QT Viets on their Vietnamese Roots and Routes

[00:00:00]

good evening. You are tuned into Apex Express Radio. We're bringing you an Asian and Asian-American view from the Bay Area and around the world. Tonight I'll be the host, Paige Chung. And this is Acre Thursday. Acre is Asian-American for civil rights inequality. It's a network of 11 amazing organizations.

Today we're gonna talk to two of our organizations, Asian Refugees, United and Vie Unity. And tonight we're gonna talk about our Vietnamese roots and routes. And tonight we have, joining us is Tama and Hi can you please introduce yourselves? Ma you can go first. .

Hi everybody, my name is Mel. I am a co-executive director at Asian Refugee United. Also co-founder and core member of Cafe Collective. Okay. My, hi,

my name is, hi. I go by my name. I am with Asian Refugees, United and Cub Cafe Collective. And yeah, I am currently on Alon Land, native Alon Land[00:01:00] in Oakland, California. Great to be here.

Hi everyone. My name is Tau. My pronouns are they them. I'm currently on Tommy Noon Land, also known as San Jose, California. I am a member of Viet Unity Bay Area. I I didn't even introduce myself in the Vietnamese context. Hi everyone. My name is Paige Chung. I am part of acre programs as part of Apex Express Radio.

But in my Vietnamese work, I am so excited to say that I'm part of the Cutie Viet Collective of Artisan Healers, along with hi and dang. And I'm currently based in Tongva Land in Los Angeles. And yeah, I'm really excited today to talk about our Vietnamese roots and routes. Being part of the Cutie Vic Collective and also just in my growing friendship with Tau has been really healing for my, I feel like like Vietnamese ancestral, like being and it's just great.

Every time I get a chance to speak to any of my Vietnamese friends in this work I'd love to [00:02:00] start and just. Ask everyone. Yeah. What are your roots in Vietnam and how did your family and you make it way to Turtle Island by way of the United States? And yeah, please share as much as you'd like and yeah,

if it's helpful, I can go first too. Yeah. Okay. So, both my parents are from the southern parts of Vietnam. My mom is from Saigon, or Ho Chi Min City, and my dad is from Raia, which is about six hours south of Saigon. My parents my mom was about 12 when she escaped by boat with her family. She was the second oldest of six daughter.

And I think one son and they escaped with yeah, their entire family was able to make that voyage together the first time. So I think they were very lucky in that sense. And I think the journey was relatively safe as, as safe as could be for that voyage. They landed in a refugee camp in the [00:03:00] Philippines where they stayed for about two years.

I actually it's funny I'm sure maybe my friends will relate to this, but you don't ever hear the story of the journey in one sit down dinner conversation or something. It's like every year I get like different pit bits and pieces or like maybe I'll hear the whole story once, but then you hear it from another family member and then the story like sort of just changes depending on who you talk to.

So, my auntie, they actually told me that My grandfather winging they were actually offered six months into living in the Philippines refugee camp to move to Australia. And then my grandfather winging was like, no, like, like, we're gonna wait until we're offered immigration into the us.

And my grandmother was very upset with him because she's like, why would you do that now? We have to stay longer. So that's why they were in the Philippines for quite a bit of time in terms of in terms of my family, like why they were there for two years. And then my dad actually escaped by himself.

He was 16 at the time. [00:04:00] His mom and his sister had to stay behind because They wanted to make sure like someone would take care of the house in case he didn't make his voyage, like in case he didn't make it. So they kind of stayed behind just to see like, oh, in case like, you don't make it, we can stay with the house.

And also because my grandmother on my dad's side, my bono, she thought that he would have a better chance because he's a boy and, you know, could do something as dangerous, as risky as that by himself. Whereas she felt like it would be really hard for her daughter to do that journey. And I won't get into the details.

Maybe if folks wanna share like maybe some graphic details about anything today, maybe just give a little heads up. But yeah, I won't share any of the violent parts of the story. But his journey was quite treacherous. Really quite very violent and awful on, on the boat in terms of like pirates and different violence that can happen when you're out at sea.

So I think that's, yeah, that's just been like a [00:05:00] point of like a lot of healing that my family's had to deal with him. Like just all of the things that he's had to go through as a young person. And then I think he landed in Cambodia. And for him, because he was like a single child, he actually didn't have to stay in the refugee camps for very long act.

One of the other people in the camps told him that he should, he was actually 18 but they told him to write down, like on the paperwork that he was 17, so that he would get sponsored as a child into the us. And then from there, He was sponsored by like a Christian family in in Florida. And he was there for a couple months before his his aunt moved to Orange County was able to make her way over to Orange County and sponsored him over to be with her.

And then my mom and her family, they first landed in San Francisco. Cuz I always remember this part because she's like, I miss San Francisco. The breeze. The breeze maua. [00:06:00] Like, she was like, oh, what is this place? It's so magical maua, like, it's so, so much good breeze. And you know, I especially after coming to from Vietnam, like, it's so g like, it's so stuffy.

So she always talks about the wind and. Yeah, my parents, they met a little bit later, a few years down the line. I think my mom was 23, my dad was maybe in his late twenties. They actually met like at a party at someone's house in little Saigon. And yeah, also up there. That's kind of the journey of my parents a little bit in the b in the very beginning.

Yeah.

Thanks for sharing that, Paige, my mom's from the same area as your dad. Yeah. What if they know each other? Have you ever been to those gatherings where I went to this gathering once where it's like people from a village in Vietnam, like have a gathering over here in the US and there's like a ton of folks.

Those are really interesting. But yeah. My mom's from, or which is just like a [00:07:00] little village that's part of red. Yeah. My family actually comes from two diasporas. My maternal grandparents are from China, Guang, China. And my grandma is Haka, which is an ethnic minority in China. . And what I know about her was that she was married when she was like nine to my grandpa cuz she was an orphan.

And they made it down and she was born in like 1912. And I think in that time in China there was a lot of, you know, a lot of war. So I assumed that. That might be why they left. And so they made it down to Vietnam, to the very southern area in the Mekong Delta. And my grandpa was a Chinese teacher and they had 11 kids.

And my grandma sorry, my mom is the youngest but her dad passed away when she was seven to tuberculosis. So [00:08:00] that's my mom's side, you know, like pre, sort of the American war. They were mostly just like small merchants that would like sell like ice cigarettes and bread or, you know, whatever.

And my dad's side is from which is about two hours from Saigon. And I believe his dad was like some, like, like a. Some position of power in the village. I'm not really sure. I think Jung Lang or something like that. And my dad's oldest brother was in the Southern Vietnamese Air Force.

So they were associated with the Southern Vietnamese military. And I remember, you know, I, I have a relationship now, like, I can't say that about before, but I have a relationship now with my dad where I will talk to him about the war and he's pretty open about it. There are [00:09:00] points where there are moments that really trigger him and we have to take a moment to, you know, like, sit in those feelings.

But yeah, he. He, after the war, he was actually conscripted into the communist military to go fight in Cambodia. So yeah, he's like told me like I've held in AK 47 before and things like that. And actually what my, and then one of another, one of his older brothers was sent to be a, after the war ended, was sent to be a teacher somewhere.

They had, even though his older brother fought for the South Vietnamese side, they had two aunts that were actually on the communist side. So this is something that some people actually, you know, have in their family, where some people are on the su, you know, the southern, you know, Vietnamese military side and the other, some others are on the communist side.

That doesn't really get talked about [00:10:00] as much, but it is a very common thing. And it is because one of my, two of my dad's aunts were associated with the communist government that took over that him and his brothers were able to, his oldest brother was, you know, more easily able to leave as refugees.

So I think that's important to note. So both of my parents, they hadn't met each other. They left by boat. My mom made it to sun CLA in Thailand, and my dad made it to Indonesia. And my dad was telling me this story that when he was on the boat, there was this one you know, day where he felt like he was gonna die.

Like he was just so. He was not feeling good, but then he saw Quan Ang gum in the sky on a dragon. Right? And he felt instantly relieved. And what's wild is like, I think like two weeks ago I went to this reiki healing session, which I've never done before. And I felt this energy, [00:11:00] just like during this session, I felt this energy in my forehead and I pictured the dragon and for some reason I knew it was Wong Gum's dragon.

But anyways though like there's a lot of like, there's a lot of like, spiritual sort of attachment to Buddhism with my dad and me. And I talked to him about, I talked to him a lot about that too. So they made it to their respective refugee camps. I think my mom was only like 16, maybe younger when she left my boat.

And my dad was already an adult. My mom was sponsored. They were both sponsored to come to the Los Angeles region. My mom told me that when she first came to the US she was separated from her siblings and put into this house with a white family where there were other girls there. And she freaked out because she thought like she had just been sold or something like that.

But later she came to realize what was going on and she got to go to high school in the US for at least a year. [00:12:00] And then they met in Glendale Community College. My dad was her math tutor. And then he became an engineer. She dropped out of college and became a nail tech. And because my dad became an engineer, you know, they ended up moving up to the Silicon Valley, which is where I was born.

And yeah, I grew up with a lot of the, my mom's side of the family. And some of them, you know, came over at the same time as my mom did, but some of them came over after 1995. So I have a mix of folks who left, like really soon after the war, and I ha I'm close to one of my aunts who stayed behind for a really long time and experienced sort of like the transition of the government and things like that.

And so I talked to her a lot about that too. So that's kind of, that's kind of how my parents got here and raised me. Yeah. Passing it on to whoever wants to share next.

Thanks for sharing. What you share, remind me in term of [00:13:00] a story that I heard my dad share when we were driving back when we were on like this long road trip, I feel like those are the precious time that I get to talk to my dad and he's like, actually share. But yeah, my dad's side is from Hui.

And on my on that's side, my grandparents had moved from Hui to the south before my dad was born. So after I think my, on my dad's side, my fraternal side, my grandma have totaled 13 kids. So after I think their first and second they migrated to the south and my mom's side. When I asked my grandma, she said that we've always her side of the family have always been in the south, but it's more on the outskirt of Saigon.

So wk is where I was born and on. Yeah. When I talked to my dad he said that, you know, like his dad and his dad's brother were on the opposite side as well. And yeah, [00:14:00] when I think my grandpa got into trouble and was locked in jail, his brother, because his brother was on the opposite side, like that connection was able to, you know, like get him out.

And one of my oldest aunt on my dad's side was a interpreter for the South Army. So when yeah, like, April 30th happened, she. Actually was, had an opportunity or like was able to From what I heard, she was able to, you know, have the whole family, like come to us with her. And they were going by plane and my grandpa was like, no, you know, like, the country is united.

We're gonna stay here. So my aunt left by herself because I think there were fear, you know, of like, different fear that arises. And then later on my uncle on that side went on his journey by boat and meet up with her in Southern California. And on my mom's [00:15:00] side. Recently I heard an interesting story.

On my mom's side, my grandma had nine kids and also the oldest he, yeah, my oldest uncle was able to escape by boat. I think se after several try And each time I feel like it's several, it was like, like gold bar, like, you know, they were like it's like, it's an expensive journey. And also very, yeah, risky.

But I think at that time, yeah, my, my uncle, I don't know much about his journey. I haven't really talked to him. But he's one of the fem first on my mom's side to escape by boat. And later on sponsor my grandma and my grandpa over to U us. But yeah, recently I heard that my fifth and sixth aunt wanted to go, but they also tried several times, but it wasn't succeed.

And so they try by, by walk, they try. They try by the route of land. So they cross the border from [00:16:00] Vietnam to Cambodia. And my aunt has, I think like a cousin that was like taking people by way of land and crossing to Cambodia to go to the refugee camp. But she said that after she had pay, and you know, like after several weeks or several months, she had not heard anything about them.

And like my, you know, aunties didn't contact her. And so she went to see a Tay boy. And yeah, this medium told her that, you know, like, yeah, your daughters are in like a really dark place, you know, you need to go and look for them. So my grandma went on this journey and she said that before she left, she told my grandpa that if she's not back within a month, consider her dead.

Like, you know, but she going to look for her daughter. So, my, at that time I think the border between Cambodia and Vietnam was fairly flexible because of the trades. You know, like, so my grandma pretended to be one of the [00:17:00] merchants and she costs over to Cambodia and then some miracle And she was, you know, talking to some local, and I think like she had went with her cousin once time before to Cambodia to like, you know, get some goods and stuff like that.

So she was like, oh yeah, I remember a little bit of the routes, but I was just, you know, like going on a whims of it. So she luckily met this Cambodian person and he wrote, he like took her on a motorbike and drove her to like this really, like in the middle of nowhere, like, house and my grandma said that she remembered the tree.

I guess that's how she was like, able to identify it. So then she was like calling out for my aunties and they were like trapped under the basement. And you know, like they were saying how like, yeah, they were like staying there for a couple days and like the family there kind of give them like food and stuff.

But I think it was kind of like a scam where like, okay, we are just gonna [00:18:00] take the money and pick, you know, like the people to somewhere and pretend that, you know, like whatever happened after a couple months that like let off. So I don't know what happened, but luckily my grandma was able to find my aunties and yeah, and then make their way back to Vietnam.

Yeah, so that was like a really wild story that I learned recently. And I think, yeah, we don't hear a lot about different ways that people have also tried to You know, like fine, like different ways of like, living during that time. But yeah, after that my uncle who escaped by boat, sponsored my grandparents to the US and then my grandparents sponsor our whole family to come by.

Reunification, the reunification act. So in 20 2002, my family and I, along with five other family from my mom's side, we immigrated to the US and has been like living [00:19:00] in the big area since.

Yeah. Okay.

Wow. I'm, I just wanna take a moment. It's just like so many I'm just like feeling very feeling heartened in so many, my heart is like, in so many different directions. Just thinking about your family walking. Yeah. Families ev like families on boats. And yeah I definitely, yeah. Thank you all for sharing.

I, I definitely, it making you sparked a lot in me. Paige, when you were talking about like, being of the diaspora and trying to like piece like truth, I feel like for me, as someone of this generation that grows up in the diaspora My parents were just trying to survive on the day-to-day that I like get truths, like truths come in piecemeal.

And it was like, in some ways, I think as I am getting older, it's like my responsibility to [00:20:00] try to bring all of those little bits of truth that I get. Like, for me it's like, in the kitchen, like while my mom's cooking or in the garden while my mom's like watering or planting or like on the way to the car shop, like with my dad, you know?

And I think that I think that it, like all of those truths for me, it didn't really come up for like until I was a lot older. I don't know why. I think maybe. Maybe my parents didn't want to want me to know as a young person, or there was definitely a point in especially the last few years, I think I wanted to know more.

And so maybe partly initiating on my own, but also I think my mom, especially before she passed, realizing kind of where she was at in her life, wanting to share too. And so, so much of my, yeah, so much of my understanding is just piecemeal and initiated because I'm curious and I want to know, but also because you know,[00:21:00] I think it took so much energy and took so, so much energy and strength and.

Courage and fear to leave that country for my parents that like every time that I've come back or return or come, go have gone to Vietnam as an adult, it like brings up stuff in my parents. Like, yeah, like I remember when I first yeah, I don't know, as someone who didn't experience the war and didn't experience what my parents experienced it's just interesting to get their truths.

And so I remember when I was like 18, 20 18, 19 20, and wanting to live in Vietnam as a young person for a really long time, at least for a year. And my, and I told my mom and she was like, oh, to visit, right? And I've only visited once when I was. Five, or sorry, when I was seven and when I was 12 during my winter break at school.

And I remember being like, no, [00:22:00] I think I wanna try visiting or try living there. And I think for some reason, I just remember my mom not having a very strong reaction to that. And I never really understood why until much later in life. And then fast forward to when I was 20 yeah.

When I was, no, it was, this is when I first came back to Vietnam after 22 years when I was back in 2018 and in 2018 after my mom passed. So that was when I was like 31. Yeah. Like, I'm like going on my own and my dad's like, oh, you're actually Chinese. Yeah, you're part Chinese. And so like, I don't, like, I don't know why like, I don't know why just.

Thing, truth just happens in piecemeal, but for me, like what I know is yeah I think it's what I know is my, my, so my mom's family is from mea and my dad's family is from Dugout. And so they're both [00:23:00] from a place known as ing a region called Ang MNA in southern Vietnam. . Plus my dad, I, and I think my, my I think that my, there's something with my Coming from Hyn from the island in Southern China.

My understanding is like there's some type of trades or some type of work happening, and then somehow found themselves in the delta. And yeah, my parents met young, they were kind of semi rearranged. And my mom is one of, my mom is one of eight and my dad is one of 13. And my dad converted to Catholicism to care to, to marry my mom.

And I think similar to youth. How Myk, so my mom's dad was, had some position of power and I think they were like a military lieutenant. Both sides of my family were in the southern, like we had. My grandfather and then my [00:24:00] dad were in the Southern army, and I think growing up, yeah. My parents and my growing up.

The story is that my parents and my brother left with they left with all the gold that they had owned. And were left on a kind of a late night ship disguised as like a market ship. And so my dad left first, and then my mom and my brother at the time, my brother was five.

This is like, I think like end of 86. They were part of the later waves of boat people. They. Left separately with other moms and children and were out at sea for seven days picked up by a military, a US military ship, and brought to Malaysia and refugee camps in the Philippines. So Paige, I'm curious if we Yeah, her families were at the same camp.

And my parents were then my parents and my [00:25:00] brother were then they were then brought to Sioux City, Iowa through the Presbyterian church where they were sponsored and then where I was born, soon afterward I was born and we moved to la my parents, so I was born like February 87, so they experienced like a Midwest winter and as much as there was a Vietnamese community out there my, what I heard was it was really rough and so they had refugee camp, refugee boat friends in la and so, took their second flight to LA and grew up yeah, grew up in California.

So I yeah, in, in many ways I think that yeah, the impacts of war, the impacts of the impacts of like that era of time of the American war in Vietnam, but also just like hundreds of, if not thousands of years of colonization, just, yeah, it just has like impacted my family and what I've seen in the vie community in Vietnam and in the [00:26:00] diaspora.

And I think like, as I've, yeah, as I. Gotten older. I think that it's been a struggle to try to hold the truth of my parents' my parents' history and their pa my parents' upbringing as people who were Mekong Delta people living in the south. But also realizing that there's like the three of you, there's like all these other truths out there and how has politics and how has yeah, how has politics and how have how has that affected like our community in Vietnam and outside of Vietnam.

And yeah, I think that so much of my healing work I'll end I'll check here for now is, yeah, like so much of my healing work has been trying to understand The truths of who I am in my family, but also there's just so many other truths out there, and there've just been waves of trying to understand like all of our people's truths and trying to like, make [00:27:00] sense of like trying to make sense of like our community's humanity and like what are the values coming out of war?

That that like pinpoint trauma and violence, but also can help trans transform or tr or like transform those things that I think can like really stigmatize and really like, kind of hold the community back and really transform those into values of vulnerability and honesty and and connection and belonging and yeah, values that I really believe that our ancestors lived out and and yeah, what had happened in you know, the sixties and seventies really like, really messed that up.

And so, like for me, part of it is so much part of like my resp what I feel is our, like, my responsibility and our collective [00:28:00] responsibility is to like literally repair, like physically, emotionally, spiritually like our family connections, but also our connections in our community where we're not stuck in.

In that stigma, but also like, informed by tradition in order to evolve with place in order to create the life in the world that we want. And so, yeah. I'll pause there for now.

I would love I don't know how other folks are feeling, but I'm sort of feeling like, not like heavy in the sense that I'm like, that was like I don't wanna carry it, but it was just like, wow. It's like a lot of holding all of the stories. I think. I'm gonna pause the recording for a second.

This is Tao again. Hi. When you talked about how there are so many truths out there, I think something. Really guides me or something that I take inspiration from is are the Zapatistas who often, you know, they're, they bring up [00:29:00] that they're, they wanna builds, which is a world where many worlds fit.

And I think, you know, when I'm navigating these multiple truths in the organizing work that I do a question that always comes to me as like, like how do we do that? Right? How do you get into a space where there are people who have different truths and how do we make space for that heal with one another and navigate sort of those, you know, likely conflicts?

And I think, like, to me that's why. It's so important in the work that I do to try to understand conflict transformation and accountability and talking about that with elders because that's mostly who I do my work with, my organizing work with and it's challenging. Yeah, I think that's all I had to say about that.

Let me just introduce this song. This song is called , which [00:30:00] is a song which is really old. It's like from, I think the twenties, forties, sixties, I'm not sure, but it's really old and it's a, it's a bolero for, um, all, it's like a tribute to all of our elders out there. They know exactly every word. So I'm gonna help, I'm gonna try to remember all the words.

Yeah. Cool. Thank you. So ready for .

We are going to play a quick song for you. This song is called after the snow by Leo had Dave, who is a community organizer at a APIENC

[00:31:00] [00:32:00] [00:33:00]

you just heard "After the snow," by Leo Hegde. Now we return back to our interview.

Yeah. I can tag on this is Paige again. I love the aist und the concepts and theories. I also think a lot about just like how you can never tell anyone or not never, but you cannot tell other [00:34:00] people how they experience the world. I think that sentence really helps me. That's something like my mentor, Dr.

G always talks about And also especially with the Covid stuff how this part in the pandemic, everyone is sort of in a different place with a masking or the different place with like, just sort of different protocols that everyone has. So I just really try to remember to respect everyone cuz I think that helps me too is not to assume or expect people will do something in a certain way, but just respect everyone.

So like if someone needs something, then like, how can we respect that person? Or if another person needs something different, how can we respect both people at the same time? So I think that's something that also helps me when there's like, especially with the Vietnamese, like political truths. Yeah.

I'm like, okay, the least I can do is just try to respect everyone.

Yeah, I think yeah, I, yeah, I love the, like I, especially as someone who's been in the food movement for a while, it's like a movement of [00:35:00] movements. It's like people who are working on farm worker rights, they're people who are working on community health. There's people who are working on like, ancestral food.

There's like so many there's so many entry points and so many ways of understanding the world. I think I'm, yeah, I think I'm like really? I think I'm trying my best to like open my ears and res and respect because I'm like, I, I. I struggle with that a little bit. Like, I think I'm not quite, I'm not quite sure how I like, like I really don't wanna live in a fascist world, and I kind of don't wanna I really, I get really scared when I know that there are people of our community who are part of that movement.

And so, there are things that I say yes to and there's actually things that I don't. And so [00:36:00] what does it mean to, and you know, these people are people who are just in our community. And so I do want to respect, respect truths. And at some point it's like, I. The reasons why I want to be changing the world is because the current conditions of it don't make sense for the majority of us, or especially they don't make sense for all of us and don't make sense for the most marginalized.

And so, yeah, I think I like struggle with it because I'm like, well, I don't, yeah, I don't quite I don't quite see a world where discriminating other people makes sense or I don't see a world where you're where people are yeah, outwardly, like bashing on other people or yeah and I, you know, my, my heart kind of saddens.

When I see people over our community, and when I say people over our community, I specifically mean view people who, you know, are part of a. Conservative. Right. [00:37:00] That just doesn't, yeah. I think I struggle with that. And so I think for me, part of my motivation or just part of how I wanna move in the world is building with the people who Oh, cute.

Sorry, I got distracted. What I keep talking yeah, building with the people who, yeah. Like, who, those of us who like really are wanting to ch see shifts and changes and want to be like building a world where equity is at the center of what we do. That we all have universal rights. And make time.

Yeah. Make time for the people who get it and hope that. We can keep thinking about how do we move more people who yeah. Who yeah, either like are apolitical or actually don't like, are like, don't yet understand like our relationships like with one another or just, yeah, [00:38:00] helping kind of people, you know.

So much of that is some of that might be organizing, some of that is cultural work. Some of that is is political education. Some of that is just like getting to know our neighbors. And so I think that's what I'm, what I want to be focusing my time on. Cuz I've definitely been on the other side where I'm like, like protesting people who living the world that I don't wanna see.

And I just, I get, I've been burned out and I get tired. So, I think it's been nice to. Yeah, have a lot of, yeah. Be able to make a lot of, make a lot of, especially the last, I say, decade of my life to be able to organize with the people who with you all, who get it and try to build the base and the number of people and towards values in the world that I wanna see.

So

did the dog say something? Is that After the capitol rights happened and there was Vietnamese people there with the [00:39:00] flag the yellow flag, three stripes the Unity Bay area. We got together this little call with our elders who don't like Trump. And it was very interesting because they were so passionate about it. And usually what we see in the mainstream that's like very passionate Trump supporting Vietnamese elders.

And I think a question that was asked was like what do they do knowing that they are kind of in the sort of minority as it seems? And a lot of them said, well, they will talk to some of their friends about it, but that's as far as it can go because they don't wanna get entangled in that argument.

And I thought that was, I thought that was interesting. And I also find that like, when I am in relationship in organizing relationships with elders in my community, that it really turns out they're not, like, most of them [00:40:00] I feel like are not like how it is depicted. Sort of like mainstream, like, oh, they're super red Beatty or anything like that.

And there's been instances too where like, you know, I have a friend who does tenant organizing and she organizes with a lot of Vietnamese tenants, and they were trying to form a union and one of the tenants called her a communist. And then the other tenants were like, what are you talking about?

Like, just like, what, you know, and it's like, and like over here in San Jose, like, I'm trying to, you know, with my I bring my aunts and some of her neighbors out to these meetings where we're trying to pass a policy that gives tenants an opportunity to purchase the building that they live in. And there are Vietnamese landlords calling this communists.

And my aunt, who's like, came over here like, you know, after 1995 and has, you know, have lived with the supposed communist government for a long time. She was like, That's, this isn't communist at all. What are you talking about? So I [00:41:00] feel like

like there, there is a lot of things that are misconstrued and lots of propaganda For sure. That I don't want to accept that as that person's truth, you know, in a sense. Like, I don't, when I when I, you know, when I say we are holding multiple truths, I think there's a difference between that and someone who has I don't even know what to call that.

I have no idea what to call that. I know this is still being recorded, but I'm interested in talking about food and plants too. You can cut that out if you want. I was like, totally.

Oh, I think we didn't say anything while we were.

This is Paige. I was thinking about what you were saying hi about neighbors and then how you kind of struggle sometimes with different people's politics in our Vietnamese community. I actually, like, I have a lot of family in Orange County, which is you know, famous for their Republican politics.

And I was actually like eating crawfish with some of my aunts and uncles in, in little [00:42:00] Saigon. No, Huntington Beach. Huntington Beach, yesterday. And my uncle had his neighbor over yesterday. And you know, my, my aunt uncle, they were very proud that I got into school. And so they were you know, like ex explaining to the uncle, like, oh yeah, like, Paige got to school, da.

Like, kind of just like sharing with the neighbor. And it was, yeah, it was just a very interesting experience, I think. He was just like, you know, congratulations, that's a great school, da. But he was also like, that's a really leftist school, right? And I was like, I don't, I didn't know that.

Like, I didn't know that school was really leftist or anything like that, so I was just yeah, sure. So there was just like small moments, like while we were eating crawfish, just kind of like that. And then a little bit later he was just talking. He was like, yeah, the next election, like, we're coming back.

And then like, he was like and then he like went on for like 30 minutes about guns and then. So, so it was like, kinda like that, right? But then there's also, like, to me, what I think

I think for me is like, like trying not to focus on the politics sometimes is [00:43:00] actually helpful. Like, I just, like, I ask him questions about his family and I ask him questions about how he knows my uncle. And he was like, I love your uncle so much. He's been like one of the best neighbors I've ever had.

Like, every time one of our garages open, like, we spend so much time together. And he also talked a lot about his son who Was in the military and how he has P T S D. So I think to me it's just kind of interesting, like people who we think we might be so different from politically in, in some ways.

I think for me, I try to stay open-minded because I try to find ways that we're actually share commonalities or just share common, like human things. Like I can relate to having p, I mean, I personally don't have P T S D, but I can relate to being related to someone who has a lot of P T S D from war.

I think that's something that sometimes people forget about being like in America is like, well, someone you know probably is a vet and has experienced maybe [00:44:00] some, something quite similar to your family in terms of like the war traumas and Yeah. Who's to say? I mean, I'm not gonna be buddy-buddy with him and be his best friend tomorrow, but there are small moments of humanity that we can share with one another in our relations, you know?

Yeah. Tell earlier when you were sharing about your dad experience and how he looked up and saw Ang Am and with the Dragon, I feel like that's yeah, Wang Amma has been like such a big significant part in term of like, my healing journey as well. And I feel like in many of like, also like the diaspora, I think like even to share that, oh, like Guam, you know, is like multi-gender, right?

Like kind of can hear like. You know, the cries or like the suffering like of people and transform in ways that, you know, like they can get to help or to like the root of like the other person suffering and like helps transform that in the ways that they can best receive it. [00:45:00] So I think like that's been like coming up for me and thinking about like, you know, my own family, my parents, and also like, the elders that we also work with, you know, who also carries a lot of, you know, like Yeah.

Like their, the stories, right? Like I think we share about like, yeah, like for me, like hearing these stories from like our elders and so many different, you know, stories of like sea and land and also all the stories that we don't get to hear, right? Like so many, I think like children and like women that like, yeah, like we're not able to hear their stories, you know, like crossing the oceans and.

And then also like the story, what does it mean to see like a country transform after so much like devastations, you know, that happened to the land and the people where like life condition is not, you know, has forced people to leave, you know, their homeland, right? And then like, what does it mean for elders when they [00:46:00] are really older, when they're on, you know, like they know that their, like, their time is like almost like coming that wanting to go back to the homeland, right?

So I think like about those stories and also like, war and violence and destructions of land and people is such like, it's so violent. Such a violent right? And it's like forces people and just like it is held for so many different generations. And thinking about like, yeah, like how am I able to also share and live the truth about what I believe in?

And being able to share that without having fear. And I think right now, that's still something that I'm like still kind of contemplate on, right? Like, like while connecting. And also there is like a certain place and time where I can share, you know, like different things that I believe in.

And there's also yeah, just adapting to like how and what [00:47:00] is the best way for me to connect with the person that I'm talking to right now, you know? And I think just like, yeah, in what are ways that, like I said, we can like humanize like each other and our experiences. And that's something that I feel like all of us on the call has been doing through, you know, like different projects that, that we like been a part of.

So I'm like excited for that, you know, as well.

I bring up Buddhism a lot with my dad to like, talk to him about politics, like the whole like rooted in culture thing. So like, yes I've brought up Howan is multi-gender to him to try to explain to him that I'm non-binary. And and then also there was this, I remember him telling me a story of

I don't know how that translates in English. But anyways, it's a story about this one Buddhist monk who, his mom did something bad, like I think his mom fed dog meat to a monk. And so she went to hell and his whole thing was like, I will [00:48:00] not become a Buddha until all people have been free from hell.

And I was like, that's hella abolitionist. Like, and I was like, dad, like, come on. Like, what do you think the story of that message is? The message of that story is and then I remember like I, I went to uc, Santa Cruz, and there was this whole presentation about like property and then like the Marxist theory around property ownership.

But the presenter brought up how like monks back in the day didn't own any property. And I was like, wait, Buddhist monks also don't own property. And so I, like one day I'm talking to my dad, I was like, so Dad, why do Buddhist monks own property? And then he went on this whole. Tangent and he was just like, you know, owning property is pretty bad.

It should be collectively owned. And I was like, you said it. I didn't say it like I didn't tell you anything. I just asked you the question, why don't monks own property? And so I think it's like, there's so many ways and it's a challenge too because I also have Trump supporting family that I'll get into like a huge fight with like one of my uncles called the cops on me cuz I've [00:49:00] stepped on his MAGA hat.

And it's like a push and pull of like, how much energy, what is my relationship with this person? How much energy am I gonna give to like, really like sit in this vulnerability? You know, it really depends on the person. Like if they're a family member, like, you know, like that's why it's, I think that's part of the healing too, is recognizing like, where can you say no to?

So you can say yes to somewhere else, right? And like establishing those boundaries. Cuz I could be both. I could be like the person who, you know, and like patient and like trying to be vulnerable and like work through the conversation with someone who I assume is on the other side and also I can fight.

And I think it's, yeah, it's like, you know, there is, there's also a lot of truth that you can find from your own anger. So yeah, just acknowledging that for yourself and for other people.

Wow. I love love, love that story. The the monks and the Buddhist monks in your dad. Yeah. I just, I'm just like, I'm just like yeah, like words can be so [00:50:00] trippy, like associations can be so trippy. I think I'm just trying to always think about the, like the. The spirit of our collective and the spirit of the commons.

I think when they, it reminded what your, what you shared Howard reminds me of when the years I was working with young people and especially the years working with primarily like Southeast Asian some East Asian young people in downtown Oakland and in South City in San Francisco. And helping folks reconnect to land and food and cultural identity.

That's when I was starting to do that maybe around 10, 10, 15 years ago. 15 years ago. And that was when my, when I started to. Build allyship with the Amma Musen tribe and the local native indigenous people. And you know, a lot of the young people were really curious, like, you know, what does it mean for us to be here on land that isn't ours?

And you know, like, sh should [00:51:00] we be giving this back land back to you? Just really insightful questions from these young people, mostly high school aged, young people. And then, you know, just, it was really interesting hearing their perspectives too, because they also, similar to these Buddhist folks that you were talking about, how they were like, actually this is, we don't own this land either.

Like, this is like, we may be even the person to people here. We might, we have, we might have a lot of knowledge and yeah. And like exploitation of land and people and resources is wrong. And the history of native indigenous people, especially on Turtle Island. And around the world like shouldn't be dismissed and things need to be restored and repaired.

But it was interesting to think about the commons and the collective and how do we not only steward our relationship to to the where we live and the physical location of our ecology, our home. But also how do we like, take care and steward our relationships with each other?

And I think that there's [00:52:00] just so many examples in nature and so many examples of you know, what I've heard about, or read about or seen from our homeland where, you know, nature and and even in just my own relationships with my family and my own friendships and connections, that I truly believe that I truly believe that we have the potential to heal.

And I think that yeah, I really think about like, like, like we, like the four of us. Like we're like the, we're like the, we're like the, we're like the stars in our family that survived, you know? And like for me, I think so much of what I want to be doing in the next phases of my life is like how, yeah.

Like what is, what does cultural survival look like and how do we support our current generations and our next generations to heal and restore and repair? And I think that will continue to be an experiment, but I think that. Yeah, like nature, I see [00:53:00] it around in nature all the time. Like, how are plants and how are waterways?

Like how are those being by remediated? Like what is our relationship to the natural resources that are helping to filter and yeah remediate and restore. And I think that us as humans, as part as not as like a people who are dominating any of those things, we're just part of, we're just part of one of many materials of life other animals, plants that, you know, we're trying to be in.

To me, it's just like white right relationship. And so when I think about me, when I think about, you know, if we can be healing yeah. I think that if we can be healing our relationship with each other, if we can be healing our cultural connection as we get people, if we can be healing our relationship to land and place then I think that we can heal like as a country and as a community.

Politically also,

I love when you talk high, I just wanna listen to you all day. Oh [00:54:00] my God. Same to the you three hand dog. Yes. Yes to everyone. Earlier you mentioned that you told your mom that you wanted to move to Vietnam and live there. So actually, yeah, you, and actually a few years ago, right when I finished college I was awarded at like a Fulbright scholarship to go to Vietnam and teach English.

And I unfortunately, you know, wasn't able to attend because of the pandemic. And also it was beautiful because then I actually spent so much time with my UA before she passed away. And I was just thinking about that for a while when you said that, because yeah, my parents had so many reactions about it.

They were like, it's so dangerous there. You're not gonna make it da. Like, it's like, are you sure you wanna do this? Like, they had so much doubt and fear and I. Part of our work, like you're saying, is about collective healing with each other and then also with the land. And I think the land is like partially about finding ways to be in Vietnam and not in Vietnam.

[00:55:00] And not, I don't know I'm not sure what it looks like or what it means or what you have to do, but I think there's something about returning to the homeland and and not in the Disneyland version of returning the, to the homeland where everyone's like, oh my gosh, you go to the homeland and everything's amazing and fantastic and No, it's hard.

It's really hard. You go there and like a lot of things come up. It's not like, easy journey. And I think that's actually why our QD v Collective Vietnam trip this year is so, so important for so many of us. And I encourage all of the folks to who are listening right now to check out our website, qd vi faye collective.com.

Is that the website? Someone plugged the website? I gotta cut this part. Plug the website correctly. Kitty vic cafe.com. Kie vic cafe.com. So, you can learn more about our Vietnam trip upcoming October. I think that's all the time that we have today. If anyone has any last words or last things that they would like to share, otherwise please come back for a part two.[00:56:00]

We'll have Vietnamese Roots and Routes part two to this episode with all the same folks you heard here today. Yeah. Is there any last words that folks wanna share?

Thank you so much for being on the very first part of our interview. Yeah, thanks Paige, for gathering us together and have this conversation.

Thank you so much for joining us. Please check out our website, kpfa.org backslash program, backslash apex express to find out more about the show tonight and to find out how you can take direct action.

We thank all of you listeners out there, keep resisting, keep organizing, keep creating and sharing your visions with the world. Your voices are important.

Apex express is produced by Miko Lee Jalena Keane-Lee and Paige Chung and special editing by Swati Rayasam.

Tonight's show was produced by me Paige Chung. Thanks to the team at KPFA for their support, have a great night.

[00:57:00]