

# Tammy Nguyen Luu

## Vietnam



**Tammy:** My home town was Bảo Lộc, in Vietnam.

**Interviewer:** What was that like?

**Tammy:** I was pretty young. We left Vietnam when I was nine. But where I live, it's a little bit cooler because it's closer to the mountains.

**Interviewer:** What did you feel when you moved to the U.S.?

**Tammy:** It took a long time for our family to get the paperwork, about 10 years for my family to be able to come to America. And so the 'American Dream' was that you come here and you snap your fingers and whatever you want you will have. But, when I came here, it was a little bit different. It was really cold in September, and so I was a little confused, a little lost, but I was really excited to be here.

**Interviewer:** What differences in culture did you see in America?

**Tammy:** The difference between our culture and American culture is that we're very conservative in our country. Vietnam was taken over by the communists after the Vietnam War. And so you don't have a lot of say, you don't get to do a lot of things. So if they say that, 'You actually don't own that house,' they can take it away, or, 'That job that you're doing, doesn't really exist anymore.' So there's not a lot of freedom. Here, it's different because there's a lot of freedom- you can speak, you can own what belongs to you. So that's the cultural difference.

**Interviewer:** Are there any similarities?

**Tammy:** Yes. The people are both friendly. Once you get to know the people here or in Vietnam, they're very welcoming. And it can be very lovely.

**Interviewer:** Were you alone or with family?

**Tammy:** I was with my family. My sister had the opportunity to go to America because she was mixed- My sister was adopted, and she was half-American and half-Vietnamese. This gave her the opportunity to go to America herself, or she can wait 10 years and have our whole family go. And so we went together, as a family. My parents had eight kids when we left, so we had 10 people.

**Interviewer:** How was your first day of school? Were you worried or stressed?

**Tammy:** I was very nervous because I didn't speak the language. I had to start from the ABCs. My family is very poor. My parents had to leave everything in Vietnam, and so we came with \$10 and 10 people. I was very nervous. The kids were not as friendly, but it got better in junior high.

**Interviewer:** Was there support in place to help you with transitioning to school and learning English?

**Tammy:** My family, after we left Vietnam, we were in the refugee camp in the Philippines for about eight months. There they taught us a little bit of English. Then the Catholic Diocese in Utah sponsored our family. In the Philippines, they said, ‘Where do you want to go in America?’ We said, ‘We don’t know, anywhere is fine.’ The Catholic Diocese here sponsored our family and they helped us adapt and transition.

**Interviewer:** When you got here, what grade were you placed in?

**Tammy:** I was in fourth grade.

**Interviewer:** What traditions do you have?

**Tammy:** We have a lot of traditions. The biggest one is probably the Vietnamese New Year which is based on the lunar calendar. Our next one will be February 3 of next year instead of January 1 like over here. The next event that's also pretty big is the mid-autumn festival, which we'll be celebrating next month, September 9th at Sugarhouse Park.

**Interviewer:** What do you like most about living here?

**Tammy:** I love Utah because of the mountains here and you have access to water, which is great. I also think the people is amazing. Everyone's so nice here and friendly and helpful. So that's what I like the most. The snow not so much, maybe just for Christmas day [laughter]. I love it here.

**Interviewer:** How long have you lived here?

**Tammy:** I've been here since 1998. Over thirty years.

**Interviewer:** Is there anything you miss? Have you ever gone back?

**Tammy:** I went back once, in 2009. Hopefully, when my kids get older we'll take them to go visit. My husband's Vietnamese also, but he was born in Utah so he's never been back either. So, we do want to go back again to visit.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any family here?

**Tammy:** We have some relatives in Vietnam, but most of our family are in Utah.

**Interviewer:** How old are your kids?

**Tammy:** I have four kids. My daughter, she's 11. My son is nine. Our other daughter is five and our son, our baby, is three. We're outnumbered. We have our hands full.

**Interviewer:** Are you a U.S. citizen?

**Tammy:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** What was the naturalization process like?

**Tammy:** When I was younger, my parents had to study the exam. They took the test and they passed. Lucky for me I didn't have to study and they passed [laughter].

**Interviewer:** How old were you when you officially became a citizen?

**Tammy:** I am not sure. Probably a few years after we arrived. Probably when I was maybe 12 or 13.

**Interviewer:** What is your favorite American food?

**Tammy:** I love all kinds of food. I'm a Foodie. I love most Vietnamese food, like pho, and noodle soup, especially on a rainy day like this. Yeah. I also love sushi, Chinese food, American food, etc. I pretty much eat anything and everything. I love food in general.

**Interviewer:** What's the best pho restaurant?

**Tammy:** Rollz on 5400 South and Redwood is pretty good. We used to own that, but we just sold it last year. Pho 433 has really good pho also.

**Interviewer:** Why are you interested in participating in this project?

**Tammy:** Like I told you, when I first came to America I was very alone, I felt lonely and I wish I knew someone that could talk to me and explain to me like this and say, 'You know, I've been there.' and 'How can I guide you?' When I found the opportunity where I can share my culture, I can share my experience I said, 'Why not?' I would love to share our culture with other people and you guys here.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned earlier how when you got here the 'American Dream' didn't match your expectations. Does the 'American Dream' mean something to you now?

**Tammy:** Yes, now that I'm older, I can see that the 'American Dream' is possible. The rumors are true. If you work hard, you can achieve anything here. My family, we all work really hard, we work full time- We all have jobs or own a small business. We try to give back to the community and try to help out the community wherever we can.

**Interviewer:** What is the small business you mentioned?

**Tammy:** My sister, she started the nail business. She owns one of the first nail salons in Utah. So we do nails, manicures, and pedicures for customers. Then she said, 'Oh, now there's other people that wants to learn it,' and so she opened a beauty school. It's called Top Nails and Hair Beauty School. Once students are graduating and they said, 'Where do we buy beauty products?' So she and our family discussed and said, 'Let's open up beauty supply.' So that's where I work. I work at Jasmine Beauty Supply. So I provide the products for nail tech or salons. We're very lucky that our family actually get along. My parents, they were very strict and so they made us go to a family dinner, go to church together and I think that kind of helped. They would always say, 'If you guys don't get along, then all of you guys get punished' I used to always say, 'That's crazy and doesn't make sense. He just hit me, why are you putting all of us on timeout?' My

mom would just respond with, 'Well, then learn to get along.' Now I can see it works because we would always say, 'Let's not fight cus then we all get in trouble and that's no fun.'

**Interviewer:** Where in Salt Lake County do you live?

**Tammy:** I live in Taylorsville.