



PEN-International
Interview with Van Nguyen

Interpreter voice for Van:

THERE'S NO DREAM. I NEVER HAD A DREAM TO BECOME A COMPUTER SPECIALIST OR A TECHNOLOGIST OR ANYTHING. NOTHING. JUST LIKE THE OTHER PEOPLE WHO WORK IN VIETNAM WITH NO EDUCATION, THEY DON'T HAVE DREAMS.

Narrator:

THERE IS LITTLE HOPE FOR A YOUNG DEAF PERSON IN VIETNAM. VAN NGUYEN WAS BORN IN VIETNAM AND IS ONE OF TWO DEAF CHILDREN IN HER FAMILY OF 6. WHEN SHE WAS A YOUNGSTER, HER FAMILY MOVED TO THE UNITED STATES TO ESCAPE THE EDUCATIONAL, SOCIAL, AND LANGUAGE BARRIERS FACED BY DEAF PEOPLE IN HER NATIVE COUNTRY. IN AMERICA, SHE ATTENDED MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS AND LEARNED TWO LANGUAGES: ENGLISH AND AMERICAN SIGN.

AFTER VAN GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE, SHE TOOK A JOB AT A CALIFORNIA UNIVERSITY WHERE SHE WORKS AS AN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CONSULTANT.

Interpreter voice for Van:

MY GOAL AT MY JOB IS ALWAYS TO MAKE EACH INDIVIDUAL PERSON AS COMFORTABLE AS I POSSIBLY CAN WITH THEIR TECHNOLOGY. MY FEELING IS THAT TECHNOLOGY IS A REALLY COOL THING AND A REALLY INTERESTING THING TO WORK WITH, AND SO I WANT TO USE TECHNOLOGY TO MAKE THEM THEIR MOST EFFECTIVE, AND SO IF I HAVE TO TEACH THEM ONE-ON-ONE, IF I HAVE TO TEACH REALLY SLOWLY, OR IF I HAVE TO REPEAT MYSELF OVER AND OVER AGAIN UNTIL THE PERSON FINALLY FEELS COMFORTABLE, THAT'S WHAT I'M WILLING TO DO-- WHATEVER IT TAKES,

AND SO SOMETIMES I HAVE TO ILLUSTRATE MY METHOD IN DIFFERENT WAYS OR WHATEVER IT TAKES TO MAKE THE STUDENTS OR THE STAFF OR THE FACULTY UNDERSTAND HOW IT IS THAT THEY CAN USE THEIR TECHNOLOGY MOST EFFECTIVELY, AND I'M HAPPY TO ELABORATE HOWEVER I NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY UNDERSTAND.

I WANT TO SHARE WITH PEOPLE THAT TECHNOLOGY'S A WONDERFUL THING. IT'S NOT JUST SOMETHING THAT YOU CAN, YOU KNOW, KIND OF



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IGNORE AND GO AHEAD DO YOU JOB WITHOUT IT AND, YOU KNOW, THINK THINGS WILL BE OK. I WANT PEOPLE TO FEEL LIKE IT'S A REALLY IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR JOB, AND I THINK IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT WHAT I'VE LEARNED IN THE CLASSROOM, I'M ABLE TO PASS ON AND SHARE WITH THE STAFF HERE. AND, IN RETURN, THAT MAKES THEIR JOB MUCH MORE EFFICIENT.

MY FAMILY AND I MOVED TO AMERICA 17 YEARS AGO. THE REASON THAT WE CAME HERE IS BECAUSE WE LIVED IN A COMMUNIST COUNTRY, AND WE REALIZED THERE WOULD BE BETTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR THEIR DEAF CHILDREN HERE IN AMERICA. ASIAN CULTURE OFTEN IS NOT VERY ACCEPTING OF DEAF PEOPLE. I FELT LIKE I WAS AN ANIMAL. THEY ALWAYS LOOKED AT US LIKE THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG WITH US, THAT MAYBE WE SHOULD JUST GO WORK ON A FARM OR SOMETHING. THERE WAS NO REAL FUTURE FOR US AS DEAF PEOPLE IN ASIA. TEACHERS, PEOPLE EVERYWHERE, EVERYONE LOOKED DOWN ON US, AND I FELT VERY UNIMPORTANT-- LIKE I WASN'T ALLOWED TO HAVE ANY DREAMS OR ANY FUTURE, THAT I WOULD JUST BECOME MORE AND MORE WITHDRAWN, AND I WOULD NEVER REALLY KNOW WHO I WAS. NOBODY WOULD EVER REALLY ACCEPT ME FOR WHO I WAS. I WAS JUST CONSTANTLY SHUNNED FROM SOCIETY, AND...ALMOST LIKE I HAD A DISEASE THAT MIGHT SPREAD TO OTHER PEOPLE OR CAUSE THEM TO BECOME DEAF, AS WELL, AND SO OUT OF FEAR, THEIR REACTION IS TO OPPRESS US.

I WANTED TO BE, YOU KNOW, VERY CLOSE AND COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER PEOPLE, AND FEEL LIKE A PART OF THAT COUNTRY, AND FEEL LIKE THAT WAS MY HOME, AND HAVE NATURAL COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTION WITH PEOPLE, BUT I HAD NONE OF THAT. I WAS PRETTY MUCH ON MY OWN IN MY OWN LITTLE WORLD AND VERY ISOLATED. I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW BEFORE I CAME TO AMERICA THAT I COULD USE MY HANDS TO COMMUNICATE. I THOUGHT THAT WE WERE THE ONLY DEAF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD! I HAD NO IDEA THAT THERE WAS SUCH A LARGE COMMUNITY HERE. THERE WERE SO MANY DEAF PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT SKIN COLORS, AND THE ADULTS WERE ALSO DEAF-- NOT JUST THE KIDS.

MY HOUSE IN VIETNAM BEFORE I MOVED HERE TO AMERICA WAS THATCHED. IF THERE WERE HIGH WINDS OR SOMETHING, OUR HOUSE COULD EASILY FALL DOWN. IT WASN'T BUILT VERY WELL OR VERY STRONG.



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I DID GO TO SCHOOL FOR TWO YEARS: KINDERGARTEN, FIRST, SECOND GRADE, AND THEN I LEFT SCHOOL. TO BE HONEST WITH YOU, I HATED SCHOOL BECAUSE THE KIDS MADE FUN OF ME ALL THE TIME. I WAS VERY OPPRESSED WHEN I WAS IN SCHOOL, AND I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING. THE VIETNAMESE LANGUAGE IS VERY, VERY DIFFICULT TO LIP-READ, AND I HAD A VERY HARD TIME LEARNING ANY KIND OF COMMUNICATION. THERE WAS NO SIGN LANGUAGE IN VIETNAM. THERE WEREN'T ANY TEACHERS FOR THE DEAF. I REMEMBER AT THAT TIME, I DIDN'T HAVE A HEARING AID, EITHER. I HAD NO SUPPORT WHATSOEVER FOR THE LITTLE HEARING THAT I HAD, SO I REALLY RELIED ON MY MOM AND DAD TO MOUTH FOR ME WHAT PEOPLE WERE SAYING OR WE WOULD HAVE TO WRITE BACK AND FORTH, AND PEOPLE WOULD GET VERY FRUSTRATED AND GIVE UP VERY EASILY ON TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH ME.

MY MOM TRIED TO TEACH US VIETNAMESE, AND THAT IS MY FIRST LANGUAGE. THEN WHEN WE MOVED TO AMERICA, I REALLY STARTED MY EDUCATION IN SIXTH GRADE. I WAS 11 AT THAT POINT, AND YOU CAN'T GO BACK. YOU KNOW, I CAN'T GO BACK TO SECOND GRADE AT AGE 11, SO YOU JUST HAVE TO KIND OF GO IN WHERE YOU ARE AND MAKE THE BEST OF IT.

SEVENTH AND EIGHTH GRADE I HAD MORE AND MORE AND MORE HOMEWORK. A LOT OF WRITING. I DID HAVE A FRIEND IN HIGH SCHOOL, AND FROM THAT FRIEND, I WAS ABLE TO PICK UP A LOT OF VOCABULARY, AND I BOUGHT MY OWN DICTIONARY, TOO, SO I HAD AN ENGLISH-TO-VIETNAMESE AND VIETNAMESE-TO-ENGLISH DICTIONARY WHICH HAD A LOT OF PICTURES, WHICH ALSO HELPED ME A LOT. I THINK THE DICTIONARY WAS MY BEST FRIEND AT THAT POINT. IT REALLY HELPED ME TO KIND OF CATCH UP WITH EVERYBODY ELSE.

I REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO GO TO COLLEGE. I WAS WORRIED ABOUT HOW MUCH HOMEWORK THERE WOULD BE... AND MY TEACHERS REALLY PUSHED ME TO GO TO COLLEGE, AND WHEN I LOOK BACK NOW AT THOSE TEACHERS WHO WERE SO SUPPORTIVE AND PUSHED ME SO HARD, I KNOW NOW THAT THEY WANTED TO SEE ME SUCCEED. THEY KNEW THAT I HAD A LOT OF POTENTIAL AND THAT COLLEGE WOULD REALLY BE GOOD FOR ME. I REALLY COULDN'T SEE THAT, BUT THEY COULD. THEY KNEW WHAT COULD HAPPEN IN MY FUTURE. AND SO TODAY, I REALLY FEEL VERY GRATEFUL TO THOSE TEACHERS. I THINK TEACHERS



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ARE VERY, VERY IMPORTANT, AND THE FACT THAT THEY PUSH STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE THEIR POTENTIAL, I THINK, IS VERY WORTHWHILE. WITHOUT THEM, I WOULDN'T EVEN BE HERE TODAY.

Merri Pearson:

VAN ARRIVED ON THE FIRST DAY OF WORK EARLY, STAYED LATE, WHICH IS PRETTY TYPICAL FOR VAN. VERY STRONG WORK ETHIC. SHE PROVIDED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND SUPPORT TO THE WESTERN REGION OUTREACH CENTER AND CONSORTIA: ROCK.

SHE BEGAN TO EXPAND HER ROLE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY. SHE SAW A NEED FOR THE NATIONAL CENTER ON DEAFNESS TO HAVE A COHESIVE IMAGE FOR OUR WEB SITES, AND SHE SET UP STANDARDS THAT SHE THOUGHT WOULD WORK OUT BEST SO THAT EACH SPECIAL PROJECT THAT HAD A WEB SITE WOULD HAVE ENOUGH SIMILARITIES TO GIVE IT THE NCOD LOOK. AFTER THAT, SHE EXPANDED HER ROLE FURTHER BY INTRODUCING US TO THE CONCEPT OF INSTANT MESSAGING SYSTEMS ON THE WEB. SHE WAS ALSO VERY SUPPORTIVE OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF VIDEO CONFERENCING FOR DESK-TO-DESK MEETINGS, AND SHE JUST TOOK ON THAT LEADERSHIP ROLE TO IMPROVE THINGS FOR EVERYBODY AROUND HER.

Interpreter voice for Van:

I REALLY ENJOY INTERACTING AND SHARING MY TECHNICAL EXPERTISE WITH OTHER PEOPLE AND SHARING MY KNOWLEDGE WITH THEM. I REALLY DO ENJOY SEEING THEIR LITTLE LIGHT BULB CLICK ON AND THEIR UNDERSTANDING HAPPEN, AND THEN WATCH THEM TAKE OFF ON THEIR OWN.

I KNOW PEOPLE HATE THE WORD "BREADWINNER," BUT THAT IS WHAT THE LABEL MEANS. FOR MY FAMILY, FINANCIALLY, I WAS THE BREADWINNER. THEY DIDN'T MAKE A LOT OF MONEY TO BE ABLE TO BUY A HOUSE OR TO BE ABLE TO AFFORD, YOU KNOW, EVEN RENT OR FOOD OR ANYTHING. THEIR DREAM WAS THAT THEY WANTED TO BUY A HOUSE, AND I HAD TO ASK THEM TO HOLD ON AND LET ME FINISH SCHOOL FIRST, AND SO I JUST KEPT PERSEVERING AND GOT THROUGH SCHOOL. I DIDN'T MAKE A LOT OF MONEY, BUT I KEPT SAVING MY MONEY AS BEST I COULD



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IN THE HOPES THAT ONE DAY WE WOULD BE ABLE TO AFFORD A HOUSE THAT THEY WANTED. IT REALLY BROUGHT US TOGETHER SO THAT EVERYBODY HAD THEIR OWN SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES IN ORDER FOR THE FAMILY TO SURVIVE AND TO MAKE OUR LIVES MORE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE WE DIDN'T WANT TO LIVE IN, YOU KNOW, A HOMELESS SITUATION. WE WANTED TO BE ABLE TO HAVE A BETTER WAY OF LIFE THAN WE USED TO HAVE IN VIETNAM, AND I KNEW THAT IN THE END, I WOULD BE ABLE TO CHANGE THEIR LIVES, AND SO YES, I DO SUPPORT MY FAMILY MOSTLY FINANCIALLY.

I'M THE FIRST GENERATION IN MY FAMILY TO EARN A DEGREE-- A COLLEGE DEGREE. AND I'M ALSO PROUD THAT FAMILY ARE VERY SUCCESSFUL-- THAT THEY DON'T HAVE TO SUFFER ANYMORE. I'M PROUD THAT WE ARE HERE IN AMERICA AND THAT WE'VE HAD SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES GIVEN TO US. I'M VERY, VERY GRATEFUL FOR THIS COUNTRY.