

HISTORY HARVEST: Dr. Olsen

Transcription of Interview

Let's start off, what's your name, your full name?

My full name, ----- Olsen.

What is your country of origin?

Thailand.

Thailand, wow that's nice. And what is your current age?

Current age, oh wow, 68, no, 67 will be 68, I'm sorry.

When are you turning 68?

In May, May next year.

It's coming up.

It's coming up, soon, yeah too soon.

Well you don't look a day over---

Yeah well, you know, a lot of things kind of shield it like, color that hair and that kind of stuff.

I would assume you were like 40. I would say 40.

Thank you.

How old were you when you came to DeKalb?

Gee, let's put it this way, when did we come to DeKalb? I think maybe, I would say 27 years ago. You can subtract that, so that's about 40, yeah about 40.

What brought you to DeKalb?

My husband got a job here at the University so he got a job at the Center for ---- Studies, so that's why we move here yeah.

What does he teach?

He didn't teach, at the time he worked as an editor for the Center. At that time, they still have the kind of like their own press so that's what he got the job yeah and right now he doesn't work for that Center anymore, even though he is affiliated with them because of his interests and his background.

What does he do now?

He works at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at the Learning Center and he's the coordinator of that place.

I've been at the learning center plenty, it's really nice, I like it.

He's there, yeah.

So, did you migrate directly from DeKalb from Thailand?

No, let's see, before we came to DeKalb, we were in Ithaca New York because my husband went to school there at Cornell, and we were there about 5 or 6 years. And before Ithaca New York, we were in Hawaii for 3 years, he got the scholarship to go to school there for his Master's degree.

Wow, Hawaii, really? That's amazing, how was Hawaii?

Oh it's so beautiful every day, but it's kind of boring when every day is so beautiful.

How is it boring?

Yeah, well, sometimes you like some kind of change. You know, changes.

So it's just sunny.

Sunny, high 70s, low 80s and when one time, I think when we were there, I think the hurricane might hit us in Oahu. Oh we were so excited, something different. So we went out to get a lot of food and everything. We would stay up late with friends and watching the whole thing. Nah, it hit Kawaii, instead of Oahu during that time.

So you were disappointed.

We were so disappointed. I heard a lot of people say they call they have kind of Island Fever because you kind of feel like you are stuck in the island.

I'm pretty sure it was beautiful every day.

No, I like this four season place. I like changes, I like the different smell of air.

I'm the same. I'm excited for winter, I'm a winter person. I like the snow.

Are you from here originally?

Yeah, I'm from Chicago, I came here for my degree. It's interesting because my mom, she's from Mexico, so she didn't come to Chicago directly, she went to California and then she went to Los Vegas, and then she went over to New Mexico and then to Colorado, just to find odd jobs. She came here when she was 12 years old, so she didn't have any schooling so all she could do was just work.

To support you guys?

No, actually to support my grandmother because it was her and my mom that came to America first. She has two other siblings and they stayed in Mexico and the youngest was able to go to

school with the money they were earning, they were sending it back. So she was just working in field work and houses, then she made her way to Chicago when she was about 16 years old. Then she met my dad and the rest is here.

Wow, that's really good. Yeah, that's really beautiful. And you'll be the first generation in your family to go to college.

First generation to graduate high school. First generation to go to college and graduate.

I'm sure your mom is really happy and proud of you.

Well, probably, she doesn't like C's or B's, so that's all that is. But how was Ithaca?

Ithaca is in upstate New York. I'm sure you might know where it is, it's next to the lakes they call finger lakes that look like fingers. One of them is == Lake. And I like it, it's so beautiful. It's up on the hill and of course, Cornell has a lot of money, so it's a beautiful campus and the town, you know, kind of like East coast, so the people are a little bit different from the Midwest. So we like it and our daughter was born there and so, I mean we could have been there longer. My husband not sure about it because he doesn't like, he likes the place, he likes the layout and he likes that kind of thing but certain things bother his sinus, he likes more open land, he's from Minnesota, so he likes the lands and lakes. He likes mountains, but at the same time he likes to see sky.

How did you meet your husband?

How did I meet my husband? He went to Thailand as a Peace Core volunteer. This was in the, when was that now? Man, we have been married so long, so that's a while ago, in the 1980s, maybe late 70s and so that's how we met. I worked for the government at a teachers' college. So during summer I helped the Peace Core to train the new trainees and he was one in that group and he would like to be assigned to the place to teach English as a second language at a place that near the sea and have mountain or whatever it is because he's from Minnesota I guess he likes to see water. So and where I was, it's next to the ocean, it's like a Peninsula in the ocean in the southern part of Thailand. So he went to my college. After college, I did not train him. They broke up in different groups, even though we knew each other, but we never associated. Then we got to know each other and after a year we got married.

That's nice, that's cute. So is he from Thailand as well?

No, he's Peace Core, he's from America. So in the Americans, I think American do a lot of Peace Core things around the world to do different things, to teach English as a second language, or community development or agriculture and that kind of stuff. So usually they will give you the training, the language, the culture and then they assign you to different part of the country. They pay you the stipends, kind of like close to middle class of that country and they put some saving in your account here in the states, which is not much. So I think usually you have to be in the system or to be there for 2 years and you can ask for extension, another year, one at a time. So that's how American's go out and do that kind of volunteers. It's a kind of, they call soft

diplomatic work. So to kind of like tell the world good things about America. It might be interesting when you graduate to be a.

Do they pay for the Peace Core or do you have to buy?

They pay. They pay for you, if you when you go to Thailand, they pay the amount in Thailand money, so you are more like in the middle class range of the Thai people. Not bad.

Would you, have you been to Minnesota? Have you been to his home?

Yeah.

What do you like better, Hawaii? Minnesota? Ithaca or DeKalb?

I like Minnesota too. You know, Minnesota I think is a progressive state and I like the way that they preserve the environment and everything else. And it's a very nice, in the winter, it's too cold.

How cold does it get there?

Oh, it's worse than here. When you say, feel cold to the bone, so that's why it is. He doesn't have anyone left except his brother there so we don't go up there that often like we used to. Once in a while we went back there every 3 or 4 years.

That's nice. The rest of the time you were going to Hawaii.

We didn't have money much.

Next question is. Describe your family, your husband, your parents, life in Thailand...

Let me see, in Thailand I grew up with, my family was, its big. My folks have like 7 children, I'm the third child, I'm the oldest daughter, even though I'm the third, I have the 2 older brothers. After me are the sisters, so I have 4 younger sisters. And so my dad was the bread winner, he worked for the government official, he was government offices and he worked at the Excise Department. During that time of course, women tend to be at home, raise the children everything and I think my family focused on education so dad always said, everyone has to have a BA, and if you can go MA, PhD, we will help you, but he said that's the gift that they would give us to give us the degree, they would pay for us to go to school. And he was successful, I mean both of them were successful doing that. We were not from, we are not from rich family, but have enough to eat, to sleep you know, everything, so we are okay and I think all of us are doing well and I lost my brother, oldest brother, long time ago, he had heart problems, so we kind of expected that his life would not be that long. And I lost my parents, all of them already, one at a time, due to one Alzheimer's the other one is older age. and all of my siblings are still in Thailand, I'm the only one here because of situation that I'm married to an American. And my husband, he's from Minnesota, he has his younger brother, that's the only two and both of his folks passed away, I think his mom just passed away early October but they were in business so they are kind of different than my side. So that's how we grow up and in Thailand, you know, kids, we are taught to respect elders, so we are taught and even now to take care of older parents and I know that my younger sisters took care of my parents when I was here and my brothers

they got married and everything else. So I have 3 youngest sisters who are not married, so they took care of the parents when they were older and when they die. So it's a kind of different system, different kind of family structure and culture, it's more like, it's almost like Latin, you know Hispanic that kind of stuff. It's a big family and extended family.

I was going to say the exact same thing. My family is actually pretty complicated. I'm the only child between my mom and my dad but my dad, I was estranged from my father for a few years, but he got married to someone who had three different children and now he has a child with them, so there's a huge extension on this side and my mom has this side and my mom has three, four, 7 other siblings I believe and my dad has 6 other siblings. So it's a really big family and we believe the same thing, your parents take care of you when you're young and now that you're older you take care of yours when it's your turn. We really believe in that concept like, I'm already planning on where my mom is going to stay with me when I'm 30-40 years old. I'm already planning ahead.

And it's still like that, you know in Thailand. It's not like Chinese, we have kind of like Chinese blood in almost every Thai mall, but it's not as strong as in China that the oldest kid has to be responsible for their parents. But then, in a way, Thailand is almost like that, but not exactly, so whoever is convenient and many times, parents tend to stay with daughters more than with sons, unless they don't have daughters. So that kind of thing and like the parents, they try not, new generation, they don't want to be the burden of kids anymore and like America, family is smaller, they have either 2 kids or 1 and I think when birth control went into Thailand, and that's kind of to decrease the population so the government really campaigned that birth control so heavily so I think it worked and the person who did it, I think he knew the strategy well, so it helps a little bit because limited resources, so it helped. I met him and then we came here and then we built our own family. So it's adjusting to the new culture is, I came here before I met him too, I came here, 1974 to 76 to get my, I got my scholarship from American government to study at University of Pittsburg in Pennsylvania. So I got my master in linguistics. So, I then went home, I have to pay back the time to the Thai government, so that's the deal and then when I met him, by that time it's almost done and so we got married and we stayed in Thailand two more years and then we left. So not like I was so new when I came with him but I kind of was here 2 years before that and there was a gap of time. But to come with him to live here, it's a you know that you will be here like your second home and now it's my first home, it's a little bit different. And when you live here as a foreign student, you see certain things but you don't see all so it takes time to absorb the new culture.

Do you have children with your husband?

Yeah, one child. She's thirty years old now.

Wow, thirty, she's really young, that's still pretty young, that's nice, that's really nice. You mentioned your education, how was your education in Thailand?

I think almost all Thai parents focus on education. I think they do everything to give kids education, that's, I think I came from the South of Thailand and my town is competing to send kids to one of the best schools. It's in the brain of every family want kids to be here. Like in

Thailand, we have even now, I think they still have that, they call, called by the government, prep school. So the last two years of your high school so that if you can get into this school, they have a few branches now, but in the old days, only one place. And if you, your kids go to this school, for sure your kids will be in the top two or three universities of the country and public universities are big known and during that time private colleges and everything is looked down upon. I think it still do, but you know if you go to public university, say my government now a little bit, government cannot carry the burden of the finance so long like here. So, and that my town, we compete, you know, whose kids will go to these prep schools. And they will hire a tutor too, that kind of stuff. It's a, education comes first.

Was your location really rural? Where there like a lot of schools or was it just competing to be in the top school?

Let's see, during my time I think Thailand has 71 provinces, so each province might have a district, maybe 5 or 4 small districts and my province is in the south and the main, they call the main district, the central district of that province, that's where I lived. Now it's like a tourist town because it's next to the ocean, so it's in the ocean, so more or less like stick in there. So, it's in the south, so the name of the town is ---- and so it's almost near Malaysia. I think it depends on the town and it depends on the provinces and everything, so not every place might have the same kind of what do you call, virtues or values and in Thailand, of course they have like stigma, like America, you are from the south, you sound differently and that kind of stuff or you are looked down upon by people from the north. And so we have dialects of the language that speak differently. So I think during my time, the Northeast might be the poorest, the Northeast ---- and Cambodia. And from the south peninsula is near Malaysia, we tend to have darker skin, so we are treated like the tough ones and that kind of stuff and people from the North closer to china so their skin is lighter so they think that the women from that area is more beautiful than the others. So that kind of stuff, so but anyway, you know, education is always, I remember my dad, in one room, he'd get a desk for everyone, so certain time everyone had to study.

That's good. That's really good. Those are good morals to have. My mom never really like, well she always stressed the importance of school but I didn't have anybody to like you can do this, you can do that, you can probably go to college. I had nobody for that. But what's really interesting that you say that, that your dad was so strict about education cause with foreign countries people don't usually say that they're so educated and this and that but its really great that your dad was so on it about being educated. The desk, even the desk part, that's really interesting.

Of course we whine, we stall. We did not want to do. And in fact, I'm in the older generation, so when I was growing up, I did not have TV, I did not see TV, I don't think TV came to Thailand until I was about 12 or 13 and during that time i did not live with my father. I was left behind with my grandmother, his mom, because my father was a government official, so he moved a lot when he got promotion and he moved. So he did not want my brothers, my older brothers and my education to be interrupted. Because we were at the, almost close to the last four years of the high school and he said it was crucial. So my grandma was a very strict woman and very literate. So education, she is worse than my father in terms of discipline.

What year was your grandmother born?

I have no idea. That's another thing, people ask us about grandparents, I think keeping track of the time that they were born, the year, they never have that records, the other day we talk about birth certificate and birth records, and everything, I said, during my time in Thailand it's really poorly done rare. So I ask my grandmother, what time was my dad born. She said, I don't know. The rooster crew about 3 times so I said, well to you, what time? I don't know maybe 3 or 2 am, I have no idea, so it kind of funny when you ask.

That's amazing. In Mexico they actually do have records. I have no idea when my grandparents were born, but I know they're in their late 80s, they lost their records in a fire. There was a fire in their barn in their little ranch and all their records and forms were erased and burned.

And that's the government had that kind of papers?

So I have no idea if my dad is lying to me if he tells me he's 45 or 44, he gets mad at me for not remembering when his birthday is. I say it's either this day or this month and he never corrects me, he just gets mad at me. You should know by now, that sort of thing. You mention how you didn't have TVs as a child, so how was your childhood, what did you do?

We play a lot, we play outside a lot with friends, you know, like the kids here in the old days when they play outside, we have so many games here and there, play with rocks, play with the rubber band that you shoot each other, hide and seek and that kind of stuff. I play a lot with the plants, climb the trees, went in two friends house and played until dark. I think we sat and talked a lot, told stories, here and there the elders talk and in the dark with the lamp or the candles or even with the lights and during that time they do a lot of beetle nuts and they shoot beetle nuts and they talk to each other or smoked cigarettes and then sometime they told us ghost stories here and there and then talk about gossiping about different people. So I think in a way it's good that we were more into talking, but once the TVs came in, I remember not everyone could afford TVs so usually coffee shop to attract people. Coffee shop in the daytime, night time might turn into liquor store, a little bit, usually whisky, that kind of thing. So then they would have TV to attract people to watch Thai boxing, or news or that kind of thing. So at home for a while, many years, you could not afford to have that and I know my youngest siblings, the last 3 or 4 of them there, they grew up with the TV and of course, many of them like American movies with the south, it's kind of funny to see the long hair, spoke Thai on the TV. is it like that in Mexico?

Yeah, a lot of dub overs. When my sister went to go get her papers done in Mexico, she was so astounded with how the TV was. They were in a little hotel room with their stepfather, and she would call us on the phone, it's probably 9 o'clock over there, its 10 o'clock over here, and she would just flip out over how Sponge Bob was in Spanish, they call it Esponja Roberto. Esponja is sponge and Roberto is Bob. And she was just flipping out with how, oh it's in Spanish, I can't believe it, it's so weird, it's so amazing. And so it's kind of like that, and so they have two main broadcasts TV channels in Spanish on the TV, like here and back in Chicago. I know a majority of the movies that they play and they're in English, so it's really weird to hear one of your favorite movies like Toy Story being said in Spanish on TV, it's interesting.

I was not kind of a TV person, because I did not grow up with it and the same thing like with Coca Cola and that kind of stuff, it did not come in during my growing up time until I was like 14. So many things from western culture did not come in until certain time and kind of missed me the first decade of my life, it's interesting.

So you say you're 67 correct?

67 yeah.

So did you grow up around the war time? Like near the Vietnam war?

Yes, let me see. That in the 1970s. So I was in college and since Thailand, Thai government and American government have like kind of a friendship, so we had base, American military bases in Thailand and I think we had about maybe 3 bases and usually they would come there, you know some officers work there, and many times American soldiers, they might go to war, how many weeks in Vietnam, and then they would take a break 1 or 2 weeks in Thailand, so for their entertainment, leisure time, so yes, I grew up during that time, a lot of bombing going on. That's the first time, I saw a, not like I never saw Caucasian people, because when I went, during my school time, we always have volunteers, like Peace Core volunteers or volunteers from England or volunteers from Canada to come and teach English to us. But during Vietnam war, I think I saw them everywhere and I saw, that's the first time I think in my life I saw African American.

I was about to say, what was your first time seeing an African American?

I think that's when it was, about was it the freshman in college, I was about 18, 17, and it start to get influx heavily, yeah, every corner. Because by then i went to the university in Bangkok, I went to prep school for 2 years. So during that time yeah.

How terrifying was it?

I was mad, I was frustrated. I guess I as a young person I kind of even now some of them I don't agree with American policy in foreign countries. Foreign policy especially. So during that time, I was against it, I guess your love for your country and everything and you see the culture change and everything and I think during that time there's a lot of movement, left, right, communism, everything, all of those, all kinds of literature that coming out to propaganda and everything else from both sides.

So like, I know that I took a Vietnam class last year with Dr. Arnold, we would be talking about how universities in America were so involved with the war, was your university extremely involved, were they protesting against the war? Or did some really support it?

No, I think a lot about college students protested it and my university is a little bit maybe stronger than the other university, the other university that's well-known was set up by the king, royal family, so they were more of a conservative you know type thing. And my university is kind of like founded by a liberal, who got his education in France. So, I went to that university, so I know that they always have almost like --- but more of the not like what happened entertainment, not like newspaper but more like IEDers and that kind of stuff come out every Monday and many times its come out against anti, not just Americans, anti-China, anti-Japan, so

they call like you know, danger from white, danger from yellow or whatever it is. And sometimes, many times I went to University early in the morning and I grab it at the door, at the gate. And then, one time I remember that suddenly, almost like Thai FBI came into every building to collect that. I hid some of them and walked out of the building.

Do you still have some with you?

I think at home. I don't even know, at my parents' house, I did not even know.

That's amazing, that's amazing wow.

Later I think the coo, Thai government did a lot of the, even now, control by military. And during my time, towards the end, at the time I was a little bit, working already, they clash with the students, kill a lot of them. And my university got the most out of it and I heard my university next to the river, so I heard a lot of people who live right there came in the boat and then put them into the boat and get out. So, because my university have gates, like about 4 or 5 gates have a wall, it used to be an old palace. So it's easy for them to close that, so the only way you could escape is to go under the sewer system and then out into the river. They said a lot of yeah, I felt so bad, yeah.

Did security get like more intense, more tight around the war?

During that time, yeah. Now, you might know about Thailand a little bit, the government, we had a government for a while that from election but now is controlled by the, they corrupt, every government almost corrupt there. So now, the military control back to the old days and then the king just passed away so.

There might be a shift.

Yeah, I don't know. Yeah, so, it's almost like this country during this time, so it's influx.

Would you ever consider going back to Thailand?

To live?

Just to visit.

I usually go there maybe every 2 years. When my mom and dad were alive, I went back home more often but now they were gone two years, three years.

that's nice. That you're going back. I have never been to Mexico.

Oh really, you should.

It's just terrifying, it's just really scary over there right now with the.

With the drug thing?

With the drug cartels, it's intense. Like recently I got a phone call from extortionists and they were trying to get information out of me, they were pretending to be a family member, trying to have me guess who they were, guess where they were.

Oh, don't play that game, yeah.

I was terrified, I didn't know what was going on because I've never received a call from a family member from there. And I had my mom like try to help me figure this out. And she told me like hang up right now. And they just kept calling and calling. And I blocked the number and my aunt called them because she copied the number and they were extortionists and it was just terrifying.

Boy, they even reached out here?

They reach out, their plan is to like kidnap a family member and then they'll contact you and say like a rich family member, they're assuming you're rich because you're in America.

In American, yeah.

And they're going to try to get money out of you so that like as much money, they're going to say like 500,000 dollars for worth for your family member. And then some people give them the money and they don't get their family back. It was terrifying, I'm glad I didn't give any information, it's terrifying. And it just makes me even more scared to even just think about going there for vacation.

I'm sure if you go they might know, you know.

Who knows, it's terrifying. It's terrifying.

Yeah, anything else that I can help you with.

Yeah, your work history, how has that been like your career?

All my life?

Any job you had growing up.

Usually things in Thailand might change but during my time, usually kids were not supposed to work, they might help their parents a little bit if they have shops and that kind of stuff. So I did not get a job until, because my job was to study and get my BA, so I got a job to teach English at the teacher's college down south at St. Claire. I was there, then I took a break to come to the states to get my master degree and I went back to teach until I saw my husband and we got married. And we knew that eventually we would be back here so we needed money and at that time, almost like a BP, during that time, but they call it ----, so they went to dig the kind of natural gas out of the ground from Thailand. So they look for someone to train workers like electricians, mechanics, all of those, who are Thai men, but their English skill is not good but they know a lot about those, whatever they are hired for. So my job to train them how to speak correct English. So they know the technical thing, I know the technical terms, so we help each other. So I work with them for one year and save enough money and my husband got accepted to be at University of Hawaii and so that's how we got here and I got a part-time job here and there when he was in Hawaii. I worked for the, what they call the refugee resettlement. So we have a lot of people from Laos, Cambodia, during that time and Vietnam and so they moved to the country to America so I trained them how to speak English, how to use the bank, how to shop

at the grocery store, to fill out the employment paper, so that kind of stuff and then we moved to Ithaca New York and it's the same thing. I work for the refugee resettlement, when my husband went to Cornell. And we had a child and then we came here. When my daughter was I think three years old when my husband got a job at the center for southeast Asian studies. And I work, I help the foreign languages department to help professor John Harman to teach Thai and then later someone, a Thai student who used to work here in cataloging department in the library, she graduated and they looked for someone to do the Thai cataloging because we have Southeast Asian collection. So that lady, the Thai lady who graduated, she contacted me, so I contact the person in cataloging department during that time who was the supervisor, her name is Susan Capos, she's still here. So she interviewed me and she got me into the job as an extra help, so they trained me how to do cataloging, Thai cataloging first and then later they taught me how to do English language materials. So at the same time, and then later after extra help, I got a full time job and a silver service, they call LTA1 rank and then I went to school here during that time, we have the library school here, the library science school and so I went there and got the degree, another MA, MLS, so then in the cataloging department, the position of cataloger was open up, someone left. And I you know, they did the national search and I got the job and there you are, I have been in the building. One year later I was the head of the cataloging and then combined with the acquisition of technical services. And then maybe close to 7 or 8 years ago, I was hired to be the Associate Dean of Collection and Technical Services. Got promotion. And then our Dean left this past January, so since February 1st, the provost talked to Provost Freeman. He met with different groups and asked to nominate someone to be Interim Dean and they put my name in. So since February 1st, I have been the Interim Dean.

Wow that's great.

That's my short history of work. Yeah.

That's great, that's amazing.

Quite the adjustment.

Wow, that's a lot of high profile positions, that's amazing.

Yeah, and I learned, this is my family, my whole building here, libraries and everyone here is so amazing and not a moment that I feel like today I don't want to go to work because the work situation, no. And I learn a lot, all along, including Susan Capos and other people have trained me quite a bit and you grow, you grow with it, and so, without them, you know, in the technical services of people up here, even in the building, I cannot survive. And with the different culture and everything, it's a lot.

I'll make sure to ask you when there's a position opening at the library.

Here, oh the dean?

Or anything?

You mean like as a student, or?

As a student worker, someone working at the front desk, I'll make sure to.

To tell you the truth, I don't really know. So if you are interested, fill your form online and then fill them, fill it as completely as possible, the language you know, the skill in technology that you know and that kind of stuff, put that in there. Because we have employment database. So suppose a unit in circulation look for someone and this is a good time seeing if it's open or not, they might look for it because maybe they have a number of students who might graduate this December. So, look in that and usually a supervisor will screen through, they have their own criteria what kind of people that they look for. So they will pull the names out and they will tell the office here, please call these students for us so we can interview the students. I don't even know what units need anyone. In terms of full time, it's really kind of frozen more or less because you know, University is tight in terms of budget, due to the state. But keep sending the did you fill out?

A while ago, yeah.

Redo it again. And then who knows. I don't even know how many students in what unit open up. I never get into the database, I don't micromanage them.

Before I get to my last question, I was going to ask, how many degrees do you have?

I have the highest degrees I have two master degrees. One is in the library science here from NIU, the other one MA linguistics, from University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania.

How many bachelors?

Just one.

Just one, wow three degrees.

In linguistics yeah.

Wow three degrees, that's amazing.

And I have a certificate in teaching English as a second language.

Four, four total.

Yeah a little, you know, you study like three more classes.

I'll count it as four, that's amazing.

So you'll finish it, graduate, what is your major?

I'm a history major.

History major, what kind of history?

I want to teach American history.

American history.

I'm just right now learning French history. So if anything I could probably teach French history at some point, but primarily American history. I'm doing a program called teach for America that if I get through the full program actually, I'm in the final steps of it. If I get accepted I can get a job anywhere in the United States right after graduating and I will teach with a starting teacher salary anywhere where they need me. Like Minnesota, or like New York, or right here in Chicago, or in Texas, anywhere where they need a teacher.

What project is that, what program?

It's called Teach for America.

Teach for America, it's a federal thing?

No, I don't think so.

You said non-profit.

I think it's a nonprofit organization. They do it for like low income communities, so that's where they need strong teachers and the most teachers. So I might end up going somewhere like inner city Chicago or inner city Harlem or inner city Oakland. It's all about like where they need the teachers and if they need them they'll contact Teach for America and they'll look at their core members. And if I get accepted I can get my career started right after I graduate.

Well, try to get, they will need some reference letters, so talk to your professors and do you have to have like certificate in teaching?

Well with the program, not just yet. They'll start you off at the teacher's salary so you'll be making money as you work to get your certificate, so once it gets started I'll probably end up going to school for another two years, and after those two years, I'll have my certificate and then I can teacher wherever I like.

Okay. Where are you now in your education? Are you a senior?

Yes, I am a senior. I just didn't do the teaching program here, I just started. I figured out I wanted to teach last year, as a junior. By the time I would have wanted to, it was a little late, I would have had to wait a whole year after to get started with the teaching program and so that would mean I would have to spend another year at NIU and it wasn't in my plan, I wanted to do the four-year plan. And then I heard about teach for America and how they'll start you off right after graduation.

So you applied there already and everything, wow, good for you! So you study French.

I'm studying American history.

Oh French history too. And you speak Spanish?

Yes.

That's a plus there and keep reading with it too and that's really a good quality. People don't pay attention much in this country about foreign language. I think to me it's really, it's nothing about just getting money from it but it's a thing.

It's a benefit.

Enrich you in terms of who you are as a man being to me. So I think the more you know about the language and the more you know about the culture it makes you more well-rounded.

My mom definitely made sure I would learn Spanish before I learned English. She stressed Spanish first until I was three years old. Spanish only at home, anywhere else, whatever you want.

Smart woman. even though I have degree in linguistics and I could not resist to speak English to my daughter. She knows Thai when I speak Thai to her. But she cannot speak back to me.

My mom made sure to only speak Spanish at home. I mean she can't really speak English, she can understand it a little, but...

Maybe I should pretend to be dumb with my daughters so she could speak Thai back to me.

What she did was actually, it's funny, she made sure I would only speak Spanish but when it was time for me to learn English, she literally put me in front of the TV and just go learn and that's how I learned English, by watching TV.

What program? Sesame street?

PBS, Sesame Street, Tele-Tubbies, Barney, I would just watch that okay, orange, ball, three. That's how I figured it out.

But then you learned from your friends too. So that's a lot of people, the linguists, many times they go to do field research in another country, so they speak only one language at home and then when kids go outside and speak with friends or Hindi or something, that's really good. I was weak and your mom is so strong. I so regret that and now I have a grandson and she said, I have to teach him Thai and I said, oh boy.

Good, yeah make sure he learns Thai. How old is he?

Only 13 months.

Oh, well then now is the perfect time. Okay, the last question is, describe your immigration experience, cultural differences between like Thailand and anywhere else you've been.

Let's do between Thailand and here because that's where I lived most of my life here. In terms of culture, you know, I think the value of the family might not be that families, I think parents love kids but the way they show might be different and I think in Thailand, the focus is on education and here the focus is education get, but try to teach kids to be independent, but I think many times in Thailand we kind of like nurtured them so much to the point that they cannot be independent. Yeah that's one thing I think that I see the flaw in that, in the culture. Yes, they challenge them, this is the job. So for example, everyone one's job over there, study, study,

study, but then kids don't learn how to do chores, to do other things to do like what do you call, day to day life, survival thing, and I think another thing is that here is you try for the best of, you can be the best, you come first and over there more likely you should not be ahead of the others too much, you kind of like, you know, more of the same network.

Same playing field.

Yeah, right, so here you try as best as you can no matter what but over there, no you have to think people around you so maybe the progress might not be that far, but at the same time you still have friendship, but here is the other way around.

It's like more teamwork over here and more competitive on the other side.

But it doesn't mean that Thai is a good team-worker either. So sometime they might compete and everything, it's kind of conflicted in itself and I had a difficult time, a little bit when my daughter was growing up in terms of dating and that kind of stuff. During my time I did not have that. My father always said, love is like, when you have love during your education period is like oil and water. So I struggle in raising my child a little bit because of that culture. But I don't hang onto my culture to the point that I don't see the world is changing. So I struggle some but then I not too much in the sense that I was miserable. So, I always tried to teach my daughter to be. I'm a little bit different from the norm of the Thai. I was more, I'm more to the Thai I'm more independent, I'm more my own individual thing, I believe in what I believe. So my dad was a little bit concerned. Because he, when he said, the way you think, the way you do, you work in the Thai government office, you don't grow because of trying to be independent more or less. So I guess maybe I don't fit well there in the system of the bureaucratic there. Maybe something tell me, I don't know, so, it's and like I said, I think here, I talk to you about over there people take care of parents when they get older. here is a little bit different. And parents here don't want to be the burden of kids. Or here, when the kids are 18 years old, you are done, we are done to supporting you, over there they support you until they are 22 or 30, if they have money, whatever it is. But here they to make kids to be more independent, fly on your own. And I think in Thailand they start to try to do that but slowly and over there maybe appearance might be important, your dress your whatever it is, your presentation, your manner. Here, you might be so intelligent but you wear like a beggar, like a homeless person, but it doesn't mean that you don't have money. So when I go home sometimes I struggle because i wear whatever I want to wear so my people might treat me at the store might be different, it depends on what you look. So, I think when I live in the different cultures, I don't look like, okay, this culture is bad or this culture is good. I just look at the, okay, we do things differently. But I think to me, bottom line, human beings anywhere are about the same. Yeah so I think, a lot of good nature of human beings but a lot of evil all there too. So I think that okay, this is not the thing that I think I can do, this is the way they do things, but I don't judge, so it's just different. And, do I understand the culture here? I 'm still learning, some of them I still don't understand. It takes time to fit in the culture, to understand. Certain jokes I don't understand because I don't have that background that I grew up with. You grew up here, you were born here so you understand things here. So sometimes my husband and my daughter, they laugh, they have the reference what they

laugh about, I don't. That shows that if you were born here, grow up here, but I appreciate everything that this country has offered me though.

That's amazing, that's great.

It's beautiful and it's my home. Yep.

That's amazing, thank you so much.

Thank you.

No thank you, this is amazing.

This is great, I enjoy learning more about you.

No, I enjoy learning from you, I'm really glad I was able to do this.

This project is good and if you need anything I'm here and you have my email.

Thank you so much.

Good luck with your---