambitions afterwards. So we've been exposed to the same set of challenges, we tend to react and manifest a different result. And to me, the negativity, I used that as a driving force to better myself and to show that I can do it, to overcome the stigma, so on and so forth. But other siblings may look at it, say, 'Now, why is life so tough?' This and that. 'We used to have money, now we are broke. Used to be who and who in society. Now we are nobody. Used to have a house, now we live in an apartment in the ghetto.' So on and so forth.
>
> But I think the sense of feeling sorry for yourself didn't last long because either you stand up and strive and live for another day or you are going to be crushed by society as a whole. And I think that, fortunately, my parents come from an environment that we believe in good ethics so it's instilled in all the children in some capacity. So even though we came from a different way and eventually we united in San Diego, over the course of maybe the first five, six, seven years, we all branched out and were able to stand on our own feet. And I think that it's not a common response per se, but I think overall my siblings turned out to be better than average, better than okay. And that may be attributed to the upbringing, to the environment we were exposed to as well.

For Đraco, throughout his life, he stayed true to his free-spirit, independent, positive nature.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Shaped by his experience in the open sea, Đraco learned not to take his life for granted.

> Well, do I believe in miracles? I don't know what a miracle is but I think looking back though, in my time of reflection, is that I was given a second chance. And it wasn't my choice. It's just like I should have been dead and I was not. So that is the same motivation, speaking to you now, that is the same motivation that prepared me to where in school, where in life, anything that I put my mind to. And I think that this is the same general attitude of Vietnamese immigrants, either the first generation or the second generation and so on, so forth. It's a part of who we are… The images are very vivid and very three-dimensional.

Đraco candidly expressed that he has little patience for immigrants who don't have the drive or motivation to better themselves in this new country, "This USA is not a paradise, but compared to what? Compared with where I came from, Việt Nam, it's a paradise. It's not perfect, but it's a paradise." Being such a determined immigrant student, he could not relate to other immigrants and refugees who did not strive as hard as he did.

Career & Life Aspiration

At the time of this interview, Đraco was a Software Test Specialist, "I can say that I solve problems and get paid for it." Đraco worked on medical devices, "I'm good at what I do and more importantly, I'm passionate about what I do. I know that I'm very fortunate that I'm able to make a difference on the people that I will never meet… I think that I've been blessed in many ways, doing what I do as an engineer, but also being able to touch [the lives of] thousands of other people."

In the beginning of his career, Đraco acknowledged that it was rough for him. First, like many of us new on a job, he did not fully understand his job as a test engineer. When he struggled so much that he almost got fired, Đraco took courage to ask his peers, "What do you do

daily?" Once he asked for help, Đraco realized that he had a real talent for solving problems. Proudly he explained his job.

> Well, software has bugs. And for the system to work well then all the bugs have to be resolved. They have to be identified and they have to be resolved. And that's pretty much the high level. So my job is to find problems before the customer does. And finding problems is not easy enough but you have to think contradictory to what a programmer does. They build something, my job is to tear them apart. To break them any way possible. And that's my job. And therefore on medical devices, when a surgeon performs a surgery of some type, it's driven by software. And therefore he or she is less likely to make mistakes.

Loving his job, Đraco bought books and attended seminars to learn more about his field. Even so, he had several tough managers that made his work experience painful. He learned and grew from those experiences. To be specific, he learned what not to do as a manager from them. Soon enough, he became the Senior Lead, then the Manager, and moved on up to Director in about fifteen separate companies.

> I'm 58. I think that years ago, I reached the upper echelon of my career. So I'm really proud of that. I earned it along the way but now that I'm in the second half of my life, I no longer have a desire to climb the corporate ladder or compete with the younger generation. I can't compete with them anyway because I'm slower…

Đraco looked forward to retiring soon. In Đraco's life, he felt satisfied. However, Đraco confessed that in his personal life, he made a lot of costly mistakes along the way, "I've lost a lot of valuable time and energy...It took away a lot of enthusiasm [from] my youthful life… There is much I want to achieve… to accomplish between now and the end of my journey." Đraco

admitted that growing old and having limitations is “a bitter pill to swallow… and my time is not unlimited anymore.”

Đraco divulged that if he had a magic wand and could change the past, he would hope that he would have more courage to truly follow his dreams, goals, and passions. In the last five years, Đraco found a passion for giving back, especially to the orphanages in Việt Nam.

> And the soft spot I have is the orphans and the underprivileged people back home. To me, that would give me the final victory lap, if you will, before I hang up and say, ‘Okay, this is the end of my journey… Like all the career successes over the years, I felt great, but only for a short time… I want to leave a legacy… for the last four, five years, I’ve been participating in various charity events back home and I enjoy those experiences tremendously. But I also know that it’s barely scratching the surface. It’s a drop in the bucket. And there are more that can be done.

Đraco happily recounted his first trip back to Việt Nam where he visited a hospital that performed cataract surgery for the poor. On a whim, Đraco wanted to see the machine the surgeons were using.

> They took me to an operation room. Guess what? There was a machine that I actually worked on here in the U.S… I can use that machine better than the surgeon because I worked on it. And I know it’s bulletproof! I know that with high level confidence that with my contribution, even though I get paid as an employee, I made a difference… And it was a very profound experience for me… You travel halfway around the world and here is [my work]... It’s a whole, closed circle. Big circle, but closed circle.

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

With urgency, Đraco advises high school newcomer students to learn English first, learn it fast, and learn it well.

> First and foremost is that, first you're behind. You learn the English as fast as you can, day, night, weekend, do whatever. You learn English, learn English first. You can defer chemistry, physics, and mathematics later. Because Vietnamese, Asian countries will go and [teach] these topics first because we need to have a job. But if you couldn't talk, no job offers. So we learn English, learn English first.
>
> And learning English from school is not enough. You have to learn on your own at night, at home. You have to make a lot of mistakes; you have to have the courage to converse as much and gather the courage to talk to the other people and make mistakes along the way. But this is how you learn [English], how you master the command of the English language in the shortest time possible. But also put in the work ethic and before you know it, in a short period of time, when you lift your head up, you have traveled far already.

Đraco encouraged immigrant students to keep their spirits high and overcome racism and discrimination.

> As immigrants, we all automatically, we have a stigma as a second or third-class citizen. Fair or unfair, that's not debatable. It's a fact, it's a part of life. But using that as a positive energy to give you motivation, to feed your hunger… And not try to be victimized or feel sorry or have a pity party for yourself.

Đraco advised the importance of surrounding yourself with good friends who are also ambitious learners, “[Don’t] hang around the people who go nowhere… Find people who are going somewhere… like-minded people who motivate and push you along the way.”

Đraco continued about the importance of pushing yourself and working hard to achieve your goals.

> But you have to push yourself first and I mean other people can help you but the only person that truly can help you, is one looking back in the mirror. And this is the speech that I give to my loved ones. And sure, don't expect life to be fair, don't expect life to be easy especially in a new, foreign land that doesn't speak your native tongue. And you don't look the part, you don't look [have blond hair] or blue eyes. Don't expect life to be handed to you on a silver [platter].

Like a father-figure giving life lessons, Đraco hoped immigrant students would toughen up mentally and be resilient in the face of discrimination and injustice.

> It's going to be challenging, you're going to be discriminated against. Life can be unfair, you could be looked over, passed over for promotion and so on, so forth. But hey, guess what? Move on. And I think that the resiliency in mental attitude is there, that's actually much stronger than the people who were born here… You’ve got to have it.

Again, Đraco spoke about drive and how essential it is to keep immigrant students going and making sacrifices to achieve goals.

> You’ve got to have that drive… Just put your head down and plow through and put in that extra hard work. Wake up at night, sleep a couple of hours a day, sleep on the floor if you have to. Save money…

Finally, Đraco suggested that immigrant students be their own teachers first and not rely on others to teach them or find information for them, “Start educating yourself and focus on your self-improvement.”

In list form, here are Đraco’s advice to high school immigrant students:

1. Learn English first, fast, and well.
2. Keep your spirit high.
3. Find good friends with common goals.
4. Push yourself. Work hard.
5. Be mentally tough. Be resilient.
6. Have drive, be hungry, make sacrifices to achieve your goals.
7. Focus on self-improvement.

In his own terms and words, Đraco concluded to keep being hungry.

> I guess to sum up what I've been saying in the last hour and a half, if I had my life to live over as a refugee, as an immigrant, I would try harder than I ever did. Working hard is one thing but I work twice as hard and I will bust my behind even more, taking a second job, third job, or taking more risks or really pursuing my dream. And not be complacent. [You] want to get to the point where you are well fed, have a job, steady job, steady income, nice car, this and that. One becomes less motivated, less hungry. And that is a trap. And I recognize it but I also allow it to change me and I lost some momentum along the way and that is my downfall. So yes, going back to... If I could have my life to live over, I would bust my behind even more.

Oneria Hernandez

Personal Artifact

Oneria Hernandez brought with her several color photos. The first photograph was of her in the eighth grade. That was the first year of education in the United States. The second photo was of Oneria graduating from Kindergarten in México, with her mother next to her. The third photo was of Oneria and her sister, Olivia, in school uniforms in a Méxican private school. A few more photographs of friends and Oneria, including one in which she was receiving recognition for her high G.P.A. at school in the United States. Finally, she presented her graduation picture from Mt. Sierra High School. Oneria disclosed that she went to three different high schools: Cielo High, Verde High, and then finally Mt. Sierra High School, where she graduated in 2016. To Oneria, these photographs represented her memories, her identity, and her roots.

Personal Background

Oneria Hernandez was born and raised in México. Oneria was the middle child of three children in her household. Oneria recalled only a very good life in México, "Actually, I have no negative [memories]... I had a very good childhood, very healthy."

Her father went back and forth from México to the United States in order to earn money and prepare documentations for the rest of the family. "The plan was to come over and get an education."

Oneria shared that way back when her parents, Jorge and Maria, were only dating, they decided that immigrating to the United States was a life goal for both of them, "So my dad had the mentality of coming over [to the states] and then making money to go back to México and

marry [my mom]." Crossing and re-crossing the border was what her dad did for ten years before they all crossed and reunited in California.

Immigration Journey

All throughout Oneria's life, she shared her parent's dream of coming to the United States, "Actually, I would just wish to come over. I just wanted to leave México as soon as possible."

In 2008, Oneria visited the United States for a month, partly to complete immigration documentation. It took a while to get immigration documents for everyone in her family, with her youngest sister, Maribel, being the last to get hers done. That was why they stayed longer in México, even when the rest of the family had papers.

Finally, in 2012, the family made another trip to process Maribel's paperwork. During this trip, Jorge Hernandez suggested that Oneria and her older brother, Juan, both stay with him,

> So I was just waiting for my sister to get her papers and then once that was done we [would come] over. But the plan changed because I was already there and then my dad said, 'Well, what if Juan and Oneria just stay?'

Oneria's mom went back to México to stay with Maribel and waited for another year before the entire family was reunited in California.

Acclimation to New Life in America

The very first thing Oneria noticed about the United States was the different buildings and houses the country had, as compared to the ones in México. She also remembered being shocked to find the clothing in stores and food in markets priced so cheaply. Things in México seemed much more expensive. When asked why she believed this to be the case, Oneria answered, "It's all about the government… corruption, all that stuff."

As Oneria was settling in, it was her dad' brother, her uncle, who helped her acclimate to the new life in Orange County, "He introduced me to the school system, to the streets, to the stores, the basic stuff."

And although her mother had wanted to move to the United States for years, once here, it was hard for her to transition, "My mom had the biggest impression because in México, we have a big house… like a really huge house. Two floors. And then, we came here and we lived in a garage."

Like many immigrants, Oneria's family must make tremendous sacrifices and give up a more comfortable way of life that they had in their homeland to be here in the United States. In return, immigrants hope for more freedom as well as better education and careers for themselves and their children.

Immigrants not only lose their properties, wealth, and position in life as they immigrate to this new land, they also leave behind family members, loved ones, and friends. For Oneria's mother, it did not help her feel better about her situation in California when her mother questioned her decision to cross the border. Oneria explained, "And then my grandma would always tell us, 'Why did you decide to come over and live there instead of having your house and castle?' That's what she would say...yeah, my mom was the one [who] suffered."

Later, their lives improved, "Well, this is not going to be forever. So my mom, she now got a house, they own a house."

Oneria revealed that it was just as hard on her adult brother, Juan, when they first arrived in Orange County, "He didn't like it either. He just wanted to go back." In the end, Juan stayed in the U.S.

In contrast, the youngest in the family, Maribel, acclimated very well and became very independent, “Oh, yeah! She already became independent. She worked up north in San Francisco...with my brother.” Maribel planned to continue with her education after making some money.

As for Oneria, she never looked back, “I have always been confident. I said that things happen for a reason and for good, and I love going to México, and I never regret what I did.”

Education History

Oneria attended a private school in México from Kindergarten to seventh grade. Oneria was a straight-A student. She recalled the school being a Catholic school with very strict nuns.

Since her immigration journey occurred over the summer, she was able to start the new school year with her peers. Speaking frankly, Onerica felt that she was more than a capable student in all her classes, but the English language was hard, “I was the smartest one in the class from all the classes… It was very similar…, [but] it was hard because of the… language.” Although Oneria had a chance to study English in México, she was not fluent.

> I would understand it, but I wouldn’t speak it. I understood it very well, and then I knew a few words here and there. Oh no! I knew the basics, but it was just like the basics. I wouldn't like to speak it, but I would understand it very well.

Part of Oneria’s strategy as she was learning more English was to hang out with girls who would speak English to her, “Yeah, they would like try to speak Spanish to me and I said, "No. I understand. Try to help me." Maybe if I was home, that's where I speak Spanish.” Before a full year’s end, she was able to communicate well in English.

High School in the United States

Although she was top of her class as a student in México and she still learned very quickly, she lost interest in exceling. "I was like a regular student. I wasn't really that involved in school." Certainly, it was hard for Oneria to go from top of class to someone who was behind her classmates because she had to take English Language Development (ELD) classes.

To further complicate things, in the four years of high school, she moved from one high school to another. At the very least, the constant movement stifled her educational growth as she played catch-up in each class. Additionally, she struggled to make deep connections with friends. She felt making friends was almost pointless when she did not know how much time she had in one place.

There were also moments of distractions for Oneria. She found herself ditching class. It started innocently enough as she met up with her friends in the restroom. But, they took longer to get back to class. They would enjoy talking and taking pictures. Then, Oneria got caught by school safety officers. This is an example of why her mother called her a troublemaker.

Teachers like Mr. Martinez, her ELD teacher, helped ground Oneria, "I'd just give up and then the teacher, he said, 'I know you came from Mexico, but you're too smart, and I want you to push up yourself because I want you in two honor classes, but you need the English.'"

She was often recognized by her teachers for her smarts. But this came at a price, too. Envious classmates picked on her by making fun of her language and accent, "But it wasn't really because of that. It was because I was so smart. They just couldn't deal with it, and they would just make fun."

For the most part, Oneria ignored these remarks, "I have always high self-esteem, and year, I didn't really listen to them because it's not worth it."

Life after High School

After high school, Oneria attended Mt. Sierra College. She got married and had a baby. Her parents and her husband support her endeavors, "I just came here with one goal: getting a Master's degree."

At the time of this interview, Oneria was finishing up her last semester of college, "I'm getting two A.A. degrees… I'm getting a Liberal Arts [degree] and a Humanities [degree]."

Experience & Perception of Trauma

> Oneria revealed that her parents found it hard to let go of the memories of México. They always bring back flashbacks. They're always like, 'Oh, I'm already old enough. I want to go back.' But then, they never go back… Yeah. So they're always talking about going back to México just to live there, but they never go. They just go visit, and my mom said that sometimes she regrets coming to the States...Why? Because I was a troublemaker back in high school… Yeah, I was a troublemaker. And every time she said that to me, she'd say, 'Oh, regret going to [the U.S.].' She kind of like throws that onto our faces. We don't even worry about it.

Another sense of loss that Oneria had was her relationship with friends. When she left México, she left behind all her friends. Once settled, she thought she could make friends again. However, sometimes life doesn't go as planned.

> Since I was little I came to this country when I was like twelve years old, and I had no friends. I had the mentality that my friends don't exist. And then I just came over and my mentality changed. But then I went back and realized that, oh yeah, I was right. There are no friends. For now… In school… [my friends] would just get me into so much trouble…

> That's the reason why I started to hang out with guys instead of with girls because guys, they would always have my back. And girls, they would do the opposite.

Oneria struggled to trust others in her life.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Since before she could remember, Oneria knew one of her goals in life was to cross the borders and make something of herself. She continued to be determined to break the discriminatory stereotype, "You know, Mexicans are known for coming over and just to commit crime…" Oneria wanted to prove people wrong. Her immigration journey had helped keep her focused on her life goal of completing a Master's degree.

Career & Life Aspiration

At twenty-two years old, Oneria had yet to start her career, "I'm about to graduate. I have a healthy baby. He's a year and a half… And I'm in the process of becoming a citizen."

Oneria looked forward to moving out of her parent's house.

> I'm always looking for more stuff. I never settle down. What I'm looking for now is to move out of my parents' place because when I got pregnant I was about to move out, me and my husband, but they said I needed financial help, so they wanted me to stay at home with him. And we did for now, but we're kind of ready to become independent.

In terms of the next steps in her education, Oneria looked forward to being accepted to transfer to a 4-year university to earn her Bachelor's, Master's, and hopefully a Doctor's degrees. Oneria desired to become a social worker.

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

Oneria contemplated deeply over what advice to give teenage newcomer students, "I would say to never miss school. There is nothing more important than education. There are no friends in the world, especially in school. Believe in yourself. You can do it."

She continued, "Find a mentor who's already gone through it."

She advises immigrant students to "take extra classes. Read books. Lots of books. Get involved in school more than anything. What else? Just to get everything that's educational like you're not staying out too late."

Here is a list of Oneria's advice:

1. Never miss school.
2. Set education as a priority.
3. Believe in yourself.
4. Find a mentor.
5. Take extra classes.
6. Read books.
7. Get involved in school.

Oneria concluded that immigrants have an edge over those who were born in the U.S. Immigrants suffer or live in poverty or feel that they never belong.

> I feel like we work the most. We work harder than the people who are already from here. Because they get all this help from the government and they don't care. They don't really care because they have all the [resources]... They don't suffer...All my cousins, they're all from here and I always look up to them because they're old. They're like in their forties, thirties. And then they said like, 'You inspire me because you came from Mexico and

you're about to finish college and us, we don't have a degree. We don't have anything, but you work more than we did.'

These common immigrant issues give them motivation and drive to become better and achieve more.

Trí Phan

Personal Background

Trí Phan lived in Việt Nam, right by the beachside. Trí's childhood was filled with games with neighborhood kids, daily swims in the warm beach water, and happy memories.

So because where I lived, it was very close to the beach. So I walked there, I swam almost everyday with kids. We spent a lot of time outside. Here [in the U.S.], we spend a lot of time inside with computers, computer games. [In Việt Nam], we just go outside and play with your neighbors, the kids. You create your own game and use anything you have to play games. Creative games for me to play…

One unique aspect about Trí was that he had polio, which stunted the development of one of his legs. His foot muscles weakened and he had to wear a brace. Trí recalled kids making fun of him. The way he responded is true to Trí's fighting spirit, "I guess I remember when I was young, back in Việt Nam, I wore the brace. So kids… they notice… One time, I think it was fifth grade and they teased me… Instead of crying, I kicked them!" In that time, most kids wear slippers. Trí always wore tennis shoes to help support the brace. So, when he kicked the teasing kids, the kick hurt more than usual. Everyone was surprised that a person with disabilities will fight back.

Immigration Journey

In Trí's house, uncles, aunts, and grandma all shared the big ancestral house. When Trí's family left Việt Nam, his grandma stayed behind with the house. The first person in the family to leave was Aunt Thu, who left before 1975 because she married an American soldier. In 1978, Trí's father, Tin Phan, left because he was a South Republic Soldier. The Communist Party would not leave him alone and there was always the threat of retaliation. Just as importantly, Trí's father was concerned about his sons becoming drafted as they turned sixteen years of age. Trí was the middle brother, but Tin took the oldest and youngest sons - and not Trí - because Trí had polio. Trí walked with a slight limp because one of his legs was underdeveloped. The government would most likely not draft Trí even when he was old enough to join the military. Therefore, Trí's father and two brothers left by sea in a big ship that went directly to Australia. Aunt Thu, in America, sponsored Trí's father to the states soon after. Then, Uncle Tân and his family left by foot through Cambodia and somehow made it to America, too. The fourth group of escapees included Trí, his two sisters, his mother, and his Uncle Tiến's family.

In 1980, they took a small boat and risked their lives in the open sea. Trí's escape group traveled out in the open sea with a total of thirty-eight people. The small boat was owned by Uncle Tiến's boss. Every family paid the boat owner money for passage in this secret voyage. Uncle Tiến was the helmsman during the trip.

It was a known fact that large ships and sea vessels sometimes would rescue these small boats with escapees. Sometimes, the boat people were captured and arrested. Sometimes, they were completely ignored. This was the case for the first two big ships that passed by Trí's boat, filled with people crying for help. A third vessel passed by them, too.

> First, when we saw it, we all waved. We do everything to let them know, so they could see us. They passed us. But then about five minutes, we saw them turning around and so that's [when] they picked [us] up. And after they picked us up, they said, 'Okay, the reason we picked you guys up is because a storm is coming.'

Trí realized how catastrophic it could have been if that third ship did not return for them.

The boat people were taken to the deserted islands of Indonesia and handed over to the Indonesian authorities. On the first island, they stayed for two months. Later, they were shipped over to a second bigger island where Trí's family waited for sponsorship for another thirteen months.

Refugee Camp Life. On the first island, life was precarious and scary. Overcrowded with approximately 200 refugees, ten people died of malaria in the short two months that Trí was there. The bigger island helped ease things, but the days dragged on with nothing to do.

> We're just hanging out and doing nothing. On the first island, we'd just go fishing. [The authorities] provided us food. I think they [gave us] one bag… of food and rice and if you don't like it, you can trade with the local people… So we trade with them for fresh fish.

The big island had even more refugees and they were kept in the closed camp, isolated from the local town. After moving to the big island, Trí joined the Gia Đình Phật Tử at the makeshift temple. Also, there was an English class that anyone can attend.

Trí's wait, although long, was not riddled with uncertainty because it was his father who was sponsoring them, "We expected to go to America because my dad was already there. So we waited for him to do the paperwork and sponsor us… A lot of people, they don't know any

relatives, so they had to wait until other [humanitarian] organizations in any country for [sponsorship].

Acclimation to New Life in America

When Trí landed in America, he reunited with his father and brothers in Louisiana, "When we first moved to Louisiana, we stayed in a trailer. We didn't have a house, so we had to stay in a trailer. And it's a small trailer. It was cold. The weather's cold…We stayed there for, I think, only six months because it was so cold over there and my mom was weak."

They made contact with Uncle Tân, who was living in Orange County, California, where the weather was warm and moderate. There was also a large Vietnamese American community known as Little Sài Gòn in Orange County. Uncle Tân welcomed Trí's family into his home as they settled in California.

The most important thing about Trí's arrival in the United States was his appreciation of the fact that his family was finally together again after years apart. His father and two brothers helped Trí acclimate to the American life, "I think because we're lucky we have family here. We didn't run into any trouble, any issue...So we didn't have any issue with adapting to the new country or anything."

Education History

In Việt Nam, Trí Phan attended school from Kindergarten through the tenth grade. Even though he went to school during wartime, there was little interruption except for the few weeks at the very end of the war when the fighting and bombing intensified in the Spring of 1975.

Trí shared a unique difference between the school systems he experienced in Việt Nam versus in the United States. School cohorts worked differently, quite student-centered.

> And school, that's different here because school here, you go to different classes, right? So, school there, you don't go anywhere. If you go to that class, you stay there. The teacher rotated… So to me, that is better because you stay together. Once you go into that grade, and you stay in that grade, same class, you know everybody and you bond and get closer. So, if the same class goes to the next grade, it would be the same and you stay with all your friends, you go to the same class with the same friends. So, your friendship is closer. Over here, you move around… But over there, if you stay in the same class, your friend's the whole group. Maybe thirty students.

When he escaped Việt Nam and waited in Indonesia's refugee camps, he missed a year of formal education. Once in America, his counselor thought it wise to have him start high school all over again, since his English was very limited. In fact, Trí was studying English in Việt Nam before he left and took advantage of English classes in the refugee camps.

High School in the United States

In Louisiana, even though Trí was sixteen years old and had completed the tenth grade in his home country, he was placed in the ninth grade of high school. This was a decision that he appreciated then and now because he realized he needed all four years to build and develop his English skills. He had actually finished the tenth grade before leaving Việt Nam. On top of that, he lost more than a year's time of education at the refugee camp.

> Yeah, they put me back in 9th grade. But the thing is, even if you learn English back in Việt Nam, I go there, I have no idea what they're talking about… The lesson, I can read. But I couldn't listen to it. It's hard to hear it or talk. So, that's why every time the teacher teaches the lesson to the students, he had to write it on a separate piece of paper and then hand it to me at the end of class. I couldn't understand what he said.

Trí estimated that there may have been just a handful of Vietnamese students in the entire school. No ESL or ELD classes were available. He recounted a time when he tried to tell his teacher that he was leaving for California, but could not communicate that message correctly.

> I remember when I told my teacher, I had to go to California. But my language wasn't that good. I was like, 'Okay, I quit.' I remember his reaction, 'You quit?" I remember exactly the tone I used, I quit because I have to go. And he says, 'Why?' So instead of using the word "transfer," I used "quit" [incorrectly]. And he's the one that always, when he dictates the lessons to the students, he'd write me notes. My English wasn't good, but in math, especially the math class, I was top in the class. Even the teacher asked me to grade the work. In Việt Nam, the two topics, the two subjects that we focus on are literature and math. So that's why, people who came from there are very strong in math. [For instance,] we start Algebra in sixth grade.

Once Trí and his family moved to Orange County, California, everything changed. All of a sudden, he could find Vietnamese students everywhere; there was a larger number of Vietnamese refugees who settled in Southern California. There were many more programs to support Newcomer Vietnamese students, including ESL classes and Vietnamese-speaking teachers. Socially, there was a Vietnamese Club in school and Vietnamese temples in the community. Trí had an unexpected view on the change of environment.

> To me, there is a disadvantage because you have people [who] speak the same language. You don't really try harder to learn a different language. So I used a lot of Vietnamese, of course. Yeah, it slowed me down… because I know if I stayed in Louisiana, maybe I would have picked up [English] faster. But when you go here, a lot

of Vietnamese, so your friends are all Vietnamese, it's just like you're back in your old country.

Trí ruminated that perhaps he may not have minded staying in Louisiana if that meant learning English better. He compared both his brothers who came sooner than he did learn English in Louisiana, and they both learned it better than he did.

Life after High School

After high school, Trí went to a Cal State University and studied mechanical engineering. At first, he wanted to follow his older brother's footsteps and major in microbiology, too. Soon, he realized this was not for him and changed his major. Trí was still learning English in college by taking several extra English and reading courses. Even in college, he was still relying heavily on translations, "It's not like directly I understand and know right away."

Trí saw the disadvantage he had as a teenager trying to learn a new language and adapt to a new way of living. It was exhausting.

> I translated it back to Vietnamese. You're better when you come here when you're young, like you. So, your language, English is your primary language right? [interviewer nodded] But for us, because we were teenagers… we have to translate back to our primary language. So that slows us down a lot. So we spend more time reading. But, solving a problem, no problem!

Trí pointed out that there was a huge difference between high school and college, "In high school, the subjects are not that hard. Until you go to college then it's totally different." Trí graduated with a Bachelor's degree in 1992 and then went to work.

Experience & Perception of Trauma

When asked about experiencing trauma, Trí did not position himself as someone who has experienced deep trauma, "We didn't have any trauma… I don't remember having any." He understood that the sea journey and refugee camp experience were scary and treacherous, but these feelings did not stay with Trí, did not linger in his mind and heart. Trí's temperament was calm and collected in the face of trouble. For example, Trí confided that his disability does not stop him from living life or being outgoing, "People with disabilities, sometimes people shy away from society because you're different and especially if your language is different. But to me, I didn't pay attention."

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Trí reflected on his immigrant experiences and the trials most immigrants go through. To him, these hardships help build character.

> I'm thinking about it because… when you are an immigrant, a lot of it, you have to learn a lot of stuff, you have to start a new life, adopt a new custom so you have to learn a lot of stuff. But it helps you, it's just like to me now, I have a chance to learn more about Buddhism. So, I guess when people are poor or have hardships, they strive to be better. But when you already have everything, you start to just enjoy it. And of course, that's just a whole cycle and then you will go down. And when you go so poor and so hard, you have to build up again. So you learn the value of the things that you learn. You earn. But when you have everything ready, you don't learn the value because everything is handed to you. As an immigrant, you have to adapt to the new society, and you just learn to survive and get better.

Career & Life Aspiration

Trí shared, “Current life is good. I am lucky. I graduated as a mechanical engineer. I work for about a year, a job related to my career and my major, but then after that, I get laid off. It's not because of my performance or anything, but I believe it was because of my leg, my polio.”

He recounted how he was fired because of his disability.

> After I graduated, I worked at this laboratory, so we're testing all the plumbing stuff, fixing toilets, sinks and faucets. And then one time, because we test the toilet, right? So we had set it up, so one time I carried the toilet. I was young, even though I had polio, I carried it, and I walked. And then when I put it down, I turned back and I saw the son of the owner look at me. And then the next day, he called me in and said, ‘We have to let you go. We don't need [your position].’
>
> But because, at that place I have a friend who graduated from the same school as me, same major too. He worked there too. So after they let me go, I think a few days later or a week later, [my friend told me] they hired another person [to take my position].
>
> The thing is, one door closes and another opens for you. [Getting] fired doesn't mean a bad thing. After that, I went back to school to study computers. At that time, computers started to introduce Microsoft Windows. So I went there, I took a couple classes, computer classes...met a guy there...and he needed some help with desktop support. So that's why he went to the class and I was in the class… I applied for it. So I have worked with computers since then. So I switched majors. I studied one thing, graduated from one thing, but now I'm an IT guy.

After seven years, they closed down that facility and the company moved to New York. A friend suggested Trí try for a state job. He applied and has worked at the capitol city for the last eighteen years.

Trí planned to retire in two years, "You have to work for twenty years up at the state services to get full benefits. Then you have to read above 52. So, in two more years, I meet all the requirements."

Trí looked forward to spending more time working on his spirituality. He wanted to put much more into meditation. Rather than socialize, he looked forward to more time to himself.

> I have more [time] to listen to Buddhism… lucky we don't have kids, the two of us. So nothing to worry about. I see the society, the world, so I want to focus more into my spiritual inside, I guess… Of course, I'm lucky we have good jobs, stable jobs. We've got a house. As a person you don't need that much… So, I have enough material stuff. Just focus on my spirituality.

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

Trí reflected on his struggles with learning the English language, advising today's high school newcomer students to prioritize learning the language first, "The language is just the foundation of everything. Once you know the language, because, to me, if I have a chance to learn better English in high school or something, when I go to college, I [would] have more options and learn more."

Trí suggested that without English proficiency and fluency, a student limits their educational opportunities and career choices.

Trí's advice to high school newcomer students:

1. Learn English first and well.

Serene Lý

Personal Artifact

Serene Lý presented several color photographs of friends and herself. There is a graduation picture, class of '95. In another photo, Serene is standing with a Vietnamese friend, "I think we graduated the same year… but different week… because she goes to a different high school." They knew each other through the Gia Đình Phật Tử or Youth Buddhist Association in Virginia. The third image was at Virginia Beach with five friends standing shoulder to shoulder with her.

> Oh, I had a great time. I had great friends. That was a great time… All Vietnamese [girls], we went to the same temple. We went to the same Buddhist Youth. And we did have a great time… You do not meet good friends every day. And you know, sweet memories are something that stay with you forever.

In the last twenty-five years, Serene still kept in touch with one of the friends in the photo.

Personal Background

Serene Lý was born and raised in Sài Gòn City. "Việt Nam is a nice country, friendly people. Mainly the people that I met, I went to school with them. Nice, they were nice people. I have not got a single painful memory." Serene lived with her parents, eldest brother, and youngest sister.

Because of her family's association with the defeated southern Republic of Việt Nam, they were closely monitored and constantly harassed, "[My parents] lost everything. They lost their jobs. They got bullied from coworkers. They got discriminated [against]."

Serene's family was one of those families in Việt Nam that felt they had no future if they stayed in the country. They had nothing left to lose but their lives and each other. Their journey is the journey of millions of other refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants.

Immigration Journey

The first memory Serene had of trying to escape was when she must have been no more than seven years old, before her youngest sister was even born.

> My parents owned a boat, a small boat. We tried to escape with that boat, but we failed and got captured. So they sent my dad to a different, more [prison-like] camp, and then they kept me and my brother at this one… It's not really a prison. It's more like a concentration camp or something like that… Then they let my mom and great-grandmother go, so that they can get the money [to bail us out]. At that time my mom asked the people in that camp to watch out for us. She secretly planned to come back on a certain day to get us out.

The fact was there was no money to bail out the children and her husband. The prison camp was in the middle of the jungle at the border of Việt Nam and Cambodia. Because of its remoteness and the dangers of the jungle, security was lax. Hiền, Serene's mother, gave Serene's brother, Tom, strict instructions to meet her at the edge of the camp during a shift change between the camp guards on a specific date and time two weeks later, "That day, my brother told me, I remember he told me, "Let's go out over there and see something." So we just did, we went. We went there, and then when we got near the end of the road I saw my mom. She was there, waiting for us."

Many Vietnamese families were attempting to escape Việt Nam and getting caught. The government was overwhelmed and lacked a system of keeping track of prison camp records,

especially in remote towns and villages, “They couldn’t track us back then. No computer or nothing. No sources of credit number.”

Hiền bet on this fact and prayed that no one would miss her two children in the prison camp. She was right.

Serene’s family did not give up. Several years later, the family tried again. They were even more determined to escape because Tom would turn sixteen years old in a couple of years.

> I was eleven. My brother, maybe fourteen… I remember my parents mentioned, discussed before we took that trip… Because, my brother, he was reaching the age of sixteen. That’s when young teenage boys had to [go] to a training camp… They train you into a soldier and then they make you work for the Army. Yeah, you have no choice. You have to go. That was the law.

This time, Serene, Tom, and her father took a different route. The decision to leave her mom, great-grandmother, and newly-born sister behind helped to fool the local authorities; they were not as suspicious when only half the family left town. The three of them headed into the jungle and hiked to the southern border. They reached the southernmost tip of Việt Nam and surreptitiously bought sea passages. The plan was to make it around to the Gulf of Thailand and get to Thailand, “We were on a boat for like an entire day, and then there was a storm in the ocean. We [lost our] food, drink, water, and everything.”

At sea, a group of Cambodian soldiers caught them. The boat people were able to bribe them away with their jewelry. The Cambodian soldiers also gave them food and water. They ran out of luck when a second group of Cambodian soldiers stopped them, retained them, and sent them back to Việt Nam, “And then, they sent us to jail [again].” This time, their mother bailed all three out.

By then, they were desperate. They must get Tom out of the country at all cost. In the dead of the night, the family sent Tom off all by himself. Barely a teenager, Tom would walk by foot all the way to Thailand, as planned. He stayed in a Thai refugee camp for a couple of years before reuniting with the rest of his family in America.

In 1990, to their surprise, the family's petition to leave the country by sponsorship was approved. This petition to the Vietnamese government was applied for at least ten years ago. Finally, the Vietnamese government granted the family permission to leave and join the rest of the relatives in the United States. After a one-week stop in Thailand, thirteen-year-old Serene, her little sister, Sarah, and their parents flew to Virginia where Tom and their grandparents anxiously counted the days until the long-awaited reunion.

Acclimation to New Life in America

Serene described her first memories of the United States:

> Here in Virginia [there are] lots of trees, and it was beautiful. It's nothing like in Việt Nam at all. I was very impressed with the sight. And we never have a big house, even though my grandfather's house is just like a normal one. Only maybe three bedrooms and not a big backyard and front yard. But to us back then, it was huge because we had a small apartment in Việt Nam. Everything was so big. [It was the] first time I tried cereal with milk. It did not taste good for me. Since then, I never tried cereal ever again… But other than that, everything was so big, so new, impressive.

Like so many other Vietnamese refugees who arrive in America, they were drawn to California for its much-touted warm weather and well-known Vietnamese American community. It was a place that reminded Vietnamese immigrants of the old country. Within a

month, Serene's family came to live in California with other relatives who were already settled in Los Angeles County. She would spend the next two years in California, starting high school.

From the start, school was a frustrating place where she did not understand anything in English. She relied on other Vietnamese students to help translate.

> In California, I didn't understand English… I went to school, the teacher asked names and all that. I have no idea what she was talking about. Just sit there and just watch. And then I have other classmates who have to translate. They came here a few years earlier, they knew a little more. They have to translate to help me, but without them I wouldn't understand a thing… We went to the same ESL class.

Two years later, Serene's mom decided to move the family to Virginia, where her parents were living. Serene would complete her high school years in Virginia.

Education History

Serene attended first through sixth grades in Việt Nam. However, after that, she did not go back to her regular school, "I stopped at sixth grade and then went to training… It just focuses on English learning only, and maybe studying some special skill, like music…" One of several reasons why she did not go back to her school included the fact that schooling was costing too much. Even though the public schools did not take tuition, there were other fees and costs, including private tutoring that was part of the hidden curriculum. Serene tenderly shared that she still kept in touch with her best friend who never left Việt Nam. Several times a year, they called one another to check in.

High School in the United States

In high school, Serene struggled with English and making friends. To her, learning a new language and then learning everything else in this new language that she did not understand was tough. On top of that, she missed everything and everyone in Việt Nam.

> I missed home. I missed friends. I missed everything because, when I first came here, and went to a school that did not speak the same language. I did not speak English. I didn't understand anything. I got bullied. Other classmates bullied me and they made fun of me because I didn't understand English. That was very hard… Ninth, tenth, eleventh [grades]. It happened everywhere. Not until my last year, senior year, that was when I spoke with some, maybe better English. I understood better, and I knew who were good friends and bad friends. I just don't hang out with those people that pretend [to be] like nice ones, and just bully you.

The one good recognition was Serene's math skills, "My math skill was way ahead of same-age classmates. They sent me to advanced math class rather than the regular one. But that's the only good thing for me. But other than that, I had to take ESL and had to take everything from basic. From the beginning." Another highlight that Serene mentioned was playing the viola and performing in concerts with the school orchestra in grades tenth through twelfth.

When she was in California, there were other Vietnamese students who helped her navigate the school system. However, when her family moved back to Virginia in the middle of high school, it was even more isolating because Virginia did not have a significant Vietnamese population. For many Vietnamese Americans, finding a community organization like a Vietnamese Buddhist temple or a Vietnamese-speaking Catholic church became a way to interact

with other Vietnamese Americans. The five friends in the photograph she brought along with friends she met at a small Vietnamese temple, a safe haven for Serene throughout her life in America, “Back in those high school years, all the friends I ever had, all of them, I believe all of them were from temple.”

Notably, once back in Virginia, she made a connection with her high school counselor and a few teachers.

> Actually, I remember high school had counselors… If you have any problem you can talk to them. I don't remember the counselor in California, but I remember the lady in Virginia, because she was the counselor of my brother, too. He went there for a year, and… we had the same counselor. She seemed like she knew the whole family. She's very friendly. She told me, ‘Hey, any problem, any questions, come talk to me.’

Additionally, Serene recalled kind teachers, “I was fortunate to have met really great teachers, really nice teachers. Not only are they friendly, but they are very helpful too. They'd say, ‘Hey, what is your next class I'll show you. I walk you there’ or something like that.”

Serene also reminisced about the ESL class during summer time with a “super nice” teacher. Only for ESL students who struggled with English as much as she did, Serene really enjoyed the summer class because she could let her guards down, “I had fun. I made friends there. But without that class, I wouldn’t make any friends in other classes. I barely talked to anyone and no one talked to me.”

Life after High School

When Serene graduated from high school in Virginia, her parents wanted her to venture into a pharmaceutical career. From Serene’s point of view, this was not a possibility because her English was limited, “They wanted me to become a pharmacist. Because English wasn’t my first

language, I have a hard time memorizing names and anything that has a lot of words. That sounds scary to me." Instead, Serene tapped into her love of drawing.

> I had an interest in art, drawing, and I learned better through pictures. But I never knew drawing or art can make money, too. One day, I was with my uncle, my mom's brother that came to visit us for a couple of weeks. And on that specific day, we talked and I told him that I like to draw. I also like computers, but I'm not good at programming, I don't think I [ever] studied programming or computer science. So then he just said, 'Then why not study computer art?' Yeah. I never knew, nobody told me anything like that. School never had things like that… explain other things you can do with that. Nobody told me that. Nobody taught me that actually you just had to come up with your own [major]. You can just do your own research or something like that. When my uncle mentioned that to me, I was like, 'Wow, I can draw with computers.' That's something I might be interested in. I did research and wanted to study that. Okay. I guess I would say my uncle, he opened my eyes to different views or something I don't know.

Serene attended a college for graphic design for two years. Then, she spent four years more to get her Bachelor of Fine Arts at the state's university, "It had the best foundational art program in the country… [T]hey taught everything from the beginning… I got my foundation from them. Because you love what you do, then it's not hard anymore."

Experience & Perception of Trauma

Serene not only went through life-risking adventures, she also had to cope with losing the only life she knew to come to America and to ignore bullies who picked on her. In dealing with the hardships and traumas of the escape attempts and difficult transition to America, Serene explained how her parents' philosophy helped her cope.

> [My parents] had to work very hard to survive, to keep us going. And of course, they felt very fortunate that we could come here. They planned all this. They were willing to make [America] home. And to make sure that we get a good education and be good citizens.

Similarly, her brother's stories influenced Serene's way of looking at her own troubles.

> He told us stories, and his experience, and he too got help from fellow campies because he was young. He was like sixteen. Can you imagine a sixteen-year-old teenage boy who lives far away from family and no parents around? People could have got addicted to drugs or all the bad things. But luckily, he would travel with the people who kept an eye on him, kept him out of trouble, and all things like that. So it was good for him, too.

Another way that Serene reflected on how the teachings of Buddhism helped her deal with all her losses and heartaches, "We just kept moving on. The past is the past. There's nothing we can do about it, or we can change about it. We're still moving on. This is where we were glad that we are Buddhist, because we understand what Buddha taught us, and with [that] belief, keep moving forward… If we want a better future, just plant better seeds right now."

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Serene believed everything in life, the causes and consequences of our actions, thoughts, and words can be explained by the concept of karma. Everything happens for a reason, even if one cannot understand or see what the causes are. For that reason, she also believed in educating young kids to understand the consequences of their actions. Serene redirected her negative experiences at school as life lessons that she can use to teach other children. "If I didn't go through all of that, all of the bad experiences of being bullied, I wouldn't stand here, and teach

the young kids right here in the temple and say, 'Hey, bullying is bad. You should not bully any people at all. You should help people instead of bullying them.'"

Career & Life Aspiration

After earning her BFA, Serene moved back to California, "unfortunately, Virginia was not a state for entertainment. That's why I was drawn back to California." Serene was hired by a film studio. She loved her job. However, another studio bought out her company and shipped all the work from her department to India because they had a more expansive department in India. She was laid off. From that point, it was difficult for her to find a job she loved as much as the first one.

> Everything I did seemed like everything went wrong. Nothing went the way I planned. Did not matter how well I plan or how much I want something… I had to get whatever job other there, even though I still do freelance at home. I still love doing animation and writing stuff like that. But it just seemed like I was drifting further away from my dream. I wonder why? The [more] questions I have, the more I find myself loving to go to temple to find an answer.

Serene searched her soul for answers to things in her life that she thought she could not control. When she lost her job, she turned to her faith for answers.

> Not too long ago, I thought success means you have a good job. You have a good family. You make a good living. I thought that was success, but I guess to most people that is success. But for me personally, after what I was going through, the last few years… that is not a success. Right now, right this moment, I am so glad that my mom actually made me go to the temple every Sunday, since we got here. Because if it wasn't for her, if it wasn't for that decision, making me go to temple… But now, going to temple

> is the thing that I look forward to every week, every Sunday. Why? I learned Buddhism. I learned what is good for me… With the experience I'm going through, whether it's a positive one or it's negative one, there is always a positive way to deal with it. Rather than, be disappointed and blame other people, I just reflect on myself and think, 'What can I do to change it all or move forward?' Just not let that situation drag me down.

In 2015, Serene went on a pilgrimage to India. For Buddhists, the most important pilgrimage is a journey to the four most holy sites, including visiting the Bo tree under which Prince Siddhārtha Gautama became enlightened.

In 2019, Serene went to Canada and became an ordained Buddhist nun for ten days. This practice is called Xuất Gia Gieo Duyên, "August last year, I [became ordained] for ten days. And on my third day of that event, I decided to fully shave off my hair. I [didn't] think that I would do it… but I finally [did]." With others on this journey, Serene lived like real monks and nuns for ten days. They wore the same robes, ate the same food, and practiced meditations and prayers, "That event opened up my eyes to another level. Now I want to become a nun."

Serene's mother was very supportive of her decision. One issue that worried Serene was the student loans and debts she had, "I'm telling myself, once I pay up all the debt, I will become a nun."

Serene's dream was to take her two passions in life - Buddhism and animation - and merge them into something worthwhile like promoting and teaching karma. She continued to work on self-improvement.

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

Serene suggested that young immigrants should prepare for their transition to America by learning as much English as they can in their home country. She admitted, "When I was in Vietnam I wasn't interested in English. Yeah, there was class. We could go, we could learn if we wanted to, but I wasn't interested in that. I never thought that it would help… I was too young… to think."

Serene added that she wished some adult at school would have noticed her and watched out for her.

> Back then, if… some teachers really paid close attention to me, then I wouldn't have to go through all the bad experiences. It was tough. It was hard for me. Actually, I cried a lot too back then because of the bullying and stuff. But beside that I did have fun. High school should be fun. Even though I did not enjoy high school years that much, like I should have. I didn't go to prom.

Thirty years later, Serene still felt the pang of not fitting in with her high school peers. Serene continued with the advice to high school newcomer immigrants.

> Do not ever let the bullies get to you. They could laugh at you, they could make fun of you, but don't let them get to you. There are other good people, too. If they're not good people, if they laugh at you, they are not your friends… Do not let them get to you. Those bullies, they just want attention. They're not better than you. Absolutely not better than you. You are better than them.

Additionally, Serene recommended that immigrant students should get connected and involved in school by joining a club or extracurricular program. For Serene, that was the orchestra, "I would recommend to join a club… at least I joined orchestra." She remembered

how her orchestra teacher would buy doughnuts every Friday for students, “I had something to look forward to every week.”

Finally, Serene suggested that newcomer students be open to making new friends, “Don’t shut yourself out. Other people are nice, too. Just find that person… talk to that person. You never know. That person can be your friend for life.”

Here is a list of Serene’s advice to newcomer students:

1. Learn English before coming to America, if you can.
2. Find a mentor for help.
3. Ignore bullies.
4. Join school clubs, participate in school activities.
5. Be open to make new friends.

Serene noted this, “Now, whatever happens to me, [either] it is positive and what I want or not want, I'm okay with it. I can move on. I can deal with it either way, in any way, because life is short and you never know what will happen tomorrow. You are sitting here, we are talking, but hey, next thing tomorrow you never know what will happen… like Kobe Bryant.

Frank Trần

Personal Background

Frank Trần’s family was forced out of their home and land in central Việt Nam, as part of the New Economics Zones program, an initiative by the Vietnamese Communist government. There was no point in refusing. They would come in the middle of the night and burn down their houses and fields if they did not follow the order. The Trần family, with ten siblings, mother and father, were forcibly relocated to a small piece of land in the middle of the underdeveloped jungle region south of Sài Gòn.

The family farmed on the land and opened a small market shop in the middle of town. Life was a struggle for most people after the Fall of Sài Gòn and most people bought food and things on credit. Some would honor their bills and pay later. Some would not. A few would become violent, threatening to do harm if asked to pay their bills. No different from outright thieving, one man put a gun to Frank's father's head when Frank's father refused to extend his credit, "It was lawless and corrupt. All types of crimes occurred there."

Immigration Journey

It so happened that Frank's family adopted a child who was half-Vietnamese, half-America. When the Amerasian Homecoming Act was established to admit the children of American servicemen left behind after the Việt Nam War, Frank's family applied for admission. There were plans to escape by sea, but the opportunity came with the adopted Amerasian.

Refugee Camp Life. As part of the admission process, in January of 1989, the family was flown over to the Philippines refugee camp, isolated from the local community, to learn English for four months, "A lot of immigrant people. Mostly Vietnamese. Some Laos, Cambodians. But the majority was Vietnamese."

There was not much else to do but go to English class. The family also had to wait for someone in the United States to sponsor them. Luckily, Aunt Helen, who had already made it to the United States earlier, stepped into the role of sponsor.

Acclimation to New Life in America

In April of 1989, when Frank was sixteen, he flew from the Philippines to the United States, "Everything looked new." Aunt Helen lived in Los Angeles County, but everyone agreed that Frank's family should rent an apartment in the heart of Little Saigon in Orange

County. That decision inadvertently isolated the family from the needed family support. Simple things like buying food at the market, registering for school, finding the nearest shoe store were unnecessarily arduous.

More than once during the interview, Frank mentioned the pair of leather shoes he had to wear the first week he attended school. That pair of dress shoes symbolized for Frank the confusion, hardship, and isolation of his acclimation to the American life.

> At that time we didn't prepare any clothing for school or anything. So when we got here...you see, right before we came to America, my mom purchased each boy an entire tailored suit and a pair of leather dress shoes. So the first day of school we all got dressed up and then walked to school. You can imagine how painful those shoes were. It was the first time I've ever worn leather dress shoes. By the end of the day, there were blisters all over my feet. And the next day, I had to wear the same shoes because there was nothing else. But a neighbor noticed us and bought tennis shoes for us to wear.

When asked to recall some good memories of his first months in the United States, Frank laughed and asked back, "Positive?" Instead, his response was, "Confusing."

Frank recounted a time he rode his bicycle to school. He did not know the street rules and was riding on the wrong side of the street. An officer stopped him and explained, but he had no idea what he was saying. So he continued on his way, not understanding the officer's order. The officer stopped him again and cited him, "Because I didn't know the language, I didn't understand the law. It was very confusing."

Frank wished there was a translator or a social worker who could have helped them understand the essentials of life in America, "We needed a translator. We needed the basics, like the simple pair of shoes to wear. Maybe if they have an initial guideline to show us how to

navigate the city. My aunt, she tried her best, but she had to go to work, too. We didn't have any friends to lean on when we first arrived. She lived in [Los Angeles County] and she came by only on Fridays and stayed over the weekends… she helped out a lot."

Things taken for granted, like a simple family trip in a car was a hardship for Frank's family "because we had twelve people in the family." However, when they did all have to make it to a government office to sign documents, they all squeezed into Aunt Helen's two-door car. Frank laughed heartily and explained, "Back then, we were very small and skinny!"

Education History

In Việt Nam, schooling was not a major focus for Frank. As a farming family, there were chores to take care of, including tending to the water buffalo after school. Frank remembered walking the water buffalo around his land every day after school. There was not an expectation to sit down and study. So school was a haphazard element in his life that seemed to change with the seasons. Frank attended school from first grade to fifth grade only. In his small town, there were no intermediate or high schools. If you wanted more education, you'd have to travel to another city or town, but they could not afford that, "If my parents sent any of us to somewhere else, we don't have money for that because we have ten kids."

High School in the United States

Even though Frank was the third child in the family, he was the oldest one to continue with formal schooling. His older brother and sister were both adults by then, so they went to trade schools or looked for work instead. Just like that, Frank started high school. Because he was already sixteen years old, he was placed in high school, ninth grade. For Frank, not having any education since fifth grade and then skipping all the way to ninth grade in a completely foreign language was a daunting experience, "Just imagine over there I studied only up to the

[fifth] grade… I came here and they put me in the ninth grade. They put me into some mathematics class. It was the [basic] add, subtract, multiply, divide, but I didn't understand because it was in English."

To his own surprise, Frank began to feel unchallenging in high school. Classes became easier and easier. Several times in his high school years, he wanted to take more advanced courses, "I saw the counselor a couple of times. I kept complaining to them that the math and English classes were too easy, but they didn't listen to me… I felt that I had to help myself. No one else [helped], really. I didn't know how the system worked."

Frank recalled there were a lot of gangsters in school, but as long as he avoided them, there were no problems. Frank did not join clubs or have many friends, but there were a few things he enjoyed at school. Frank loved art classes and ceramics. He loved the lunch food.

Additionally, Frank took a typing class on a Microsoft Disk Operating System (MS-DOS) computer in high school. Then, his father bought a computer at home, too. Frank knew he wanted to study computer science.

Life after High School

Frank started his higher education at a local community college and continued to work on his English, "Even when I went to college, I still learned ESL." In college, Frank had more friends and studied with them. Finding his passion, Frank committed to Computer Science, "I really enjoyed it because I interacted with the computers."

He transferred to a California State University and earned a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science, "Because my English was not strong enough, I was so grateful to earn my college degree. I barely passed the [required] English class in college."

Experience & Perception of Trauma

Frank acknowledged that he felt homesick for the life he left in Việt Nam. Pressed for more details, Frank retraced his transitional experience to America. In reflection of experiencing trauma, Frank shared how his family struggled to acclimate to the new country.

> Of course, we missed Việt Nam. We missed the food. We missed the people. When we came here, none of us could drive. Luckily, my neighbor gave us bikes. That's how I got the ticket. [laughing] I even got hit by a car because I tried to ride and that guy, he tried to turn right. It was ok. Just a minor. I think my brother got hit, too… Everything was confusing. We missed the people. We missed Việt Nam.

But not so minor was his little sister's bike accident that landed her in the hospital for days, "My little sister was hit by a car. It was such a bad accident that she was helicoptered out. My mom got lost [coming home from the hospital]. We had no way to find her. By luck, she made it home."

When asked if Frank and his family spoke with each other about these experiences, Frank admitted that they did not, so the past stayed in the past.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Coming from a land of no opportunity, Frank reported that it was very impactful that he had been greater opportunities as a result of migration. There were limited opportunities for higher education and professional careers in Việt Nam. Surely, Frank thought, there were no opportunities to climb the social ladder.

In America, all of that changed for Frank, "I realized my luck, so I tightly clung onto all the opportunities that I was given. Compared to many people who don't have the opportunity. I think back...Just imagine if I lived in Việt Nam [still] and my family didn't come here. Maybe

right now, I have nothing and maybe I'm still in the farm and still very poor. Right now, I come here, I have an education…"

Career & Life Aspiration

Fresh out of college, Frank was hired as an Information Technician (IT) that demanded a lot of travel time. Later, he found a local job with less travel time and worked close to ten years before being laid off during the Recession of the late 2000s. He was able to find other jobs without much trouble. He started his most current job three years ago.

> My current life right now is too relaxing. Maybe I'm bored right now. Too relaxing… Well, maybe in my childhood I had a few accidents, so that's why right now my mind is not that good in terms of continuing my career… Maybe in the short future, maybe I think about retirement. Early retirement.

Frank's company did not have an early retirement. He wanted to contribute more to his company but felt trapped by the restrictive system. Frank admitted that he was not up to the job anymore. Frank especially struggled with reading wordy, jargon-filled, tedious manuals, memos, and information. Feeling uninspired and underutilized in his job place, Frank wanted to look for something "completely different that doesn't use the mind… I can't really concentrate when I read. I can't analyze what I read." Frank explained that although he wanted to do more and expand his career, the limits of his communication skills in English held him back.

"I have everything… I almost paid off the house. I think I have enough for retirement. Maybe I have enough for the kids' college, so that's when I have nothing to hang onto." Frank bought his first house in 2003. Then, he bought a second house in 2011 and rented his first property.

In Frank's perspective, he was financially stable enough to consider other passions that would fulfill his spiritual and personal growths, "I go to temple and help out a lot. I'm really happy about that. I think it's worth [my time]."

Frank was confident that his good fortune had come from his voluntary work at the Buddhist temple, "So in terms of financials, job, career, I think of karma, sometimes invisible, but I can feel that…I know my ability to communicate and analyze is not as good as others. But I know I try my best, work hard for it, and it pays off. At work, sometimes it's very stressful. Sometimes I make a lot of mistakes. Or sometimes the task that is assigned to me sounds impossible, but things always turn out well enough for me. I believe it's my good karma."

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

Frank said again, "I wish I was more prepared for school in America. I wish I knew the language." After thirty years in the United States, Frank still believed his limited English skills was his Achilles' heel. He advised that teenage newcomer students focus their energy on mastering the English language.

1. You need to know English.
2. Pick whatever you want to do in the future. You have to make a decision now… Don't wait until you go to college and make bad decisions and waste time.
3. Talk to a counselor. Better yet, talk to someone who speaks your language and get the information.
4. Don't play too much. Just focus on your study.

Frank ended his interview expressing his appreciation for the life that he has now in the United States, “Luckily, we came here. Otherwise, my family… I don’t know how my parents could have raised ten kids with so little. You know? We got lucky.”

Hannah Santos

Personal Background

Hannah Santos was born and raised in the Philippines. For sixteen years, the city life of the northern part of the Philippines was home to Hannah, her two younger siblings, and parents.

> Even in the Philippines, we liked to stay in one area, especially kind of close to our relatives. In just that one apartment, we have us and then another close relative living downstairs, and then a block away is another relative living there. We like to be close and just be able to support each other.

Hannah described her city as a humid, very humid place that was dangerous for foreigners.

> I feel like you kind of have to be street smart whenever you're going from… I don’t know… a foreign country to the Philippines. There's a lot of pickpockets. I actually came back there in 2016, and I felt kind of a little bit alienated… Before we came to the US, I never wanted to leave the Philippines. I thought, "Oh, I'm going to leave my friends. I'm not going to meet any friends here, and I just don't want to be here." But when I came back, I felt like I didn't belong there anymore.

Immigration Journey

Hannah guessed that her mother was motivated to leave a long time ago. There seemed to be political conflicts in the country.

> I think when we left the Philippines wasn't in good shape, because they elected someone really from a Democratic party and had history. Their family had history with leading the

country. So, I think it was maybe his dad. Well, the president then, his dad was a senator who got killed because of his Democratic ideology. He was opposing the regime back then, martial law and all of that. So, at that time the son who became the president sat on the presidency, and I felt like everyone was welcoming it, because it felt like it's the right thing to do. They're going for the democracy of all of that.

But then, I think when I was here, I still watched the news, and it felt like it doesn't matter which president sits on the presidency. Everyone would say anything to kind of bring down the person who's sitting there. You can't really agree on everything. It felt like that, but it felt like in a short sense of bringing a person down. So, I think overall it was a good presidency, and there wasn't a lot of chatter based on it.

Before Hannah was even born, her mother, Jasmine, had petitioned to leave the Philippines for America, where her own mother lived, "My mom… she was still single then, and then she had three of us. So, that took a while to process. I believe my whole life, or maybe twenty years or twenty plus years.

Her grandmother, Analyn, was already in the United States, "At the time, [my grandmother], I think she was just trying to vacation [in the U.S.], and then she did some work. Then she heard that Reagan will [give] amnesty to farmers… So, she did that. She actually became a farmer herself."

Grandma Analyn, with the help of a friend, co-sponsored five out of her eleven children and their families to America. It was easier to sponsor her single children; there were more restrictions with married children. Even though Hannah's parents were separated, it took twenty years for her family to come to the United States because of her last name, "It took us maybe twenty years because my last name was [my dad's]. I mean, I took his last name, and then my

brother took my mother's last name. So, it was that whole confusion between if they were really together or not." Looking back, Hannah remembered how much she did not want to leave her homeland and her relatives behind, especially her father.

Without her father, Hannah and the rest of her family left the Philippines in November of 2011. They flew over in fourteen hours to LAX, California.

> It just felt like hell, I guess. I was crying the whole ride, crying in my sleep. The first few months, I was also feeling depressed and all that. When we came here in November, there was already Thanksgiving. So, we didn't have time to enroll in a school right away. It wasn't until after Thanksgiving that we were able to take classes and all those nitty gritty stuff. But before that, we were just like, 'What are we doing here? I don't know anyone.' It was really a shocking experience too. Our address is ... It says Harvard Boulevard, and I'm like, 'Oh, we're close to Harvard.' At least for me, I was really surprised that I don't see any white people in the neighborhood. So, it was predominantly Hispanic and Korean Americans that were living in the neighborhood. I was really surprised. Even in my school, I see the representation. I only see like one to two white kids, and that was it. I was like, 'Oh, this is America.'

Acclimation to New Life in America

Hannah's first home in the United States was in a one-bedroom apartment with grandma, uncle, mom, brother, and sister. All six of them.

Both she and her sister, Sarah, openly grieved about their departure. Their youngest brother, Gabriel, was only nine at the time and soaked up English like a sponge.

> My sister was in the same state of mind as I was. My brother didn't know any English, but after the first month we were all surprised that he was already not speaking any

> Tagalog. He was spending a lot of time with our cousins, and our cousins don't speak Tagalog and they only speak English. We were surprised, because back in the Philippines he's not really that type to study a lot and acquire a lot of stuff. But just having those conversations with my other cousins, he was able to do that.

Finding a job was difficult for her mother. The first three months, the family lived on food stamps. Even when Jasmine did find a job, the 4-hour commute was just too much. Finally, Jasmine found a job in New York, all the way across the country.

> Me and my siblings were left with my uncle and my grandma, and [my mother] was the only one [to go to] New York. She lived in a friend's house, kind of just rented a room in New Jersey. Then she works in New York… That went on for two more years until I graduated high school. Then my mom planned to take my brother and my sister with her. So, I attended UCLA alone but with my grandma and my uncle and a partner.

At the time of this interview, Hannah had moved in with her mother in New Jersey after graduating from UCLA.

Education History

In the Philippines, Hannah started school at four years old, "I don't know how the school is here in the US, but in the Philippines it's kindergarten for three years, and then you go on to elementary [school]." Spending two to three years in the Philippines' Universal Kindergarten was a common practice as the country embraced a strong early childhood education.

Hannah's mother, Jasmine, prioritized her children's education and offered them the choice to attend a private, bilingual school that taught English and Chinese.

> I remembered my mom asking me, because we're moving to the city center, and she asked me, 'This is a private school. It's a Chinese school. Do you think you want to go

here?' I'm like, 'I'm scared, but let's go to it.' So, I tested. I was supposed to be in the first grade, but I didn't pass the test. So, they put me back into kindergarten, because they felt like I wasn't ready. I think that was the best position ever, because after that they decided to enroll me for after-school tutoring as well. I just really flourished. I was always in the honor roll, both in the English academic part and the Chinese part, although nothing stuck with me with the Chinese part.

Hannah had a competitive streak and always strived to be the top student. When she struggled with fractions, she turned to her best friend not for help, but to motivate herself to compete with her best friend, "We were having competitions in the classroom. I felt like I achieved something, because I was competing with my best friend. It was a big deal for me." Hannah also critiqued America's way of teaching math.

Most of our math courses are from Singapore. We take from it. We just discover little things or techniques to go around a problem. If something doesn't work for you, we'll find another thing that works for you. In the U.S., you have Common Core. I just feel it's really dumb that they have that… even with teaching my cousins, I had a hard time explaining to them, because they have a certain way of explaining it in the schools, and you can't kind of veer off from that, because that's how they teach you. I'm like, 'Why are you doing it the long way when you could just go straight to it, shortcuts?' I don't know. I feel like in Asia it's all about going the shorter, fastest route and learning stuff just as you go, but here you kind of have to put steps in. I think that takes a long time, energy…

Having learned English - one of the *lingua francas* in the Philippines - all her life, Hannah was fluent in English when she came to the United States. However, she did need help

with writing, “When I was in tenth grade, or maybe eleventh, my English teacher would write a lot on my paper, and I thought, ‘Oh, I guess I'm not that good in English after all.’ But I think it complemented that, when I first came here, I already spoke fluent English.” When Hannah and her siblings started school in the United States, their cousins, who have immigrated earlier, helped them navigate through the school system.

High School in the United States

Serendipitously, Hannah’s family heard about a well-known University’s Community High School.

> We heard the program through other resources. So, when we first came here ... I don't remember the exact name, but I know we called it the Gap Center. We'd go there… We were [told] about this new school that was built in [a hotel]... I think it's a science school, more like a STEM school… My mom kind of had an idea about [this university] being a prestigious school. So, she enrolled us there.

In the Philippines, Hannah was already in the eleventh grade. However, when she attended high school in California, she was placed in ninth grade.

> I kind of struggled, not in a bad way, because also I felt like I already took the classes that I needed, and I was still put into ninth grade. So, I did ask for assistance from our academic counselor… I was fortunate enough that my first semester of high school I was in ninth grade, and then my second semester I turned into tenth grade.

Hannah was able to convince her counselor to believe in her abilities and moved her back into eleventh grade in her second year of high school in America. She thrived in this setting.

> I felt like I was prepared, because, first of all, it was a new school. It was a new partnership with [the university]. When they came, they were just barely starting their

first year K-12. Everyone's new. Everyone didn't know each other. So, it felt like creating a new family. I felt like right in. I felt like I was part of it.

Hannah spoke well of good teachers and counselors at her school. She received support from her academic counselor, Ms. Bennette, who wrote letters of recommendations for her. Her seminar teacher in twelfth grade helped her with interviewing skills, resume-building, and networking, which landed her an internship at the university. Other teachers stayed up late into the night hours to help her and other seniors draft their personal statements. She fondly remembered someone buying pizzas for them to share. Throughout her high school years, Hannah felt that it was always a team effort of many teachers and staff that pushed her forward in the direction of the university. The high school later welcomed Hannah back as a teacher's assistant.

Hannah remembered there were other students who needed more help and got more attention. They were connected with gangs in the street.

> I didn't feel threatened by any of them, and maybe because the adults have put so much effort to support them and aid them in the process in academics and all this kind of stuff… When I was there, I felt like most of the attention was for those kids. And I don't blame the adults. I mean, I didn't really need that much attention anyway, because I already know I'm thriving. So, in a sense, that was helpful to those kids. I guess I just want to say I am really grateful that I entered a school wherein social justice was really [a focus]. Coming from the Philippines to the US knowing nothing was a bit alienating. I didn't know any stuff. So, coming to that school, it made me realize a bunch of the history of the people coming here from all over the world. That was in a way good, but

> also in a way bad, because I feel like it's always social justice. I feel like there should be balance in both STEM and then social justice. I don't know.

And although she received much help, a part of Hannah felt that she was not pushed hard enough. She did not believe she lived up to her full potential.

> I know I've had a lot of good teachers and counselors, but maybe I wish they would have pushed me more to my potential. I was very comfortable back in high school. When I transitioned from ninth grade to tenth grade, my first day as a tenth grade I took the CAHSEE right away and passed it. I didn't study. That's the comfortability, because I know I'm smart enough, but I know I'm not using my full potential.

When she went to the university and had to drop Calculus twice because she just couldn't pass the course, she wished she would have studied harder subjects like Calculus in high school, "And I really needed that class, because I was trying to minor in Accounting. I just felt hopeless. So, I dropped the minor altogether. Yeah. I just wish I had more push, because if I did take a lot of those [AP] high school classes, then I feel like I wouldn't have struggled so much in college."

Life after High School

By June of 2017, Hannah graduated from the university with a Bachelor's degree in Linguistics, "but I don't think I'm going to go forward with it." With anguish in her voice, Hannah recalled how she landed there.

> I entered as a pre-psychology, and then during orientation I switched to pre-business econ and hoping to minor in Accounting, but I was struggling already with all the prerequisites for business econ and accounting. I was taking some language classes to fulfill my general requirements. I thought, 'Well, I already have all these requirements for

> Linguistics, and I think I can do it.' So, I switched in my second year of summer, just complete 360, I guess.

Hannah regretted her choice of letting go of the Accounting minor.

> I really wish I stuck with at least a minor in accounting, because even their minor you can get a lot out of. I was already networking, because one of my friends from the club that I was in ... I was only into one club, my whole four years, which is kind of dumb. But I just felt safe, and it felt like it was a family too. So, she was in the accounting minor, and she would invite me to all the networking. It was great. I was meeting people, but I didn't pursue it because of ... Well, I couldn't. But I just wished I got help, but I didn't know how far it would have made me go. But I wish I could have asked for help, even if I failed maybe three classes already. Like, what can I do to still be able to get there?

College was a challenging milestone for Hannah. Though she had mentorship from a Filipino organization at the university, she struggled her first quarter with lower grades than she ever received. Granted she was earning passing grades like Bs and Cs, but this shook her confidence.

> Because coming from high school, and I was getting all As, and it's not even core classes… but I was already feeling that way. [The mentor] kind of made me feel reassured, but I really hope I didn't hear it from her. She told me, 'Well, girl, Cs get degrees.' Just that kind of stuck with me. I just hope I didn't hear that, because when I heard that, I felt reassured that, oh, even if I have low grades, I can still make it… I wish I could redo college all over again.

Currently underemployed, Hannah felt torn and confused. On the one hand, her mother's insistent voice telling her, "Oh, get accounting!" really made sense, but she still felt unsure.

Looking back with hindsight, Hannah reflected, “In one sense, I would want to change my whole college experience, but in another sense, I don't, because I've met some of the greatest people. I've met my friends… They made the whole college experience bearable for me at least.”

Experience & Perception of Trauma

When asked about trauma, Hannah described an encounter with a man trying to engage her on the bus that she took daily to commute to the university, “I realized he's maybe a sexual predator. That was my first traumatizing experience.” Another time, someone was exposing himself behind her on the same bus.

When it came to talking about trauma with her family, Hannah thought of her mom as open-minded, but “she doesn’t want to seem weak.” Hannah’s grandmother was not open-minded, rather traditional and militant.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Hannah did not feel that she was living up to the expectations and hopes that she came with as an immigrant to this country.

> I feel like I'm one of those people that's an outlier, because until now I still don't know what I want to do in life. Other immigrant children, they're very headstrong, and they account for all the sacrifices their parents made. I do too, but I'm still in that confused state of mind of what I want to do in the future, unlike other kids who really persevere.

Career & Life Aspiration

After college, Hannah moved to New Jersey to be with her mom and siblings, “So, now we're all here, but I'm still unemployed. That's one other thing that we're struggling with.”

Even as an undergrad, Hannah was working as a Program Coordinator with the Community Programs Office at her university, thanks to her time as an intern there while in high school. However, at the time of this interview, Hannah had moved across the country to be with her family and currently worked part-time at a mall. Still undecided, Hannah looked for other training and career options.

> I got so desperate about not finding a job. I found a job. It was with Columbia and was a six-month contract, but I turned it down, because I thought I would get other full-time opportunities. But at this point, I just feel like ... I don't know. It's not coming. So, I feel desperate. I tried to enroll in this online program for a business development training program. The first one I tried to enroll in is the free program, very extensive, 12 weeks, but they rejected me. So, I'm like, 'Oh, my gosh. Even this free program wouldn't want me.' But, that didn't deter me, because I was already feeling so desperate. So, I enrolled for another program. This one I have to pay for, but that doesn't matter, because I feel like the returns for me would be greater after I finish the program.

Advice to Today's High School Newcomer Students

Hannah sighed and said, "I feel like they should give me advice" when she was asked to give advice to high school newcomer students. After a moment, she suggested they should find friends to help with the transition to America.

> So, go find people, go find friends, mingle, and just do whatever you want. That helped. And also because I made friends back in high school that I am still friends with until now. So, that was great. But, yeah, over time, we just realized that your life is here now. You're just going to have to make the most out of it.

Hannah also emphasized the importance of self-care and mental health for students.

> I feel like there's a lot of stigma. They talk about mental health and all that kind of stuff. I only knew the importance of it when I got older, because my mom was going through it as well. But she's open-minded, but she's still struggling with it, and so am I at this point still. There's one thing: always ask for help. Doesn't matter if it's your friends. It doesn't matter if it's your friend or a college counselor or maybe even a stranger on a hotline. Just go talk through your feelings. Maybe if you don't verbally say it, write it somewhere. Whenever I have arguments with my mom and I try to reconcile, I always text her. For her, it's not the best communication ever, but I told her it's my way of communicating. Maybe figuring things out in that sense would help you a lot.

Concisely, Hannah provided the following advice to newcomers:

1. Make connections with others to help you transition to a new country.
2. Be open-minded to help and mental health services.

Hannah, compared to many of the other participants arrived with a number of advantages—no pre-migratory trauma, a quality and uninterrupted education in the Philippines, strong English and math skills. However, she struggled in her transition and with a sense of downward mobility.

Ian Ngô

Personal Background

Ian Ngô was born and raised in Hồ Chí Minh City. He had fond memories of Việt Nam, but no longer felt tied to it, “I don't think I would want to live there for the rest of my life, but basically somewhere I would go from time to time.” In Việt Nam, like many other families, Ian lived with three generations of relatives.

Immigration Journey

In the 1990s, Ian's father made it to the United States because he was sponsored by Ian's great-grandparents in California. Ian's father moved to New York, got a job, saved money, and sponsored the rest of the family.

By 2000, at thirteen years old, Ian flew out of Việt Nam, had layovers in Taiwan and Alaska, and landed in New York to reunite with his father.

Acclimation to New Life in America

Ian was awe-struck by the big houses, tall skyscrapers, and lines and lines of cars in the streets. He was excited for a new beginning and looked forward to everything. Because his father was already in America, things that the family needed were taken care of.

Ian revealed that his mother was homesick for the family and country she left behind, "My mom missed my grandma at that time, but then again, when you grow older and you have your own family, you just have to know what's best for your family, too." Ian missed his friends, too, but he explained that the excitement of the new life helped him let go of the old way of life quickly. Also, as a young teenage boy, he did not have too many close relationships with friends.

Education History

In Việt Nam, Ian attended school from first through eighth grades. He recalled that school was tough. There were a lot of assignments, homework, and things to memorize. The cumulative end-of-semester test was very hard. Ian also studied English in Việt Nam, so, reading and writing in English was not a concern for him. Still, speaking and listening in English were not his strengths, "Basically, in Việt Nam or in a lot of countries when they teach a foreign language, they focus more on reading and writing, but not so much speaking and listening." Yet

having literacy in his native language, plus some basic literacy skills in English, is an advantage over many immigrants.

High School in the United States

In New York, Ian registered for ninth grade. Right off, he realized how limited his English skills were, "[My] low point, I would say would be my inability to communicate in English."

Ian's family sent Ian to a high school with a larger Asian American population than others in the neighborhood.

> I would say that I was lucky to go to a school with a lot of patience. So, the house that I was at that time, there's a high school there too, but we didn't want to go to that school. So, we had to apply to go to their district and ask to be able to go to a school with more Asian. So, the teachers know that I'm new, so they would have somebody that could speak either Chinese or Vietnamese. I was lucky that I was able to go to a school with patient people.

Teachers were also especially helpful to Ian, "I think… teacher… understood that I'm new, so they would call me to do something, like go to the board and solve this problem, you know? They're like, 'Oh, try to get used to the environment and to blend in.' But they help, I mean they asked me if I need anything and what not."

Ian felt his teachers helped him fit in, but when it came to his academic progress, he judged that it was his own motivation to do well, "[It was] mostly myself… to do well in school, to stay up late to try to do homework… When I was in high school, I stayed up late to catch up on English."

Life after High School

Ian graduated from high school and continued to college to earn his Engineering degree.

Experience & Perception of Trauma

Ian did not think he went through much trauma.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Ian reflected that he would most likely not have a chance to follow his passion and career path, “I will say… right now I'm an engineer, a mechanical engineer. I don't think I would have the same opportunities, the same education, or a job that I am doing right now [in Việt Nam].

Career & Life Aspiration

In 2009, Ian earned his Bachelor’s degree in Engineering and applied for a job, “but then [it] was taking too long for them to respond [after] my interview. So I decided to apply to grad school [instead].” Ian worked through his Master’s degree and even before he finished, in his last semester of school, he was hired by a major aerospace company. Ian never could imagine that he would have a full-time job working in aerospace engineering as he had for a decade now.

At the time of this interview, he lived with his family in Washington State. Eventually, Ian would like to move to California, away from the cold weather. He wanted to grow more broadly and do different things.

Advice to Today’s High School Newcomer Students

Ian would like high school newcomer students to work on building their English skills and open up to others in order to practice using English.

Maybe if my English was a lot better than what it was… that would be the only thing that I would change… Don’t be shy to talk to people even though they don't understand you

that well… That's how you're going to increase your speaking and communication skills. Most importantly, learn English vocabulary.

Ian explained that many immigrant students would probably have sufficient content knowledge in the core curriculum like science, history, and math, "Because I'm pretty sure in their original country, they know a lot of stuff more than the education [in the United States like] math. I'm pretty sure that they know a lot of stuff already… Focus more on English."

Ian ended with advising immigrant students to have different pathways planned, in case things do not work out as planned. When he could not find a job right after college, he knew what to do next: go back to school.

Here is a list of Ian's suggestions:

1. Build English skills and vocabulary by practicing with others.
2. Focus on English most.
3. Have a back-up plan.

Thương Lê

Personal Background

Thương Lê lived with her parents and older brother, Thanh in Việt Nam. She lived in a crowded town next to a contaminated river. Ever since Thương could remember, her parents had dreamed of coming to America, "My mom and dad really wanted us to come [to the U.S.]... for a better future… Compared to the education in Việt Nam, it is way different because it's a lot of money and tuition just to go to school [in Việt Nam]."

Immigration Journey

Thương's grandmother, two aunts, and an uncle were already in America for at least a decade before it was Thương's family's turn. Her grandmother had begun a sponsorship petition

in 2001. Thirteen years later, in 2014, at fifteen years old, Thương flew out of Việt Nam, stopped shortly in Taiwan, and landed in LAX on the night of 4th of July. Fireworks lit the night sky as they arrived in America.

Outside of the thunderstorm of fireworks, Thương was amused by the quietness of city life in America, "In Việt Nam, we're used to a lot of people coming in and out. Here [it's] peace and silence… It's kind of weird at first, but then I got used to it."

Acclimation to New Life in America

In America, Thương's family moved into Aunt Nina's home for about a year. At one point, Aunt Nina had fourteen people with four separate families in her home. They sectioned off part of the garage to make a fourth bedroom.

Thương was excited and scared at the same time because she knew her English was not up to par. Thuong was grateful that her family had a place to stay and that Aunt Tina, the youngest aunt who had immigrated many years ago, took care of her and showed her around town. Another family friend with college-age students helped tutor Thương and guided her through school.

However, Thương's dad was really sad because he had no [blood] family over here, "Dad called home to Việt Nam a lot, talking to his relatives."

Education History

Thương went to school from kindergarten to eleventh grade in Viet Nam. However, when she arrived in America, she was placed back in ninth grade, "It's better for me to learn English before going to college. And also be prepared for the CAHSEE test… then they canceled it." [laughed] When asked how she felt about going back two years, Thuong reflected,

“I would say maybe go back just one year. I think I could catch up for sure. But I think the whole full year in high school is a good experience for me.”

Like Tri, she also loved the cohort structure of the Vietnamese classroom. School in Việt Nam was really tough, but experiences with classmates and friends in school was “really, really fun because everyone stayed in one classroom for one year and then teachers came in to class in and out. Not like we come to all the classes in the United States.”

Thương learned English in Việt Nam, “It's not as good as teaching over here because the way they teach is more grammar, but not really conversation-speaking.”

High School in the United States

At fifteen years old, Thương was starting her eleventh grade in Việt Nam. However, when she arrived in California, she was placed in the ninth grade. It was hard to swallow, but Thương appreciated the years in high school in Orange County.

One the first day, Thương was out of place, “I got lost. I didn't make friends on the first day. But the first class, because it was the ESL class, the teacher, he's very, very helpful. He's very nice and generous because he told us about his family, and his wife is also Vietnamese and he’s American.” From that day, Thương felt a connection with her ESL teacher. Each day in high school for the ninth grade, Thương studied two hours of English, one in a general education class and one in an ELD class.

School was still very difficult, “I didn’t know English at first. So some of the students made fun of me. I think when I [joined] the Volleyball team...So there are some members, the teammates made fun of me. Because I didn't know English and ‘cause I was confused about what's going on when we practiced. And even when I had friends come to see me play, the other

teammate was, 'Oh, you have friends?'" Thương took that to mean that somehow, because she was a newcomer student with limited English, people did not expect her to have friends.

Thương kept moving forward and asked for more help with school.

> For two or three years, I was tutored by college kids. Every homework or question I had, I would ask for help, especially with the essay. They helped me apply for college… helped me with the application, I remember. And they also gave me advice on where to apply for college.

She recalled getting help with college applications, signing up for the FAFSA, and preparing for the SAT and ACT exams. A few teachers and her counselor stood out as really helpful people who pushed her forward into higher education.

Life after High School

Thương was accepted into a Cal State University, a 45-minute commute each way for her. Many evenings, she stayed late at school to work on her projects. She wanted to participate in college Volleyball, but did not find the time, "I really want to try the volleyball club, but every time when I'm done with my class, I just want to go home." She wished her mother would have let her move into the dormitory at school, at least the first year of college. Thuong was also considering a second major in interior design, "I think [architecture and interior design] would complement each other."

Experience & Perception of Trauma

When asked, Thương reported that she did not perceive that she has experienced trauma, with regards to her immigration experience. This may be the case because, relative to other immigrants, coming through sponsored migration was much less arduous than other immigrant journey experiences.

Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences

Like other participants, Thương agreed that coming to America had broadened her education and career choices, “if I stayed in my home country, I'm not sure I'll be choosing architecture as my career, my major. I probably would have chosen the one that makes more money… This is the [reasonable] way because in Việt Nam, it's hard to follow your dream.”

Career & Life Aspiration

At the time of this interview, Thương was working toward a career as an architect. She was in her second year at a Cal State University. The college experience was really good, but really stressful, “I don't know about other majors, but my major we spend a lot of time on doing models and then drawings for a model of a building. And we always have to redo stuff. Keep redoing the drawing and the model all the time. We take a really, really long time just to draw and then make the model.” She expected to earn her degree within five years at the CSU.

Advice to Today’s High School Newcomer Students

Thương reflected that, “if I had learned English back in Việt Nam, I'll be better in communication when I come over here.” So this was the advice she wanted to share with high school newcomer students. She also hoped that newcomer students feel confident no matter what new obstacles they face, “Be confident. Be ready, I guess. Be ready to learn. Confident, ready, don't be scared of anything because even if it’s school or friend [issues], you have family. Just be yourself and then do anything you want because you can achieve it.”

Here is a list of Thương’s advice:

1. Learn English before coming to America, if you can.
2. Be confident.

At the beginning of 2020, Thương became a United States citizen.

Summary

This chapter chronicled the life stories of ten immigrants who came to America as teenagers and entered high school as newcomer students. The aim in Chapter Four was to document the individually unique and intensely personal immigrant stories told in the voices of these ten immigrants. Chapter Five will explore the participants' life stories by analyzing common themes that have emerged, related to the research questions of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS

Whereas Chapter Four was organized by the life stories of the ten participants written in vignettes, highlighting the voices and perspectives of the ten participants, Chapter Five analyzed the interview data collectively to sift out major findings. I created tables that examined how all ten participants described life before (Table 1 and Figure 1), during (Table 2), and after (Table 3) their migratory journeys. Table 4 laid out the perceived effects of immigration on educational opportunities and accomplishments, careers, and life satisfaction and/or aspiration. Table 5 dived into perceived trauma while Table 6 explored a topic of English Language Development. Table 7 lists every advice given by the participants. The tabular analysis made plain several themes and emerging findings. To encapsulate, I found unexpected as well as anticipated themes that gave light to a deeper understanding of the 1.25-generation immigrant (those who immigrated in their adolescent years from age thirteen to seventeen) student experiences before, during and after migration.

RQ 1: The 1.25-generation immigrant experiences described

Research Question 1 sought to know how participants would describe their pre/during/post displacement experiences. In Table 1, I presented categories that illuminated the participants' lives before their migratory journey. These pre-displacement categories included the historical context in which they lived, the socio-economic status, the education completed, and the likelihood that they would go to college if they did not leave their home country.

Table 1

Life before Immigration

Pseudonym	Gender	Ages (in years) in Home Country	Country of Origin	Year Left Country	Historical Context	Socio-economic Status	Education Completed in Home Country	Likelihood of Going to College in Home Country
Will	Male	0-13	Việt Nam	1983	Reconstruction after wars; economic depression, local surveillance; lack of civil rights and freedoms; conscription	high	Grades 1-3 in public, urban school; Grades 6-9 in rural school	not at all
Bella	Female	0-14	México	1987	natural disasters; government corruption; economic instability; social injustice	low	Grades K-2 (local public); Grades 3-9th (1st semester only) in affluent, competitive, public schools	most likely
Đraco	Male	0-15	Việt Nam	1978	Reconstruction after wars; economic depression, local surveillance; lack of civil rights and freedoms; conscription	middle	Grades K-8 in expensive, private Catholic schools	not at all
Oneria	Female	0-14	México	2012	political upheaval; government corruption; economic instability; social injustice	middle	Grades K-7 in expensive, private Catholic school	most likely
Trí	Male	0-14	Việt Nam	1979	Reconstruction after wars; economic depression, local surveillance; lack of civil rights and freedoms; conscription	middle	Grades K-10 in public schools	most likely
Serene	Female	0-13	Việt Nam	1990	local surveillance; lack of civil rights and freedoms; conscription of 16-year-old males; government corruption	middle	Grades 1-6 in public school	most likely
Frank	Male	0-15	Việt Nam	1989	local surveillance; lack of civil rights and freedoms; conscription of 16-year-old males; government corruption	low	Grades 1-5 in public school	not at all
Hannah	Female	0-16	The Philippines	2011	political upheaval	middle	Grades K-11 in private, bilingual schools	most likely
Ian	Male	0-13	Việt Nam	2000	Economic stability	middle	Grades 1-8 in public schools	most likely
Thương	Female	0-15	Việt Nam	2015	Tension with China	middle	Grades K-11 in public schools	maybe

Stable SES before Migration

One key finding that emerged from Table #1 was the unanticipated commonality that most participants lived a relatively financially stable life in their home country. Overall, eight out of the ten participants described that before they left their home countries, their families' socio-economic statuses were middle to high class. Will, for example, acknowledged that his

family had been quite privileged before they immigrated. Even after the economic collapse after the Việt Nam War, Will's family, on both sides, had enough wealth to quietly live with comfort. Will shared, "Most families didn't have enough rice to eat. They would dig up cassavas or other root vegetables to mix with their rice. My family, we ate pure white rice." Will's parents buried gold bars under their pepper tree. They secretly built their own boat to escape Việt Nam.

Seven out of the ten participants categorized their families as living in the middle class before they decided to leave their home countries. Oneria, Đraco, and Hannah benefited from private education. Đraco expressed that his family was "who and who in society." Oneria's family owned a ranch. Serene, Trí, Ian, and Thương had family members who were already in America sending money home to help support their families. All seven of these families owned their own homes in their home countries.

Two out of the ten participants considered themselves in the low-class status in their home countries. Bella described her home, "[M]y house didn't even have a floor. It was dirt and the walls were made of wood; it was whatever we could find to put on top." Frank recalled how hard it was for his family to survive after being forced off their land. One of Frank's fondest memories when he first attended school in California was eating school meals because the food was so much more nutritious and abundant.

For Bella and Frank who experienced a life filled with financial hardships before they immigrated, it may be easier to understand their motivation to leave their home countries for more opportunities in the United States. Yet, this was not the case for the other eight participants who immigrated to the United States. Reasons to immigrate, for every ethnic group in every time period, may share commonalities, but also differ greatly.

High Likelihood of Attending College

From Table 1, another finding can be surmised regarding the participants likelihood of attending college in their home country. Out of the ten participants, only three male participants answered that they would not have gone to college or university if they would have stayed in their country and not immigrated to America. Đraco bluntly said, "I would [have been] drafted into the Army at fifteen to seventeen years old and buried shortly after. Time was much different then." Will had the same sentiment as Đraco. Frank also agreed that there was no likelihood of him aspiring to higher education because his family was too poor to afford it, especially with ten siblings. Additionally, college was very far away from home and very selective and elitist.

Six of the ten participants, four females and two males, were confident that if they would have stayed in the home country, then they would have "most likely" continued their education through college. One out of the ten participants, Thương, was not as confident and replied, "Maybe."

As Figure 1 and Table 1 depicted, six (i.e. Bella, Oneria, Trí, Serene, Hannah, Ian, and Thương) participants who lived in a middle to high socio-economic class thought they would have "maybe" or "most likely" gone to college if they did not immigrate. The two other middle-high class participants (i.e. Will and Đraco) were sure they would have not made it to their twenties (let alone go to college) if they did not immigrate due to conscription into the Third Indochina War. The two participants who categorized themselves as in the low socio-economic status in their home country had contradicting views of college access. While Bella determined that she would most likely go to college, Frank figured it was not at all likely. To sum up, I found that the majority of the participants (seven out of ten) thought they would have gone to college or university if they did not immigrate.

Figure 1

Relationship between the Likelihood of College Attendance in Home Country and the Socio-Economic Status before Immigration

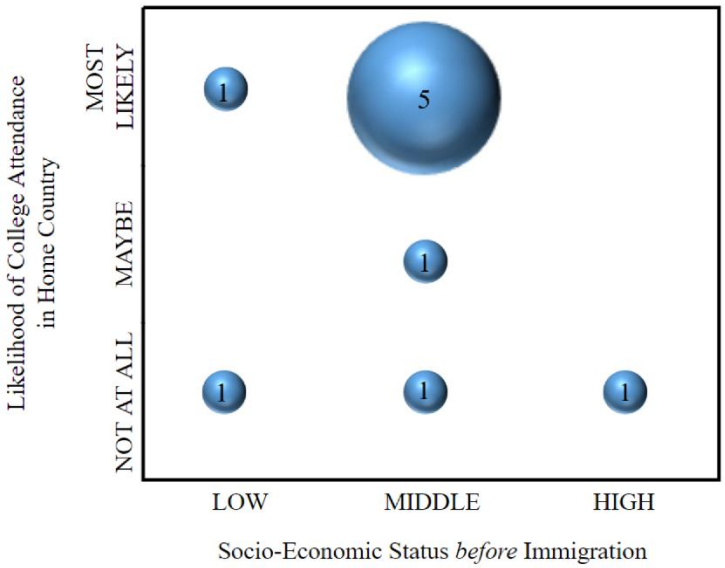

Table 2 highlighted the details of the immigration journey. These details during the migratory journey included age of arrival in the United States, reasons for immigration, length of time of migration, as well as if there refugee camp detours. The major take-aways from Table 2 revealed the common reasons immigrant families shared the prompted them to leave their home countries and the correlation between refugee camp life and interrupted formal education.

Table 2

Immigration Journey

Pseudonym	Age Left Home Country	Age of Arrival in the U.S.	Year of Arrival in the U.S.	Reason(s) for Immigration	Mode of Transportation	Length of Time	Refugee Camp
Will	13	16	1986	fear of conscription of male sons; sought freedom; wanted better futures for children	by boat to refugee camp; flew to U.S.	about 3 days at sea; 2 years in refugee camps	2 years in Hong Kong; 6 months in the Philippines
Bella	14	14	1987	wanted better futures for children	by land	a few days	N/A

Đraco	15	16	1979	fear of conscription of male sons; sought freedom; wanted better futures for children	by boat to refugee camp; flew to U.S.	4 days at sea; 8.5 months in refugee camp	8.5 months in Malaysian island
Oneria	14	14	2012	wanted better futures for children	by land	a few days	N/A
Trí	14	16	1981	fear of conscription of male sons; sought freedom; wanted better futures for children	by boat to refugee camp; flew to U.S.	a few days at sea; 15 months in refugee camps	15 months on Indonesian islands
Serene	13	13	1990	fear of conscription of male sons; sought freedom; wanted better futures for children	flew to U.S. with 1-week stay in Taiwan	1-week stay in Taiwan	N/A
Frank	16	16	1989	sought freedom; wanted better futures for children	flew to the Philippines; flew to U.S.	4 months in the Philippines refugee camp	4 months in the Philippines
Hannah	16	16	2011	wanted better futures for children	flew to U.S.	less than 1 day	N/A
Ian	13	13	2000	wanted better futures for children	flew to U.S.	less than 1 day	N/A
Thương	15	15	2015	wanted better futures for children	flew to U.S.	less than 1 day	N/A

Dream of a Better Life

As portrayed by Table 2, ten out of ten participants expressed that their families immigrated because they wanted a better future for their children. Bella remarked, "[My mother] always wanted better for us… to have a better future, to have a better life." Thương stated, "My mom and dad really wanted us to come [to the U.S.]... for a better future." Frank voiced, "Just imagine if I lived in Việt Nam [still] and my family didn't come here. Maybe right now, I have nothing and maybe I'm still in the farm and still very poor."

Five out of the ten participants were also motivated to immigrate because they feared for the lives of their teenage sons who would have been forced to enlist in the military if they stayed in their home country. Particularly for Will and Đraco, chances were, they would have not survived the Sino-Vietnamese War or Third Indochina War. These same five families also expressed how important it was to find freedom as they escape from Việt Nam. Will said, "[My father had] enough of the new reforms and destruction of everyone's freedom and way of

life. He wanted to leave, too." Frank described his living condition as "lawless and corrupt. All types of crimes occurred there."

It is worth noting that although all participants believed their families wanted a better future for their children, eight of these participants had also agreed that they would have had access to higher education if they did not immigrate. Moreover, eight of the participants (not exactly the same eight mentioned in the previous sentence) considered their families as middle or high class in society. Thus, it is necessary to explore the meaning of "a better future" that may not simply mean an elevated social class and access to higher education. Greater than the status in society or financial security, these participants' families chose to immigrate for freedom to live their lives and safety for their sons. The choice to migrate may not have been so difficult.

Risking It All

To leave their home countries and come to America, five of the ten participants had to take their lives into their hands. They took the very real risk of losing their lives in order to make it to America. Bella feared all the horror stories of crossing the border. Will, Đraco, Serene, and Trí could have easily died at sea. Serene was captured and imprisoned twice during failed attempts to leave her home country. Đraco recounted his journey:

> I should have been dead. I should have been dead at sea but I didn't… And all I had to do was roll over and I'd be off on the side of the boat and nobody would even care or have strength to help me. The boat [didn't] stop. Somehow, some way, I regained my consciousness and realized I was still on the boat even though I could hardly walk.

Will thought it was the end when island dwellers shot at his boat, "They took out big machine guns and shot into the water. Oh, we thought we were going to die right there." In all,

nine out of ten participants in this study dealt with risking their lives and/or extended family separation in order to come to America.

Longer Journey Correlated with Longer Interrupted Education

Out of the ten participants, six did not experience any interrupted formal education. Serene, Bella, Oneria, Hannah, Ian, and Thương entered the U.S. school system within days of the start of their immigration journey.

The other four participants experienced up to twenty-four months of interrupted education due to the extended length of their immigration journey. All four spent time in refugee camps. Will missed the most years of education. He missed two years of primary schooling during the time of his family's first (and failed) escape attempt. He also lost at least two years of school in the refugee camp. When he arrived in California, he was placed in the second semester of tenth grade. Like Will, Frank also missed a couple of years of education before beginning his journey. However, Frank only spent four months in a refugee camp. Trí and Đraco missed about fifteen and nine months of formal education, respectively, as they waited in refugee camps.

In summary, five out of ten participants experienced a considerable amount of interrupted education. The main reason for the gaps of time in learning is because of their lengthy and dangerous journey to America. The longer the immigration journey, the longer the time of interrupted formal education. At the same time, two of them also experienced interrupted education in their own home country due to their life circumstances.

The data in Table 3 concentrated on the how participants described their adaptation experiences as students in the United States. These post-migratory experiences revealed

descriptions of socio-economic status changes, language barrier, negative social interactions, and other hindrances and benefits in the school setting.

Table 3

Adapting to U.S. High School

Pseudonym	Acclimation to American Life after Immigration				Hindrances from Educational Setting in U.S.			Enhancements/Benefits from Educational Setting in U.S.	
	Grade Started in America	Socio-economic Status shortly after Immigration (changes?)	Acclimation Supports	Acclimation Barriers	Language Barrier	Negative Social Interactions	School System	Beneficial supports at school	People who helped with school
Will	Grade 10, Semester 2	low (change from high to low)	relatives who immigrated earlier; government welfare	limited English; unstable finances	limited English	Fights with Classmates	low expectations; not all credits transferred from VN; ELD classes not eligible for HS graduation or A-G credits	not mentioned	students (including cousin)
Bella	Grade 9, Semester 2	low (no change)	mother who immigrated earlier; government welfare	limited English; unstable finances	limited English	N/A	ELD classes not eligible for HS graduation or A-G credits	connection with students and teachers through club and the school band	teachers (ESL teacher, band director), counselor, students (including newcomer immigrants)
Đraco	Grade 9	low (change from high to low)	friends from refugee camp	limited English; unstable finances	limited English	racism	low expectations	ESL programs in high and adult schools	friends (from refugee camp) teachers (math teacher)
Oneria	Grade 8	low (change from high to low)	Father who immigrated earlier	limited English	limited English	bullying from classmates	ELD classes not eligible for HS graduation or A-G credits	not mentioned	teachers (including ELD teacher)
Trí	Grade 9	low (change from middle to low)	Father and brothers who immigrated earlier; government welfare	limited English	limited English	N/A	ELD classes not eligible for HS graduation or A-G credits	ESL program and culture club that helped socially, but felt these programs slowed down his English development	brothers (who immigrated earlier)
Serene	Grade 8	low (change from middle to low)	Grandparents who immigrated earlier; government welfare	limited English	limited English	bullying from classmates	ELD classes not eligible for HS graduation or A-G credits	summer ESL class, orchestra class	friends (from temple), teachers, counselor
Frank	Grade 9	low (no change)	relatives who immigrated earlier;	limited English; unstable finances	limited English	N/A	low expectations; ELD classes not eligible for	free meals	teachers

			government welfare				HS graduation or A-G credits		
Hannah	Grade 9	low (change from middle to low)	grandmother who immigrated earlier	unstable finances	N/A	N/A	low expectations	college counseling	teachers, counselor
Ian	Grade 9	middle (no change)	father who immigrated earlier	limited English	limited English	N/A	ELD classes not eligible for HS graduation or A-G credits	not mentioned	family (who immigrated earlier), teachers
Thương	Grade 9	low (change from middle to low)	relatives who immigrated earlier; government welfare	limited English; unstable finances	limited English	bullying from classmates	low expectations; ELD classes not eligible for HS graduation or A-G credits	ELD program	family (who immigrated earlier), friends, teachers (including ESL teacher)

A Decline in SES after Immigration

As Table 3 showed, seven out of ten participants experienced downward mobility right after they arrived in the United States. Will went from a very wealthy life to living on government welfare once he and his family came to America. Will's family spent everything they had to escape their home country. After two years of displacement in refugee camps, they came to California with nothing left. Will recalled a conversation the family had about not having enough undergarments, "I said to my mom I can make do with one pair of boxers. I can wash it often." Đraco also came from a wealthy family that could afford private education. Đraco also shared his own struggles with doing part-time work while going to high school, but was too proud to apply for government help. Oneria likewise came from a well-to-do family with much land, only to live in someone's garage when she came over to California. Oneria pointed out how this social decline frequently affected her mother. Hannah's mother had to travel across the country, from California to New Jersey, to find work, leaving Hannah behind with her grandma and uncle. The decline in socioeconomic status was just as devastating for Trí, Serene, and Thương.

For Bella and Frank, they did not experience a change in socioeconomic status, but both of their families continued to live in poverty when they first arrived in the country and depended on government welfare and help from relatives who immigrated earlier. Ian was the only participant whose middle-class status did not change. Finally, for all participants, they all had family members who immigrated earlier to the U.S. supporting them during their acclimation period.

Family Separation

Table 3 spotlighted the immigrant experience of family separation. It is inevitable that families who immigrate to another country would leave some of their loved ones behind (Suárez-Orozco & Bang, 2011). For instance, Will, Bella, Oneria, and Hannah all shared that they had to say goodbye to grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They did not know when they could see their extended family members again. Some of the participants were also on the other side of that experience. Serene's brother left all by himself while the family waited at home for two years before seeing him again in America. Her grandparents left for America even earlier than that. A decade later, she would reunite with them in Virginia. It would take a decade for Ian and his father to reunite in New York, too. Bella's mother crossed the border several years before she and her sister did. Oneria's dad did the same thing. Hannah's grandmother left her family for decades, too. Hannah would meet her grandmother for the first time in California. Later after her family had settled in California, Hannah's mother made the choice to go across the country to New York in order to secure a job, leaving Hannah with her grandmother throughout her high school and college years. Trí's and Đraco's families split up into different groups to journey to America.

RQ 2: The Influences of Immigration Experience on Academic & Life Trajectories

Research Question 2 considered the influences of the immigration experiences on the academic and life trajectories of the 1.25-generation immigration student.

Table 4

Influences of Immigration to Academic and Life Trajectories

Influences of immigration to academic and life trajectories				
Pseudonym	Perceived Effects of Immigration Journey on Life Experiences	Educational Opportunities / Accomplishments	Careers	Life Satisfaction / Aspiration
Will	Resilience to restart after failures	High School Diploma	Seaman in U.S. Navy; Entrepreneur/ Business Owner	Restless to follow dreams of offering shelter to homeless people and becoming a counselor / probation officer
Bella	Motivation to achieve educational goals	Bachelor's Degree in Urban Learning; Minor in Education; Master's Degree in School Counseling & Leadership; Candidate of Doctorate in Education	Teacher Assistant, Elementary Teacher, Attendance Counselor, School Attendance Review Board Member, Parent Educator Coach, Assistant Principal, Title I Coordinator	Completing Doctorate in Education; participating in Principal's (onboarding) Program
Đraco	Motivation to overcome obstacles	Bachelor's Degree in Information Systems	Software Test Specialist (Senior Lead, Manager, Director)	Ready to retire in a couple of years; looking forward to donating time and money, giving back, especially to orphanages in Viet Nam
Oneria	Motivation to achieve educational goals	High School Diploma	N/A	Completing Associate Degree in Liberal Arts & Associate Degree in Humanities; Determined to earn her Master's and Doctor's Degrees; Desires to be a Social Worker
Trí	Continual Self-Improvement	Bachelor's Degree in Mechanical Engineering	Mechanical Engineer; Information Technician	Ready to retire in a couple of years; looking forward to spending more time on meditation and self-improvement
Serene	Desire to teach others about karma	Bachelor's Degree in Fine Arts	Animator; Freelance Computer Artist	Desire to teach others about karma through animation; Contemplating life as a Buddhist nun
Frank	Determination for social mobility	Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science	Information Technician; Landlord	Ready to retire in a couple of years; looking forward to spending more time on serving community
Hannah	Determination to live up to high expectations	Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics	Program Coordinator	Looking forward to certification program; Looking to start career
Ian	Continual Professional Improvement	Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Mechanical Engineering	Aerospace Engineer	Looking forward to growing and broadening profession choices

Thương	Appreciation of Educational and Career Opportunities	High School Diploma	N/A	Looking forward to earning college degree and becoming an architect or interior designer

Self-Motivation

As revealed in Table 4, seven out of the ten participants earned at least one college degree. The other three have high school diplomas. At the time of this interview, Oneria was months away from earning two Associate Degrees in Liberal Arts and Humanities. In the case of twenty-year-old Thương, she only had a high school diploma, but was studying to earn her Bachelor's Degree in Architecture and maybe another degree in Interior Design. It was fifty-year-old Will who only had a high school diploma, but was still hopeful that he could return back to school to earn a certification to be a probation officer or a degree in counseling.

With regards to career, the seven college graduates enjoyed professional careers. Bella was pursuing the next level in her career - principalship. Like Bella, Ian, an aerospace mechanical engineer, was also looking forward to broadening his career pathway and expanding his professional trajectory. Đraco, Trí, and Frank all felt ready to consider retirement in a couple of years. They look forward to doing something else in their lives to grow personally and spiritually. After losing her job as an animator, Serene is considering pursuing a monastic life as a Buddhist nun. Hannah was also in between careers at the time of this interview and was waiting to begin a certification program. Will, who never earned a college degree but joined the Navy, joined his father's business, making signs and banners.

If the American dream equates college degrees, career opportunities, upward mobility, and life satisfaction, then most of the study participants would agree that they are living the American dream. Seven of them - Bella, Đraco, Trí, Serene, Frank, Ian, and Hannah - each earned at least one college degree. Will, Bella, Đraco, Trí, Serene, Frank, and Ian enjoyed career

opportunities. Will may never go back to the kind of life he could have enjoyed with the wealth of his home country before his parents' imprisonment, but he has moved into the middle-class and finally bought his first house as he turned fifty. Similarly, the rest of the participants considered themselves in the middle-class of American society at the time of this interview.

Life Satisfaction

When reflecting on the quality of their lives in the United States, most participants expressed a sense of satisfaction. Đraco affirmed, "This USA is not a paradise, but compared to what? Compared with where I came from, Việt Nam, it's a paradise. It's not perfect, but it's a paradise." Likewise, Frank appreciated his life in America, "Luckily, we came here. Otherwise, my family… I don't know how my parents could have raised ten kids with so little. You know? We got lucky." And Will agreed, "For all of my dreams that I couldn't do, now my sons can. I focus on [my sons]. I can prove to the world when my sons become something. That's why I am so happy to be here right now. I don't think like my dad. In Việt Nam, it was hell. America is heaven." As Đraco summed it up, "Adversity reveals itself, reveals oneself to oneself. And I took that as a motivation...It helps to build who you are and to face any upcoming problems or challenges that life will throw at you… So, to think that I'm speaking to you now, I'm forever grateful for the experiences that I went through."

RQ 2a: Acknowledging Perceived Traumas

Culturally, trauma was a difficult topic for both the participants and researcher to discuss. What participants did share, shed light on the pervasiveness of traumatic experiences, a few coping strategies, and the participants' resilient nature.

Table 5

Perceived Traumas

Pseudonym	Perceived Trauma *before* Immigration Journey	Perceived Trauma *during* Immigration Journey	Perceived Trauma *after* Immigration Journey
Will	Failed 1st escape; parents' incarceration;	Experienced traumatic sea escape, but did not express feeling traumatized	Not mentioned
Bella	loss	Short voyage – no trauma discussed	homesickness
Đraco	Not mentioned	Traumatic sea escape; secondary trauma of others' immigration experiences	loneliness
Oneria	Not mentioned	Short voyage – no trauma discussed	Did not feel traumatized
Trí	Not mentioned	Experienced traumatic sea escape	Did not feel traumatized
Serene	Failed 2 escapes; family's incarceration;	Short voyage – no trauma discussed	trauma from bullying
Frank	Threats to family by locals	Short voyage – no trauma discussed	difficult transition in America
Hannah	Not mentioned	homesickness	homesickness
Ian	Not mentioned	Short voyage – no trauma discussed	Did not feel traumatized
Thương	Not mentioned	Short voyage – no trauma discussed	Did not feel traumatized

Minimized & Channeled Trauma

Eight out of the ten participants shared that they had experienced traumatic events either prior to migration, during the journey, or afterwards, as charted in Table 5. Will felt like his whole world was torn asunder when his parents were imprisoned after their first failed escape attempt. He attributed his rebellious preteen years to the imprisonment of his parents and the social ostracism that came with that. Bella was not on board with leaving her home country at all. When she left, it was over an argument with her father. She cried herself to sleep for weeks afterward in the new country. Bella admitted to dealing with depression throughout her high school years, “I think I was depressed for a long time, but I have always considered myself to be a functional depressed person.” Đraco vividly remembered almost dying at sea. Being an

empathetic human being, Đraco was also affected by the horrors he heard from other boat people. When he settled in America, he felt scared and lonely. Like Will and Đraco, Trí also experienced days at sea, lost and afraid. Serene, similar to Will, experienced not only the imprisonment of her dad, but was also sent to prison camp herself. Like Will, her family was surveilled and ostracized. However, these traumatic events during her childhood were not as painful as the bullying she experienced once she attended school in America. Frank also experienced traumatic events before he left his home country because people were threatening his parents' lives. Additionally, it was especially difficult for Frank and his family when they first came to America. Unprepared for life in the states, in a short time, three of the siblings (including himself) were hit by cars as they rode their bikes. His sister's accident was so severe, they had to lift her to the hospital using a helicopter. And for Hannah, she did not want to come to America. Her life was happy and surrounded by family and friends in the Philippines, "It just felt like hell, I guess. I was crying the whole ride, crying in my sleep. The first few months, I was also feeling depressed and all that." Hannah hinted that she was seeking or wanting to seek mental health help, explaining how hard it is for others to seek help, "I feel like there's a lot of stigma. They talk about mental health and all that kind of stuff. I only knew the importance of it when I got older…"

However, even though the above mentioned seven participants experienced traumatic events, six of them tended to minimize or have learned to positively channel their traumatic experiences to serve others. For example, although Will's sea voyage was filled with peril, he viewed it as an adventure of a lifetime, proudly recalling his father's courage and the unbelievable power of Nature. Like Will, Trí did not perceive his sea voyage as a traumatic event, "We didn't have any trauma...So, I guess when people are poor or have hardships, they

strive to be better." Instead, Trí perceived the precarious days at sea as hardships that strengthened his character. Serene agreed with Trí's sentiment and used her trauma to educate children, "If I didn't go through all of that, all of the bad experiences of being bullied, I wouldn't stand here, and teach the young kids…" Bella, who admitted to feeling depressed, had a positive coping strategy of moving forward and letting go, "I always had that mentality of what I need to do. I'm not going to drown myself. You know, just crying. I cried things out and then I let it go. Then I was like, 'Okay, what do I need to do?'" And just like Will and Trí, Frank answered that there was nothing to feel traumatized about. Furthermore, Serene, Frank, Will, Trí, and Đraco have in common that all five of them turned to their religious organizations to find peace and give back to their community, using their traumatic experiences to teach young children to be resilient.

In conclusion, seven out of ten participants experienced traumatic events before, during, and/or right after their immigration journeys. Each one of them coped with these traumatic experiences differently.

RQ 2b: The Effects of Interrupted Education

It is worth noting that all ten participants studied English to varying degrees before coming to America. Some haphazardly learned in refugee camps for a few months. Others, like Hannah, had studied English since primary school. Except for Hannah, all participants took ESL or ELD courses throughout high school. And the same nine participants felt they needed more years of English language development after high school. These nine participants felt they were unprepared after high school due to their limited English skills. The only exception was Hannah, whose English skills were fluent, mainly because English is one of the *lingua francas* in the Philippines.

Table 6

English Language Development

Pseudonym	Education Completed in Home Country	Learned English *before* Immigration	Needed Intensive English Language Development during High School in U.S.	Took ELD or English courses after High School	Felt Unprepared after High School due to limited English Language Development
Will	Grades 1-3 in public, urban school; Grades 6-9 in rural school	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Bella	Grades K-2 (local public); Grades 3-9th (1st semester only) in affluent, competitive, public schools	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Đraco	Grades K-8 in expensive, private Catholic schools	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Oneria	Grades K-7 in expensive, private Catholic school	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Trí	Grades K-10 in public schools	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Serene	Grades 1-6 in public school	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Frank	Grades 1-5 in public school	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hannah	Grades K-11 in private, bilingual schools	Yes	No	Yes	No
Ian	Grades 1-8 in public schools	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Thương	Grades K-11 in public schools	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Limited (Time for) English Language Development

Table 6 illuminated the level of education these participants began school in the United States. Since Will started school in the second semester of tenth grade, he only finished two and a half years of high school. Hannah spent three years in high school, doing only one semester of both ninth and tenth grade since she was already in eleventh grade when she arrived in America. Bella completed three and a half years of high school. The other seven participants had four full years of high school, but agreed that they needed more English language development beyond high school. Only one, Will, out of the nine participants who felt unprepared because of their language barrier did not continue to study English after high

school. Everyone else went to college and had to take the English or ESL courses as part of the college general education requirements. It was also Will (outside of Hannah and Thương who are early in their adult life) who never held a professional career requiring a college degree. Importantly, Will was also the one participant who spent at least two years in a refugee closed camp, plus another two years of interrupted education when his parents were imprisoned (see Table 1). In total, Will missed approximately four years of K-12 schooling, the most of all participants.

RQ 3: Advice for High School Newcomer Students

Research Question 3 asked participants to give advice to current adolescent newcomer students. All ten participants offered sound advice to current high school newcomer students. Table 7 laid out all advice given by participants and organized them in groups of common themes. The three most common advice were 1) learn English first, fast, and well; 2) find a mentor and connect with others; and 3) be a disciplined student.

Table 7

Advice for High School Newcomer Students

Advice to High School Newcomers	Will	Bella	Đraco	Oneria	Trí	Serene	Frank	Hannah	Ian	Thương	Common Advice
Learn English first, fast, and well.	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Learn English first, fast, and well.
Learn English first and well.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Learn English before coming to America, if you can.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	
You need to know English.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	
Build English skills and vocabulary by practicing with others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	
Focu on English most.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	
Learn English before coming to America, if you can.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	

Find a mentor who understands what you're going through.	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Find a mentor and make connections at school.
Find a mentor.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Find a mentor for help.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Connect with counselors, teachers, staff.	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Talk to a counselor. Better yet, talk to someone who speaks your language and get the information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	
Make connections with others to help you transition to a new country.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	
Be open to make new friends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Find good friends with common goals.	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Study harder than everyone else.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Be a disciplined student.
Learn ahead so that you're ready with questions.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Don't play too much. Just focus on your study.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	
Never miss school.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Set education as a priority.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Take extra classes.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Don't take classes you don't need.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Read books.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Believe in yourself so that you can do anything.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Believe in yourself.
Believe in yourself.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Be confident.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	
Don't give up.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Persevere.
Find a way. Persevere.	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Follow your dream.	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Have drive, be hungry, make sacrifices to achieve your goals.	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Push yourself. Work hard.	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Keep your spirit high.	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Be resilient in the face of adversity.
Be mentally tough. Be resilient.	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Ignore bullies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Ask for help from good students and teachers.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Ask for help.
Be open-minded to help and mental health services.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	
Learn from criticism and change for the better.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Focus on self-improvement.
Focus on self-improvement.	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Get involved in school.	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Get involved in school activities.
Join school clubs, participate in school activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	
Pick whatever you want to do in the future. You have to make a decision now… Don't wait until you go to college and make bad decisions and waste time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	☐	☐	Plan for the future.
Have a back-up plan.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☑	☐	
Don't be scared to be the leader.	☑	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	Be a leader.

Intensive English Language Development

As Table 7 revealed, six of the ten participants gave similar advice to high school newcomers to learn English first, fast, and well. Learning English was the advice with the most number of participants. Six participants agreed that learning English was the most important thing newcomer high school students can do to help themselves. Considering that nine out of the ten participants felt they struggled with English all throughout and after their high school years (see Table 6), this advice seemed most relevant.

Of all the participants, limited English skills seemed to have the most consequential effects on Will. Because he only had about two and a half years in high school and, therefore, only two and a half years of English language development before college, he could not keep up with the lectures and reading assignments at his community college. Will quickly quitted college and joined the U.S. Navy. The struggles with English continued to haunt Will when he could not pass a written exam to continue his career in the military. Excluding Hannah and Thương, Will was the only participant who dealt with long-term financial instability throughout his working life. Surprisingly, Will was not one of the six participants who stressed learning English as an advice to the 1.25-generation immigrant students.

In contrast, Đraco was one of the six participants who urged adolescent newcomer students to focus on learning English. He believed that not being about to communicate effectively would have cost him his opportunities with promotions and, ultimately, his wages. Đraco described English as "a vehicle… [a] key to open all the doors…" He poured his energy into learning English, even taking night classes at the adult ESL program throughout high school. With a growth mindset, Đraco summed up his English-learning experience, "I was

struggling for many years but I had the deepest sense of appreciation for my command of the English language even though there's still room for improvement."

Like Đraco, Trí, who studiously learned English, advised today's high school newcomer students to prioritize learning English first because, he reasoned, not being fluent in English would limit a newcomer student's educational opportunities and career choices, "The language is just the foundation of everything."

In like manner, Ian believed that teenage newcomer students should focus on English because "I'm pretty sure in their original country, they know a lot of stuff more than the education [in the United States like] math. I'm pretty sure that they know a lot of stuff already… Focus more on English." Serene advised a focus on learning English, too, because she herself suffered from bullying because of her limited and accented English when she first attended school in the U.S.

> I did not speak English. I didn't understand anything. I got bullied. Other classmates bullied me and they made fun of me because I didn't understand English. That was very hard… Ninth, tenth, eleventh [grades]. It happened everywhere. Not until my last year, senior year, that was when I spoke with some, maybe better English.

Serene admitted that it took years to get over the pain of being ridiculed for not speaking English well. Like Serene, Thương was also ostracized because she did not speak English well in high school. Her volleyball teammates, who laughed at her often, seemed surprised when Thương's friends showed up to cheer her on during a game, as if they could not imagine how Thương would have friends. Frank also grieved over not mastering English, "I wish I was more prepared for school in America. I wish I knew the language." Frank believed that, in part, his accented, limited English held him back in his career.

For these ten 1.25-generation immigrants, they did not have the advantage that U.S.-born children who learned English as a first language or the 1.5-generation immigrants who would generally have started learning English at a younger age. Time spent learning English was valued by the participants.

Connecting with Others

Five out of the ten participants advised high school newcomer students to make a connection with someone, a significant finding for Research Question #2. Bella spoke warmly about the friends she made in an extracurricular activity, "... there was a big connection like joining the flag team even though I didn't speak the language." She encouraged high school newcomer students to develop rapport with counselors, teachers, other staff members "because all you need is one connection or someone who believes in you." Oneria, who struggled in high school, wished that she had someone to turn to for advice. She commented, "Find a mentor who's already gone through it." Hannah also spoke about the importance of connecting with others to help with adapting to the new country and school.

Frank felt that his own adaptation to school and the new country was confusing and difficult. Unlike Hannah who did have mentors in her life, Frank did not, but wished he did and advised immigrant students to seek out mentors to guide their way through high school. Serene was grateful to a counselor who remembered her older brother and the details of her family's story. As someone who experienced bullying, Serene urged high school newcomer immigrant students to be open to making friends and finding a mentor. Serene herself kept in touch regularly with her lifelong friends - the ones who she first knew upon arrival in Virginia - after thirty years. Likewise, Đraco advised teenage newcomer students to find good friends with

common goals to lean on and learn from. In similar ways, all six participants understood the value of connecting to others at school or in the community.

Be a Disciplined Student

Three of the participants focused on the advice of working hard at school and insisted that students study diligently and harder than others. There was a sense of urgency, just like the insistence to learn English quick and well, the participants felt that 1.25-generation immigrant students already have the disadvantage of being academically behind, not only in English language development, but may also struggle to acquire the right graduation credits while taking remedial or ELD classes (see Table 3). Consider also that in some cases, the immigration journey may drag on longer than expected, taking years before settlement. During these times of displacement, seldom were there formal and comprehensive education conducted.

Oneria, who was an exceptional student in her home country, struggled with school when she came to the United States. For her, it was not the subject matter that caused her pain; instead, she felt unfocused and poorly influenced by distracting friends. She insisted that newcomer student must set education as a priority, take extra classes, never miss school, and read lots of books. Motivated to live out her dream of earning a Master's Degree, Oneria was already completing her second Associate Degree at the time of this interview.

Summary

This chapter reported the findings that came into view from the participants' collective life stories, related to the research questions. The participants shared how their lived experiences before, during, and after migration influenced the academic and life trajectories. They attributed many of their accomplishments to self-motivation that came with wanting a better life as immigrants. They detailed their educational experiences and the traumatic events of their

immigration journey. They warned teenage newcomer students to take seriously the opportunities to learn, practice, and master the English language. They stressed the value of making friends, leaning on mentors, and reaching out to others to help them cope with the hardship of immigrating to a new country. Chapter Six will provide analysis of the findings and their potential implications on improving educational practices and policies to more effectively serve the 1.25 generation immigrant newcomer students, which in turn, should improve the learning experiences for all students.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSIONS

Introduction

This study set out to explore the (pre-, during-, and post-) migratory experiences (with a focus on displacement trauma and interrupted formal education) of former high school newcomer immigrant students and how they perceive those experiences served to influence their academic and life trajectories. This study also asked participants to give advice to current high school newcomer immigrant students in today's world. This study's purposes are reflected in the Research Questions.

Significance of Migratory Experiences to Life Trajectories

The interview data, organized in tables, revealed that a majority of the participants had lived in relative financial stability in the middle or high class. Another finding suggested that most participants believed they would have likely gone to college or university in their home country if they did not immigrate to the U.S. In other words, although the participants' families ultimately made the choice to immigrate, the majority of these participants lived in relative comfort and most likely would have gone to college if they did not immigrate. Clearly, most of them did not immigrate to America because they lacked wealth or college access. Juxtaposing these two findings with the third, in which every participant shared that their family immigrated to America because they wanted a better future for their children, it would be appropriate to ask what "a better future for their children" would look like. For these immigrants and their families, a better future was defined with more complexities than status and education. One viewpoint that may be true for many of the participants was the desire for a life with more freedom and less corruption. Even with a college degree, many would still not be able to obtain a professional job because of competition or lack of connections. For the families with adolescent sons in Việt

Nam after 1975 and into the early-80s, not escaping was an absolute death sentence for their sons. They would rather take their chances to die at sea while escaping the country than to die in battle in the Sino-Vietnamese War. Another possible migration motivator is the belief in the hyperbolized perception of the American Dream.

Perhaps, because the perceived gain of the American life is so great and tempting that, as Finding #8 expressed, many immigrant families are willing to separate for many years or risk their own lives in order to come to America. Oftentimes, only one member of the family would be first to embark in the perilous immigration journey. Once there, the lone immigrant would begin to plan and save money for the passage of the rest of the family. Years may pass before the family reunite in America. Serial migration, the act of family members migrating at different times, disrupts family bonds (Phoenix & Seu, 2013). Yet, when the question is to stay and die or take flight, it is not hard to appreciate why so many boat people took that risk with their lives. If your son may not survive his conscription due to the warfare in your country, then giving up the security and safety that was part of your life may not seem too big a sacrifice in order to save his life.

Once in the United States, a majority of participants experienced a decline in socioeconomic status. If they came from wealth, the families most likely spent all that they had in order to make the journey. Even if they did not, the quality of life was significantly diminished in the time period right after immigration. Most immigrant families lose not only land, property, money, home, social status, but their language, culture, and career. Other research studies have explored the difficulty of immigrants adapting to a new country (Piedra & Engstrom, 2009; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014).

I sought to explore participants' perceptions of traumatic experiences before, during, and after immigration. Most of the participants minimized their traumatic experiences and/or channeled their traumatic experiences to serve others. Many immigrants are prone to experience trauma throughout their displacement journey (Schmitz et al., 2003). Displaced children may experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and other stressors (Almquist & Brandell-Forsberg, 1997; Schmitz et al., 2003). In this study, most of the participants who experienced trauma did not perceive those experiences to be overwhelming. Most minimized their traumatic experiences and/or used those experiences as inspiration to help others. There is extensive research on traumas experienced by immigrants.

Mollica (2019) theorizes that at the center of the dimensions essential to trauma recovery is the trauma story itself. Mollica explains, "Sharing [trauma] stories serves a dual function – not only of healing the survivor but also of teaching and guiding the listener and, by extension, society, in healing and survival" (125). The trauma story includes four elements: factual accounting of events, cultural meaning of trauma, enlightened view of the world, and listener-storyteller relationship. When patients account their traumatic life experiences, they provide historical documentation and reveal their cultural meaning of trauma. Oftentimes, the survivor gains insights, experiences posttraumatic growth, and reaches a more enlightened view of the world (Mollica, 2019). And finally, Mollica describes the importance of the relationship of the storyteller as the teacher and the listener as the student. If the telling of the trauma story can, by degrees, bring about some form of healing and recovery for any of the ten participants, then it is a happily unintentional outcome of this study. Mollica (2019) offers, "By understanding that they are part of the historical process, all who are involved in the sharing of trauma histories become personally stronger and more resilient" (126).

As mentioned, I also set out to focus specifically on the influences of interrupted education on the participants. This study found that some adolescent immigrants faced interrupted formal education and/or experiences of trauma. This study found that the longer the immigration journey, the longer the time that immigrant students experience interrupted formal education. Mostly, extended immigration journeys occurred because displaced immigrants are kept in refugee or closed camps as they wait for sponsorship to a new country. Often, there are no formal education opportunities for displaced immigrant students in refugee or closed camps. The long-term effects of interrupted education on immigrant children - still an understudied topic - can manifest in losing more time in remediated education, grade retention, and/or the learning gaps (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017; Custodio & O'Loughlin, 2017). Most participants felt unprepared even after high school due to limited English language development correlated with the length of interrupted formal education. Many of the participants felt the need or were required to take more ELD courses. This finding indicated the need to consider that, for adolescents, mastery another language takes, on average, more than the four years of high school.

Finally, another significant finding determined that a majority of participants attributed their successes to their own hard work. They were self-motivated to accomplish life goals and strive for a better life. It may be that these participants, the 1.25-generation newcomer immigrants, recognized the immensity of their immigration journey - the sacrifices, the risks, the perils, the courage and love it took. Resilient and motivated, these ten immigrants approach life fearlessly and purposefully, without taking things for granted. They did not depend on others for their accomplishments, but they also did not pass up opportunities. For these ten participants,

there existed a complex duality of self-reliance and independence juxtaposed with the recognition that self-improvement requires mentorship and opportunities.

Common Advice from Former 1.25-Generation Newcomer Students

A majority of the participants advised current adolescent newcomer students to focus their energy in learning to speak, read, and write English as quickly and deeply as possible. Unlike immigrant youths or U.S.-born children of immigrants, these 1.25-generation teenage immigrants were less likely to face intergenerational patterns of acculturation, such as dissonant or consonant acculturation, where there is a gradual abandonment of the home language and loss of immigrant culture (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Piedra & Engstrom, 2009). A matter of pride for all of the ten participants is their multilingualism and retention of their home language and cultural norms. Unconcerned with losing their well-developed first language or beloved culture, the majority of the participants emphasized the urgency of mastering the English language in order to speak, read, and write effectively in the United States.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be addressed. To start, this in-depth interview research study had only ten participants. For that reason, the findings in this study may not be generalizable to all former 1.25-generation newcomer students. A second limitation was the skewed majority of Vietnamese American participants. In this study, there were seven Vietnamese Americans, two Mexican Americans, and one Pilipino American. Future research should include participants from either only one country of origin or from a larger array of countries. To add, the makeup of the participants leaned toward the college-educated, middle-class immigrants. In fact, only one participant did not further his education in college. Future research should include a more social-economically diverse sample.

Out of the seven Vietnamese American participants, I personally knew five of them. Three of them, I reached out directly to ask for their participation. My existing relationships with the five participants may influence how they answer certain questions, including expressing the social desirability to please the researcher (Nederhof, 1985). All the rest answered to my Facebook post or mass email message. Reactivity such as emotional valence was an unavoidable part of this qualitative research (Paterson, 1994).

A final limitation was the ambiguity of how each participant defined trauma. The participants' responses about trauma may also be influenced by another reactivity element. It is not the norm for most people in many cultures to discuss traumatic experiences and admit to the need for mental health care. Future studies should utilize culturally-relevant measures to assess trauma and be administered by trained experts in trauma-informed interviewing.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Immigration population in the United States continues to increase (Passel & Cohn, 2008). There is a growing number of school-aged students who are English Learners (Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2017).

Recommendation #1: More intensive English Language Development is needed for the 1.25-generation immigrant students.

The 1.25-generation immigrants who participated in this study were not concerned about dissonant acculturation (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) because they had spent a major part of their childhood mastering their mother tongue and living their lives immersed in their own cultures and traditions. In other words, the participants were not concerned with losing their own family values and upbringings. In fact, all ten participants were fluent in their mother tongue even (for some) after decades of living in America. Instead, almost all of them wished they had a better

grasp of the English language. It is recommended that schools adopt an intensive ELD model, one that considers what little time the 1.25-generation immigrant student has to take full advantage of compulsory education and become college- and career-ready in an English-speaking society.

In the humble opinion of this researcher, who taught high school English for fourteen years to a spectrum of English Learners, there needs to be a mindset shift with teaching English Learners, especially with Newcomer students. Instead of dumbing down, watering down, or slowing down the curriculum, English Learner educators need to act with urgency to intensify the English language development by giving more time, more opportunities for the 1.25-generation immigrant students to study, practice, interact with English at the appropriate cognitive age level. When a teenage newcomer student enters a United States school, regardless of how much or little education she had in her home country, she has a developing adolescent brain that needs the stimuli fitting to her understanding, experience, and age group. Even if she cannot speak English well or at all, she thinks, reasons, and feels just as profoundly as her peers, and in some cases, have experienced and observed more triumphs and tribulations compared to her U.S.-born peers. Thus, the use of high-interest, age-appropriate materials is critical to motivate teenage Newcomer students. A third component of intensifying English language development, similar to the argument of using high-interest materials because these are highly-developed teenagers, is to utilize higher levels of cognitive processing of analyzing, evaluating, and creating from Bloom's revised taxonomy of educational objectives (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Educators must have high expectations that their newcomer students (who are not just one or two years behind, but most likely four to five years behind, or may have no formal learning at all, in their English skills) must, can, and will learn more in a shorter amount of time

to catch up to their peers. In order to accomplish this almost insurmountable task, school leaders must guarantee a winning tactic of "all-in" to bridge this gap; we must use the best, most experienced, most inspiring, most compassionate teachers to teach our most high-needs English learners to read, write, and speak effectively.

Recommendation #2: There is a need for sustained and collaborative articulation between K-12 and Higher Education systems to support English Learners.

The second recommendation supports the first. Whatever English language growth can be achieved in high school, the 1.25-generation immigrant students will benefit from further intensive English language development at the college and university level. To be clear, this is not about adding on more requirements and remediation courses that take up more time and delay degree completion. It is the shifting of priorities to put the most support and resources where the need is greatest. We need the best and most passionate professors who also feel the urgency to help English Learner students reach not one or two years of growth, but three, four, or five years, so that they will have the fundamental literacy skills it takes to be academically successful in higher education and earn the coveted Bachelor's degree.

For one, the articulation between K-12 and higher education systems should improve the alignment of standards and assessments. Such efforts as the California State University's collaboration with participating high schools through the college preparatory Expository Reading and Writing Course (ERWC) sets cogent expectations and alignments of critical thinking and writing skills. These kinds of articulation encourage college-readiness for all participating students and are the policies and practices newcomer immigrant students need and deserve. In order to achieve such authentic articulation between K-12 and higher education systems, school leaders must commit to sustained collaboration.

Recommendation #3: School districts need an ongoing system to orient, support, and connect with high school newcomer students.

Once a 1.25-generation immigrant student arrives at a high school, school leaders cannot take for granted that he is knowledgeable about the U.S. school system. School leaders should not leave the orientation of newcomer students to chance or hope that he makes good friends quickly or connect with one of his six teachers who can help orient the student. Schools need a newcomer welcoming program, club, or protocol that involves students, teachers, the counselor, the nurse, the school psychologist, the ELD coordinator, the community liaison, the after-school academic coordinator, the administrator, and (hopefully) an interpreter. In other words, when a newcomer student steps foot on campus, there should be a team of people ready to orient, support, and make connections with him (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2019).

Moreover, since a newcomer student's entrance into a United States school is dependent on his arrival time into the country, it may not be the start of the school year. Newcomer immigrant students may completely miss the school's planned orientation from which the rest of the school population benefitted. From understanding rules and regulations to how to access support staff, programs, and technology, a newcomer high school student who arrives in the middle of a semester will be uninformed unless there is a sustained program or system that orients, supports, and connects the newcomer student to his school.

Recommendation #4: Educators need to incorporate trauma-informed social and emotional learning (SEL) into their curriculum.

Many immigrant students experienced trauma before, during, or after their migratory journey. To ignore this trauma is to allow it to fester and seep into aspects of these students' lives, including their academic success and personal well-being. When students are affected by

trauma, their brains' capacity to receive and integrate new information is limited (Pawlo et al., 2019). Shonkoff et al. (2012) delineate that the physiologic disruptions or biological memories that occur due to significant adversity can diminish the brain and body's development and may continue into adulthood and lead to lifelong physical and mental health impairments. Research shows that when schools systematically incorporate social and emotional learning (SEL) into their classrooms and school culture, students thrive academically, behaviorally, and developmentally (Durlak et al., 2011; Sklad et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2017). Furthermore, when SEL includes trauma-informed principles, the effectiveness of both interventions increases (Pawlo et al., 2019). Van der Kolk (2014) writes, "The greatest hope for traumatized, abused, and neglected children is to receive a good education in schools where they are seen and known, where they learn to regulate themselves, and where they can develop a sense of agency. At their best, schools can function as islands of safety in a chaotic world. They can teach children how their bodies and brains work and how they can understand and deal with their emotions. Schools can play a significant role in instilling the resilience necessary to deal with the traumas of neighborhoods or families" (353). Evident from this study, immigrant students who experienced trauma mostly did not seek therapy. This pattern of response to trauma makes the work of schools embracing trauma-informed social emotional learning urgently important.

Recommendations for Future Research

This researcher recommends more exploration of the downward mobility phenomenon of immigrant families immediately after arrival to the new country. This change in social and economic status greatly affected participants who experienced it.

One surprising finding stood out that most 1.25-generation immigrants in this study tended to minimize their traumatic experiences and/or used those experiences as inspiration to

help others. This researcher is not adept in the biological and psychological effects of trauma. A more in-depth research by experts on this topic is needed.

This study also found a not surprising, but unlooked for and tangential finding: every participant felt that they were well-advanced in math skills compared to their U.S.-born peers, even with the loss of time in refugee or closed camps. A careful comparative study of global math programs, strategies, and pedagogy should be had to advance our own practices.

This study recognizes the resilient nature of many of the participants. Masten (2018) defines resilience as the "capacity of a system to adapt successfully to significant challenges that threaten the function, viability, or development of the system" (16). In this systemic perspective, the level of resilience of one individual is interconnected to other systems like parents and family. Masten (2018) considers resilience as a systems concept that is dynamic, interactive, and interdependent. An individual who has a positive, happy upbringing with love and stability will fare better when facing adversity or deprivation (Masten, 2018). Thus, systems like parents and schools play a major part in shaping the individual's resilience to adversity. More research on how the systems of resilience influence the academic and life trajectories of immigrant adolescent students should be conducted.

Conclusion

This study set out to gain insight into the experiences of former 1.25-generation immigrant students in order to inform educators in the ways in which they can support and educate current immigrant students. To that end, all four recommendations in this chapter speaks directly to the work for consideration by educators. These recommendations are my response to the findings from the interview data. In essence, the four recommendations are directional

compasses for educators to take on the monumental work of preparing the 1.25-generation immigrant students for college and career.

The second aim of this study was to elicit advice from former adolescent immigrant students to current newcomer high school students. In that, I am grateful to the openness of each participant who shared their words of wisdom. I felt their sense of urgency when they spoke about how essential it was to learn English as deeply and quickly as possible. To all scholars, educators, readers, I ask that you share these heartfelt advice from the ten participants of this study. Current newcomer adolescent students need to hear from the people who had lived their high school experiences as 1.25-generation immigrant students.

The third aim of this study was to provide a platform for the 1.25-generation immigrants to retrospectively narrate their stories in their own voices so that these moving immigration stories can be read, heard, understood, and shared to bridge the compassion gap for all immigrants (C. Suárez-Orozco, 2019).

It is a time of reckoning with the past, awakening to the present, and reimaging the future. A time to rewrite history and wipe away the white-washing of that history. It is time to grabble with all our failed attempts to reconstruct. It is time to stop telling the lies of history, the oppressor's mad mumblings. It is time to listen to the lived experiences of those marginalized and silenced. We have the responsibility to teach our children the true history of our nation by listening to the storytellers, and in that listening we may find our way back to truth. One way to do this is to listen to and anthologize the life history stories of immigrants past and present, so that their American-born descendants never forget from where they came. The stories of immigrants are stories of human courage, resilience, and hope. These are the love stories of American history.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocols[14]

I want to thank you again for agreeing to participate in the interview for my study. As mentioned, I am here to learn about your personal experiences as a former refugee high school student. My study seeks to understand your perspective on issues related to your personal experiences. What I learn from you and others who I am interviewing will help to inform educators and policy-makers on how to improve our educational system for adolescent refugee students.

I anticipate that today's interview session will last about 2 hours.

If it is okay with you, I will be audio-recording our conversation. The purpose of doing this is to understand the details of the interview but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential and your name will not be used in my study. If there are points during the interview when you would like to have the recorder off, please let me know. At any time, we can stop to take a break. Do you have any questions before we start?

Artifact

1. Let's talk about the artifact that you brought with you today.

    Can you describe it?

    Describe the story behind this artifact.

    What made you decide to bring it?

    What does it mean to you?

Warm up – getting to know participant

2. Tell me a little bit about yourself.

    How old are you? How long have you been in the United States?

Migration History

3. Where is your family from originally?

    What do you remember of [country of origin]?

    Who was living with you in your home? *(Mother? Father? Siblings? Extended family members?)*

4. Can you share with me a little bit about your family's migration story?

[14] Prior to the interview, ask participants to bring an artifact (e.g. a photo, a painting, an article of clothing, a document, etc.) that has special importance to them.

What was going on in *[country of origin]* before your family had to leave?

What motivated you and your family to leave?

Did you all go together or did some family members come first?

How old were you when you left the country where you were born?

Can you tell me a little bit about your journey?

Did you immediately settle in one area or were there multiple stops along the way? [If so, can you tell me about when and where and a little about those experiences? *[Probe for direct journey from country A to B or stepwise migration, refugee camp, etc.* Consider a timeline if complicated journey].

How old were you when you arrived to the US? *[Again probe for immediately settling in one place or multiple moves]*

5. What do you remember most vividly upon arriving to your new land?

   What is your most positive memory?

   What is your most negative?

   Was anyone particularly helpful in your transition? Who? And How?

6. Often family members react in different ways to the shock of leaving their first country and settling into another. Can you tell me a little about how different people in your family responded? (Probe for members of family w/ whom residing or in touch)
7. Some families talk about what they are going through and others never discuss the traumas of the past, while other families are somewhere in between. How did your family talk about and deal with their trauma and losses?
8. How did your respond?

   Did that change over time?

9. In what ways do you think your refugee experience may have influenced your life path?
10. What would have helped you have a smoother transition to life in the US? What do you wish you had known when you first came here?

Educational History

11. Did you go to school in your birth country for any time?

    Until what age/grade?

    What do you remember from that experience?

Were there periods of time where you couldn't/didn't go to school? If so, why and for how long?

12. How old were you when you entered school here in the United States? What grade did you enter?
13. What are some of your most vivid memories about your experience as you entered school?

    What were some of the high points?

    What about the low points?
14. Who (if anyone) was particularly helpful in your school success? In what ways?
15. Who (if anyone) was got in the way of your school success? In what ways?
16. Did you receive any services that were helpful? Can you tell me about them?
17. Who (if anyone) was particularly kind (or helpful) to you in your pathway through education? In what ways?
18. Who (if anyone) was particularly unkind (or got in the way of your success? In what ways?
19. Did you have experiences of bullying in school? Can you give me an example?
20. How far did you go in school? (e.g. finish high school, community college, college)

    [If went to college] What was your college experience like?
21. What advice would you give to a high school refugee student coming to the United States now?

    Who would you encourage them to talk to? What steps should they take to help themselves to be successful?

Current Life

22. Tell me a little about your life today.
23. What kind of work are you doing?

    What do you like about that work?

    And what don't you like?

    [probe for satisfaction]
24. Can you tell me a little about your work history?

    [probe for stability and satisfaction]
25. Are you currently in a relationship? Can you tell me about that?

[If so] how would you describe that relationship?

In what ways is your relationship similar or different to the one your parents had?

[If not] what ways were your relationship similar or different to the one your parents had?

26. Do you have children?

    How old are they and what are they like?

    Are you parenting then in similar or different to the one your parents had?

27. Can you tell me a little about your friendships?

    Who are the people you confide in?

    Are you happy with the quality of your friendships?

    Is there anything you would want to change in your relationships?

28. In general, how satisfied are you with your life?

    What (if anything) would you like to change?

    And what do you think is just about right?

29. What are you looking forward to in your future? What goals have you set?

Closing

30. Is there anything else about your immigration experience that you would like to share with me?

I cannot thank you enough for participating in this process. I hope to share your story with the world so that we can improve the lives of all refugee students in the United States. Please accept this gift as a token of appreciation for your time.

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