

Triet Tra & Ngoc Le
Eat-Well Food Mart — New Orleans, LA

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Date: January 30, 2015
Location: Eat-Well Food Mart, 2700 Canal St., New Orleans, LA
Interviewer: Rien Fertel
Transcription: Lori Lawton
Length: Forty-one minutes
Project: The Lives & Loaves of New Orleans

START OF INTERVIEW

[*Transcript begins at*]

Rien Fertel: This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance starting a Bánh Mì Sandwich Trail in New Orleans, and I'm on the corner of Broad and Canal Streets in the center of the city. It is January 30, 2015, and I am at Eat Well and I'm going to have the owner introduce yourself.

Triet Tra: My name is Triet Tra.

RF: Date of birth?

TT: My birthday is November 26, 1954.

RF: Can you introduce yourself too?

Ngoc Le: My name is Ngoc Le. My date of birth is November 11, 1986.

RF: Okay, and are you related? Are you family?

NL: Daughter-in-law.

RF: Can you tell me where you are from, where you were born?

TT: I'm from Vietnam. I'm born in Vietnam.

RF: And what city or town?

TT: South of Saigon.

RF: So, south of Saigon. Was it on the water or on a river?

TT: Quảng Ngãi

RF: That's the name of the town. And is it on the water or is it on a river?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]. No it's not.

RF: How would you describe that town?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*].

[01:44]

NL: A very, very poor area. This is a very poor, rural area, pretty much countryside.
South Vietnam.

TT: No money, no food.

RF: No money, no food. Did you grow up with a large family, a small family? Can
you tell me about your family?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*] Only me.

NL: She grew up with only her.

RF: So did you move to Saigon at some point? How long did you stay in that town?

TT: I stayed in the town about sixteen years old.

RF: You moved to Saigon when you were sixteen?

TT: Yes.

RF: And was it for work or school?

TT: No. I work for me.

RF: Did you work in any sort of food or anything?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*] Food and I need money.

NL: She's a babysitter/nanny and cleaning the house, basically taking care of doing maid service. Basically.

RF: Is it okay if I ask questions about Vietnam? If you don't want to answer anything, we don't have to.

NL: She's okay.

RF: So you moved to Saigon when you were sixteen and so you lived there for about a decade?

TT: I live in that town for 1975 and my aunt told me to go back to my house, she don't want me to live with somebody or take care of the baby no more. And I stayed with my aunt. And I go back to my country for one [inaudible]. And I get married with my husband at twenty-four.

RF: So you married your husband at twenty-four. Can you give us his name.

TT: Dong Huynh. And I got two kids in Vietnam, Kim Huynh and Adam Huynh

NL: She had two there and two here.

TT: I come here in 1985 and I got two sons, Dong Huynh and David Huynh.

[04:14]

RF: So you went back to your town in 1975 you said?

TT: No, 1975 I go back to my aunt's house and go back to my hometown. After that I go back to my hometown for a couple of years and I get married with my husband.

RF: So you immigrated to America in 1985?

TT: Yes, I come in 1985.

RF: So from what I know just Vietnam history and going to Vietnam and living in New Orleans, a lot of Vietnamese moved here in 1975, right, and you came a decade later.

TT: Yeah, I came later. My husband before me for four years, and after me and my daughter and my son go after four years.

RF: Where did your husband move first? Was it to this area?

TT: No, Kentucky. And he go to the United States in 1981, and he come down for New Orleans in 1982. And now he stay here.

RF: How did he come to be in Kentucky? Why did he go to Kentucky?

TT: Because the sponsor want him go to Kentucky.

RF: Was it a church sponsor or a relief aid sponsor? What sort of sponsor was it?

TT: I don't think for the church, I think for adopt the family for a lot of Asian people.

NL: Like a doctor that helps with charity or aid, he sponsored him in Kentucky.

RF: So after a year of Kentucky, he moved here?

TT: Yeah, he moved her, and me and my daughter and my son come here to New Orleans in 1985, before my husband, he go, I got married and I carried my son four months.

RF: To get here?

[06:06]

NL: She was four months pregnant when he left to come to America with her second child, so she was four months pregnant and he left to come here and then a couple of years later then they were able to come.

TT: After four years I come here. I'm too lucky.

RF: Were you very happy to come here and to reunite?

TT: Yes, very happy.

RF: What was your first impression of New Orleans or Louisiana?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

NL: She's happy.

TT: I stay since 1985 now I don't want to go no more, nowhere! Stay here.

RF: And did you move to New Orleans East or to the West Bank?

TT: After Katrina, I moved for the West Bank and what we call that New Orleans, I don't have the house no more, the water come.

NL: When you first came they were in New Orleans East and then after Hurricane Katrina, the house flooded so they had to go to the West Bank.

RF: What did you all do originally, your husband and you? What was your first jobs and experience in the area?

NL: Offshore, he went shrimping. That was his livelihood. He did that too, over there too.

RF: So where is he from originally?

TT: The same.

NL: In the same area. The countryside is so rural it's hard to pinpoint the exact area, but they're around the same kind of neighborhood. Kind of, yeah.

RF: South of Saigon?

NL: South of Saigon.

RF: So he was a shrimper there, and so he got to be a shrimper.

[08:00]

NL: Yeah, and he moved here and he was able to do that here.

TT: But now no more.

RF: How long did he shrimp for?

TT: Thirty years in the United States, thirty-two, thirty-three years, and then in Vietnam more, ten year more, until forty-two or forty-three years something like that.

RF: In total?

TT: Yeah, in total.

NL: But thirty-three years here in America.

RF: So when and why did he quit the shrimping business after thirty-something years?

NL: He's sick now. So he's getting to where he shouldn't be doing that anymore.

RF: Did he shrimp up until the BP oil spill? Was he shrimping then in 2010?

NL: Yes, he was shrimping all the way through, and then because of the BP oil, they had to stop for a while, and as soon as they were able to get the boat up and running again they were back to it.

RF: Was there similarities between shrimping in Vietnam and Louisiana or the Gulf.

TT: [*in Vietnamese*] He had better water than in Vietnam. Everything in United States better more than Vietnam. [*laughter*]

RF: So you've raised four children here in the United States?

TT: I have four children; one granddaughter, one grandson.

RF: And do they all live in the area? Have they moved elsewhere?

TT: They live here, and my daughter she live in San Francisco, but today she comes home. [laughter]

RF: Before you opened Eat Well, did you work in other restaurants or any other food businesses?

[09:52]

TT: No, before I open here, I come to the United States about three months and go for work for the Windsor Court Hotel, and after that I go for the family time for [inaudible] and for furniture. And I go work for McKenzie's, and after that I go work for —

RF: McKenzie's Bakery, when it was still around?

TT: Yeah. And after that I worked for the electric [inaudible] for a couple years, about four or five years. And I opened the store on Willow Street, that's Uptown.

NL: The first Grocery Store; he opened up uptown on Willow Street.

RF: What year was that?

TT: 2002.

RF: What was the name of that store?

TT: Goody's Food Store.

NL: Goody's Food Store.

RF: I remember that. I went to Tulane and I went to the store. I remember that store.
Did you serve food there?

TT: Yeah, I did food. Food about same thing as here, but I don't sell Vietnamese food, all the Mexican food, hot sausage, the chicken wing, and things like that. And after that, Katrina killed me. I go back to West Bank I open on 4th Street called Goody's Seafood, almost six year, and then I come here.

RF: So for six years after Katrina you had a seafood — was it a restaurant on the West Bank?

NL: It was a grocery store, kind of the same concept as Goody's on Willow. She still serves food on the steam table and stuff like that, no Vietnamese people, same American cuisine and stuff like that.

RF: Okay. But you were also wholesaling seafood in a way.

TT: I sell seafood but I don't sell too much.

RF: When did you open up where we are now, this location?

TT: Here? About February 1, 2012.

RF: So, February 1, 2012.

[12:02]

TT: Yeah, Sunday I got three years here.

RF: Oh, so three years this Sunday. Okay and so this was the first time you had a Vietnamese menu, right?

TT: Yes, sir.

RF: So why did you decide to cook Vietnamese food?

TT: I learned a lot the first time I cooked and now I'm better. But after that I learn everyday a little bit, a little bit, and now I cook better now, but I thank you for the customer that come and they keep coming. That's why I keep here all the time. I thank you for the customers who come, and hopefully the customers love me and come again.

NL: [*in Vietnamese*].

TT: Before I come here, they got the food, the Vietnamese food here already.

RF: So, they had an establishment, some Vietnamese?

TT: Yes. But they sell not too much food, look like me. And my customers always eat it the first time, and the second time they come back they tell me they say, "You cook the good food." That's why I'm so happy, and I learn because the customers give me a good time. That's why I keep go, go, go, and I try to make more better.

NL: So before they took over, they had a — just the menu was bánh mì and pho here. And so once we took over, she tried to continue the menu and she expanded the menu to — a lot of times she'll cook something back there for us to eat and customers will come and she'll be like, "Hey, try this." And when they like it,

we'll try to put it on the menu or she'll just do little special things like that. So, it just built the menu from there.

RF: That's great. How did you find this location?

[14:05]

TT: I saw on the Vietnamese —.

RF: Newspaper?

TT: Yeah, Vietnamese paper, and I think a photograph helped me a lot too.

RF: So it was for rent, the space was for rent from a previous Vietnamese owner?

TT: Right.

RF: Did you want to open a place in central New Orleans and not on the West Bank or the other Vietnamese communities? Was it special to open up a place where there's not a lot of Vietnamese restaurants and food around?

NL: [*in Vietnamese*].

TT: No, I want for here because the Vietnamese people, everybody cooks at home. They don't want to go and sit down and eat some and not the whole thing, but I want sell for the people American because they like for the Vietnamese food. And that's why I wanted to open here and now, Canal, right here, and I think they need the food and why I keep here.

RF: Do most of your customers, is it their first time eating Vietnamese, or do they know Vietnamese food?

NL: Sometimes they come in already knowing, but a lot of times it's like their first time trying the bánh mì, so that's one of the big sellers here is the bánh mì, because everyone will come in — and they know pho because people would travel around the city and they eat pho, but bánh mì is something relatively new, I think, so usually it's like their first time.

RF: Can you describe bánh mì and just tell me what it is?

TT: The Bánh mì, for the regular bánh mì, the raw pork and for the ham pork and barbecue pork, that's a regular bánh mì, and then real pork, a different kind. I do for my way and food on the grill, that I sell a lot and now I serve a bánh xèo, everything so—.

[16:25]

RF: What was that last part?

NL: Bánh xèo, it's a Vietnamese crepe.

RF: Oh, you do have bánh xèo.

NL: Uh huh.

RF: The bánh mì, a lot of people compare it the po-boy? Do you think it's popular because of that?

TT: Yes.

NL: I think so too.

[16:42]

TT: Because people, the first time they come, they ask me about the bánh mì and I say, “Don’t buy want the long one. Buy the short one. If you like, you can come back. I don’t want you to buy the whole thing, the big bánh mì and if you don’t like you throw away for the food.” And I thank you for the customers they listen to me. They say, “Okay,” and try for the small one and then the next day they come.

NL: I think the fact that we call it a “Vietnamese po-boy” is because it kind of hits home for most New Orleanians. That’s something that’s significant here, so it’s easy for everyone to say, “Oh, it’s a po-boy,” so they can relate to it easier. It’s just a difference of we use veggies, fresh veggies in there and different types of meat as opposed to the regular ham or cheese.

RF: Are people willing to try it, the roast pork and the jalapeños and the pickled—?

NL: Yeah they do. They actually like to ask for what’s new or what’s different or why certain things aren’t on there. I think saying that there’s three different types of pork on the bánh mì kind of intrigues people and then the fact of the jalapeños. Everyone likes it extra spicy. We have a sriracha aioli here and everyone wants the sriracha aioli or extra jalapeños. So, yeah, it’s good.

RF: Where do you get your bread? What bakery?

[18:05]

TT: Hi Do, always Hi Do, the good bánh mì.

RF: And why do you like that bread? Why is their bread really good?

TT: Because a lot of customers like the Hi Do bánh mì, that's why I listen for the customer.

RF: Because it's soft?

NL: It's softer and flakier, it's just a different bite than the regular Dong Phuong that everyone talks about. A lot of our customers are geared towards that more. They enjoy that French bread more, so she just kept with it.

RF: Did you eat bánh mì in Vietnam?

TT: Yes sir, but a different way.

RF: How was it different?

TT: Because the Vietnam, they don't have too much the meat. They don't have for — just meat — and I don't know to tell. [in Vietnamese]

NL: She said in Vietnam there's usually just meat, but it's very little meat. There's no veggies or anything like that on there because they couldn't afford it over there.

RF: Did you eat it with egg? I've had it with egg over there.

TT: [in Vietnamese] Yeah, I did, but my son, Adam Huynh, he make the aioli, a lot of people look for aioli too.

RF: So your son made the the aioli?

TT: Yeah.

RF: Is that your husband?

TT: Yeah.

RF: And what's his name?

TT: Adam.

RF: Is the bread here, the Hi Do bread, is it similar to the bread over there?

TT: Bánh mì, no.

RF: How is it different?

TT: The Vietnam too small and it's too hard too.

[20:04]

NL: It's very dense. It's very dense and very hard. It's not flakey or soft. When you bite into it it's kind of like the consistency of a stale hotdog bun, I would say.

That's how the French bread is over there.

RF: When and how do people eat bánh mì? Is it for breakfast, lunch or dinner?

TT: Bánh mì? For breakfast, the morning.

RF: Oh, it was breakfast.

NL: Usually.

RF: And is it something you're going to eat quickly?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*] Yeah. Yes, sir.

NL: It's something quick so you can hurry up and go to work.

RF: You said you changed the business. They weren't doing well before. Were you busy all of a sudden when you rented this location?

NL: When we started, it was pretty busy and then the customers kind of changed over a little bit and then when she added items to the menu, that's when we were able to get a lot more different types of customers coming in, just to try the food, not just grocery customers. Before it was really busy, but we kind of had more grocery customers, but then now, with the menu being expanded, we have a lot of people dining in, ordering to go.

RF: I'm going to ask a few questions about the other things on the menu. The pho you make yourself?

TT: Yes, sir, I make by myself.

RF: And you were telling me you make it on Sunday, right, when the place is closed?

[21:45]

TT: Sometimes I make on Sunday, two times a week. Sometimes I make Sunday, I come back Monday, but sometimes it's a different day. It's not the same day. I saw my soup get low, I have to cook.

RF: Before you had this place, did you make pho at home?

TT: Yes, sir, for my children.

RF: Okay, so you raised your children your pho recipe. How often did you make pho and when did you make it?

NL: [*in Vietnamese*]

TT: I cook for the small pot right there.

NL: [*in Vietnamese*]

TT: About one time.

NL: One time a month. She gets a lot of different broth like she'll cook bún bò Huế and bún riêu and stuff, so she cooks a lot at home, different items that we don't have on the menu.

RF: So it would be sometimes with seafood or crab, right?

NL: Right, that's bún riêu with the crab, and bún bò Huế is a spicy pork soup. She cooks a lot of that at home, yeah, so she rotates it, probably once a month or something.

RF: Who taught you how to cook or where did you learn how to cook?

TT: I go to United States and I come by my aunt's house and I saw she cook and I copy what she cooked and I'd go home. And if something I don't know, I'd call her, because in Vietnam, I don't cook soup. I don't know how cook the soup because I don't have the money to buy for something to cook the soup. I come

here and I come to my aunt's house, and she cook and I copy a lot of what she cook and I go home and I call her. The first time I cooked, it not good.

RF: When you were cooking for the family?

[23:47]

TT: I cook for my family and my children say, "Oh, it not so good!" And I called my aunt and after that I bought a lot of bones. And I clean and cook the hot water first and put the bone in. I cook before and after I clean and then put on the side and I cook for the hard boil and pour them together with an onion or something like that. And now I know how to cook the pho, yeah.

RF: How long does it take to get your recipe?

NL: [*in Vietnamese*]

TT: Probably 1985.

NL: So it took her from 1985 to now to perfect it.

RF: Oh really?

NL: [*in Vietnamese*]

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

NL: A year or so ago she said she perfected it.

RF: And your aunt lived here? She was here?

TT: My aunt lived here, yes.

RF: Back then in the 1980s, where did you have to shop for Vietnamese ingredients in the area? Was there a grocery here? Did he have to go to Houston?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

NL: Down in New Orleans East, in Versailles, there was a — they kind of shop set up down there that kind of looked like a Vietnamese — like how they had it in Vietnam; all the veggies were outside and everything was outside, so they had a little area down there where she could shop.

RF: Can you give your impression of the since 1985 in New Orleans, so for the past thirty years, how it has grown or changed.

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

[26:08]

NL: But for me growing up in New Orleans East, I think it went through a lot of different changes, from when I was younger and remembering going to the stores with my mom, it was very just like, it was so Asian. There were veggies outside, meat outside, everything that you buy is outside in the Vietnamese stores. The neighborhood was a little bit safer then as of thirty years now, it's kind of more dangerous, but there are some good programs out there that tries to change the community and give the youth something else to do rather than just run around and stuff. But as far as the Vietnamese community, I think its changed a lot. We have more of a voice now in that area whereas before, I think the Vietnamese people were just to themselves; not very outspoken or pro change or anything,

very stuck in their own ways, but now I think with the younger group being more active there, I think we have a better chance of changing things, for the better.

RF: Because Katrina impacted your life and you lost your house, did you ever consider not coming back or were you immediately back here in the area?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

NL: She wanted to come back here. She knew she wanted to come back.

TT: [*in Vietnamese*] I told my husband, I say, “Bring me back New Orleans to see my house and my store” and when I go back, everything is gone, and I cry a lot, a lost everything. And everybody stay in Houston, and I say, “No, I go back to my hometown. I don’t want to live here no more.” And right now, if something happened, a hurricane come again, I go somewhere, I go back to New Orleans and I don’t know where I go. I love New Orleans and I want to go home.

RF: Why do you love New Orleans?

[28:25]

TT: Because I ride a car scary for the Houston, the bridge, and I go somewhere too long and I get lost, I don’t know how to get home.

NL: Driving is too hard for her over there. It’s scary.

TT: And New Orleans is easy.

RF: You think this is a small town?

TT: Yeah, small town. That why I like it.

RF: Why do you — was the name Eat Well already here attached to the building or did you bring that name?

TT: I rented the building.

RF: And it was called “Eat Well”?

TT: Yes.

RF: Why do you think Vietnamese food — from what I’ve seen over the past ten years since Katrina, Vietnamese food has become really popular with all types of eaters and there’s restaurants everywhere. Why do you think that is?

NL: I have no idea. I really don’t. I really have no idea why all of a sudden Vietnamese food is like the new boom now, but I’m glad. I’m glad that it’s out there. All these restaurants have always been around. Vietnamese food has always been around, but I’m glad it’s getting the exposure that it deserves. But I think a lot of the youth — I have friends that open up Vietnamese restaurants or things like that, and I think that with the younger generation trying to expand that, I think that’s possibly why it’s out there more. But I’m glad that it’s there.

TT: [*in Vietnamese*] A lot of food in Vietnam — before a lot of the people don’t know how is the Vietnamese food. And I work with people who said, “What happened? You do not get fat. You keep your body lighter.” I said, “Because we don’t eat too much burgers, Coke, or everything.” We eat the food, the healthy food.

[30:24]

NL: She thinks that it's a health food, because Vietnamese food is kind of tagged along with healthy eating, so she thinks that that may be what it is. People trying to be healthy, they kind of tend to find something else that's easy to eat, that's delicious and healthy, so they move towards Vietnamese food.

RF: I like that. So even if it's pork it's healthier than—?

NL: Yeah, I think it's healthier. She says it's healthier than if you go out and get a fried pork chop or fried chicken. Here we have grilled chicken. And then even the pho broth, people might think it's oily and stuff, but it's still pretty lean. You get a lot of veggies, a lot of fresh veggies. It's healthier. It's not processed food.

RF: Alongside the pho you also sell ya-ka-mein right?

NL: Ya-ka-mein, uh huh.

RF: Did you bring that here or was that already here?

TT: Already here.

NL: It was already here.

TT: The Goody's, I sell the ya-ka-mein too, where I sell the seafood. I sell ya-ka-mein too, but I don't like the ya-ka-mein, I like the pho.

RF: Do you eat ya-ka-mein?

TT: Uh, no I don't.

RF: Why do you think ya-ka-mein is so popular in New Orleans?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

NL: Well me, I think it's because of Miss Linda's ya-ka-mein that everyone gets at Jazz Fest, you know. So I think that's the only reason why — to me that's why I think it's popular. That's how I knew about it, going to Jazz Fest. But other than that, she just cooks whatever's on the menu, and she's always had it at her other stores.

RF: Do you get the opportunity — have you been back to Vietnam?

[32:10]

TT: Yes, I go about four times, a long time ago, 2011.

RF: 2011, okay. Just a couple last questions; is the food — I'm guessing it's not the same. Is it better over there maybe, the Vietnamese food? Is it different? Is it the same?

NL: [*in Vietnamese*] She said better here.

TT: Me and my husband go back to Vietnam and we eat pho and bún bò Huế, and we smell something.

NL: I think it's so long that you're accustomed to the food here and the quality of the food here.

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

NL: The way that they cook the broth here, it's more time-consuming than they do back at Vietnam. She said the smell of the pho is not the same. They don't cook the beef bones the same way as they do here. So to her, it's different.

RF: So you think it's actually better here?

NL: Yeah, to her it's better here.

RF: Well why do they cook the beef bones longer here than over there?

TT: I don't know. I want to keep for my soup be good, that why I cook it longer.

NL: I think it just depends on who's cooking it and everyone's preference. Her preference is that here it's a lot better.

RF: How long does it take to make a pot of pho?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*]

NL: A day and a night. So maybe twenty-four hours.

TT: Day and night. At ten o'clock today and ten o'clock tomorrow, I think.

RF: Oh, wow. Do you have to cook it when the restaurant is closed, when the place is closed?

[34:12]

NL: She doesn't have to, but it makes it easier for her to do it when it's closed, but she basically kind of plays it by ear. Every time the stock is low then she'll cook up a

new batch, but usually it's times when we're closed or if it's a slower day so that she can really focus on it.

RF: Do you love running a restaurant and owning a restaurant? You've owned several since the '80s. What do you love about it?

TT: [*in Vietnamese*] I'm getting old right now. I don't want to—.

NL: It's tiring. It's tiring for her.

RF: Well, I grew up in a restaurant too, so I'm very interested in the generations of restaurants. Do your children work in restaurants? Will you encourage them to?

NL: No one works at a restaurant, no. She would rather them not because it's really tiring. She sees how tiring it is for her.

TT: Too much for me.

RF: How long do you want to run this place?

TT: Three years.

RF: Three more years?

TT: I think so, but I don't know, maybe.

NL: We'll see. She staying pretty tired, so about three years, but we'll see how it goes, you know?

RF: Will you miss cooking? Do you get to cook at home for your family still?

NL: Yeah, she does. Yeah, she still cooks.

TT: [in Vietnamese]

NL: She's so tired that now she just cooks up here and she goes back home. Having a grocery store and doing the kitchen, it's a lot of work for her. She doesn't enjoy it as much anymore.

RF: But when you do get to cook at home, what is your favorite thing to cook and eat, at home?

TT: I like for the fish.

NL: Fish. [in Vietnamese]

TT: [in Vietnamese]

NL: Caramelized fish.

TT: [in Vietnamese]

RF: In the clay pot?

36:19

NL: Yeah, in a clay pot. That's our favorite.

TT: We use a lot of fish too, at home.

RF: Can you find all the ingredients you need here in New Orleans at groceries in the area?

- NL:** Yeah, everything that's on the menu is local. We try to buy local. At one point in time we were buying veggies from a veggie co-op in New Orleans East. So we try to keep local with the ingredients. Everything she gets is from any Asian market.
- RF:** You don't have to go to Houston or anything to get stuff?
- TT:** I always go to Kien Giang.
- NL:** On Gretna Blvd.
- TT:** But mostly I go to Kien Giang and if I want a meat, I call Christiana, and buy something Christiana and Home Depot, that's it. Number one I go to Kien Giang, number one.
- NL:** I live on the East Side, so I drive over there just to get meat and stuff.
- TT:** People are very nice. I love it.
- NL:** Everything is always fresh there.
- RF:** Do you think, kind of the last question, do you think Vietnamese food will keep getting more and more popular?
- NL:** Yeah, I think so.
- TT:** [in Vietnamese].
- NL:** [in Vietnamese]
- TT:** I hope that Vietnamese food every day —

NL: Gets more popular, she's hoping. I think it will. I think it's because there's so many unexplored food already. The main thing that everyone knows right now is bánh mì and pho, but there are so many different items that people haven't explored yet, so I'm hoping it will get more and more popular.

38:13

RF: So you added bánh xèo, the rice paper crepe. Do you sell a lot of them?

TT: [in Vietnamese]

NL: She just started that. We'll get a few people. We have a lot of people who come in and they love to try new things. It's very small, select few that's very loyal to trying new things here. But she just started that, and a few customers will get it but not a lot. Our main sellers are the bánh mì and the pho.

RF: Do most of the customers come from the neighborhood? Do they live or work in the neighborhood?

NL: A lot of customers live or work in the neighborhood — I should say work in the neighborhood, but a lot of people actually find us on Yelp or by word of mouth. We get a lot of people visiting town, in town, and they'll stop by. We're right off the street car, so people will come downtown and say, "What's nearby? Vietnamese food." And then they'll swing through, but mostly it's because of our businesses around here that we get most of our customers.

RF: So last question; do you think there's a connection between po-boys and bánh mì? Why are there po-boys here, bánh mì there? Some people say it's because of the

French colonial experience that Vietnam and Louisiana had hundreds of years ago.

NL: [in Vietnamese] That's why bánh mì.

TT: Yeah, I think so. But bánh mì better more.

NL: She said French bread is a lot better than the po-boy. The French baguette is better than po-boy she is saying.

RF: So you think bánh mì's are better than po-boys, better to eat?

40:16

NL: But I think it's the same, similar hand-held, quick, easy to eat, very filling. The only thing that's different is just the fresh veggies, the pickled carrots, daikons. That's the thing that stands out the most, I think. But everything is similar. If you put a piece of meat on a French baguette, it's handheld and easy to eat, it's sort of comfort food, New Orleans comfort food, I would say. I think that's what it's becoming.

RF: Well, I want to thank you all very much.

NL: Thank you.

TT: Thank you.

End Triet Tra & Ngoc Le Interview

