

Thùy Dương Nguyễn-Trần
Narrator

Simon-Hòa Phan
Interviewer

Bloomington, Minnesota
October 22, 2010

Thùy Dương Nguyễn-Trần - **TNT**
Simon-Hòa Phan - **SHP**

SHP: My name is Simon-Hòa Phan. Today is October 22, 2010. I am with Thùy Dương Nguyễn-Trần who is from Richfield, Minnesota. We are here in Kennedy High School in Bloomington, Minnesota. Welcome, Thùy Dương.

TNT: Thanks.

SHP: Thank you for agreeing to do this with us.

TNT: No problem.

SHP: First we need to spell out your name. Can you spell your name?

TNT: Yes, first name T-H-U-Y D-U-O-N-G, and last name N-G-U-Y-E-N dash T-R-A-N.

SHP: Where were you born? Tell us about your family.

TNT: I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and I was raised in Richfield, Minnesota, which is a suburb of the Twin Cities. I'm the oldest of four, so I have two younger brothers and a younger sister. My brothers are named Việt and Nam, and my sister's Hải. Both of my parents were Vietnamese refugees who came to America in 1984. Originally they were living in California, and they eventually came to Minnesota because of the education opportunities here. They knew about the University of Minnesota, and they thought it would be a good opportunity for them to get an education. So that's what brought them here to Minnesota, and they've stayed ever since.

SHP: Tell us about your name. What does that mean? How did it come about?

TNT: Sure, all of my siblings actually have the same middle name, which is Dương, which represents a body of water. That is important to both of my parents because as refugees they had to take a risky boat voyage on the sea. So for them, that's a big part of their life. So that's what they wanted to instill in us. So my name is Thùy Dương, which means "Peaceful Bay."

SHP: There's a story about your birth with a doctor. Then later on you met the doctor. Tell us the whole story.

TNT: I was born in 1988. The doctor that delivered me was Dave Moen and was, I believe, a resident at the time. There's a picture my mom and dad took of me with the doctor and the nurse that helped deliver me. Her name was Mimi. So we had those pictures, and I always saw them as I was growing up. So years passed, and my parents did not keep contact with either the doctor or the nurse. But they work for the Fairview Hospital system. So just about in May, around my college graduation, my mom was riding on a bus and she started to talk to a woman who worked at the Fairview Hospital. My mom asked if she knew Dr. Moen or nurse Mimi, and it turned out that the woman did know both of them. And so she passed along the contact information for both the doctor that delivered me and the nurse. My mom got in contact with them, and they invited them both to come to my graduation party and also my White Coat ceremony when I started medical school. So it was really cool. Nurse Mimi was able to attend both of them and celebrate that with me. Dr. Moen couldn't come to the events but my family had dinner with him. And it was really cool just to be able to meet the person that, literally, gave me life and have lunch with him and also my parents. It was kind of cool having all those people there. And it came full circle because he was the doctor that delivered me, and then I was meeting him just as I was about to start my own career in medicine and start medical school.

SHP: There was a complication when you were in the hospital as a baby. What happened then?

TNT: Yeah, there was some sort of complication when I stopped breathing for a while. Dr. Moen couldn't remember exactly what had happened, but I was just having trouble breathing, but they were able to resolve it quickly, and nothing bad came out of it. I turned out fine.

SHP: So now he is what, director of your school?

TNT: No, he is not the director of my school, but he has a more administrative role. He's helping to implement the new care model for hospitals where they interview a lot of team works. So he is doing administrative work, but he still assists. He works at the Fairview Hospital, and I think he said he might be a guest lecture for one of my future classes.

SHP: Wonderful story.

What do you know about your parents and their stories in Vietnam and their journey here?

TNT: My parents talk a lot about their life in Vietnam and their journey here. They always tell us stories of what their life was like when they were growing up and how it was different from our own, the activities they did, the culture, and just how they are very close to their families. So they tell us a lot of stories of their childhood shenanigans, like when my mom was little she had a pet monkey that she would play with, or my dad wore pink pants just to be rebellious. So it's fun to hear their stories when they were kids and kind of compare them to life here in the U.S. and to compare them to how they are now. So it's great to hear all those stories. And also they've talked a lot about their experiences as refugees and how conditions in Vietnam weren't ideal. They really wanted a better life and they were really willing to risk a lot in order to do so. They said that during their attempts to escape together my mom was able to escape but my dad wasn't

because there were police officers there that held him back. So it was just crazy to think of all the risks and dangers they had to face in order to come to the U.S. It's pretty mind-blowing because it's those things you read about in history books or you see in war movies, but you don't realize that, you know, your own parents were living through that. And it's not some fiction, but it's real life. So it's kind of hard to grasp but at the same time makes you more appreciative of the sacrifices they made. And it makes you appreciate your family more, I think. They talk about their experience in the refugee camp and how they were separated for months but they eventually were able to meet up together and then come to the U.S. So it's just really motivational to hear the experiences they had to through to get here.

SHP: Have you been to Vietnam?

TNT: Unfortunately, I haven't been to Vietnam yet. Actually I haven't left the U.S., so it's something I want to do. And in the near future it would be really great to see the country that my parents came from, the culture, and just be able to see a lot of my relatives that I haven't met before.

SHP: Do you know your grandparents?

TNT: Yep, I do know my grandparents on both sides. I was lucky enough to meet both of them. Three of my grandparents are alive, but my mom's dad passed away when I was about eight or nine. I guess my earliest memories of meeting them were in childhood. So on my mom's side, one of my aunts was having a wedding, so I got to go, fly down to California to visit my maternal grandparents. And I just remember playing soccer with my grandpa and stepping on dog poop or something. So that's the earliest memory I have of him. And then when I was nine he passed away so going down to his funeral was another memory I have about him. And then my maternal grandma I was able to visit several times during our trips to California, which has been great. And it's good to see her, but at the same time, it's harder because she is getting older, and [sobs]... seeing her like that is difficult... [sobs]... sorry...

During the last visit she used to hobble to get around. Eventually she started sitting in the wheelchair, but now she is almost totally immobile, and she is always in bed. Even for her to get up and sit in the living room to take the family picture is really difficult. It just seems really bad, and it's been really hard. And I can't imagine being in that situation and how lonely it must be while she is living with my aunts, cousins, and uncles. It makes me sad I can't regularly be there with her, even to talk on the phone. I don't feel like that's enough contact with her. Like when we were visiting, she would sometimes just asks that my sister and I just sit with her just so that we were there with her. And it just made me sad, even me and my sister sitting there quietly made the difference to her. And we would speak in English sometimes, and she would tell us to just speak in Vietnamese, and my sister and I just kind of frustrated, like why do we have to speak in Vietnamese all the time? And then I realize, well she wanted us to do that because she wanted to understand what we were saying. She wanted to feel included in the conversation, have some sort of contact with us. That just made me really kind of feel sad because it made it seem like she's really lonely, and she needed someone there, like we weren't being good enough grandchildren to even speak in Vietnamese, or that we were bad for being annoyed that she wanted us to do that. So it's just kind of heart-breaking to think of my grandma in that sense. I

wish I could see her more often, but since she's kind of far away, it's hard, but...

And on my dad's side, my grandparents live in Texas so we were able to visit them last year as well. We talk on the phone a lot. When we were growing up my dad's parents lived with us. They were kind of the default babysitters whenever my parents had to work. They were there taking care of us. My brother would always run around, and they chase us down to feed us. I feel lucky that I was able to have them in my life growing up, but they moved back to Vietnam for a short period of time when I was younger. I wish I could see my extended family more because it's just my immediate family here in Minnesota, but it's good to know that they're there. I just wish circumstances were different where I could see them more.

SHP: You mentioned that you were frustrated because you could not speak Vietnamese with your grandmother.

TNT: Yeah, so all of my siblings and I are bilingual, so we grew up speaking both Vietnamese and English, and my Vietnamese is pretty, it's OK. I'm fluent enough, but I cannot read or write very well, so sometimes it's kind of hard to communicate. Like my grandma speaks just Vietnamese, and we can converse just fine, but sometimes I just kind of slip into English mode and kind of mix it together. So I just wish that I had more opportunity to talk with her, to practice Vietnamese, and be able to converse with her more. It's going to be a barrier sometimes - not finding the correct word to express how I am feeling, I think.

SHP: What is it like growing up in a bilingual family?

TNT: I think it's a really great experience growing up in a bilingual family because you're able to have exposure and knowledge of a different culture and a different language. A lot of my friends growing up were Caucasian and just spoke English. I think that's where I learned a lot of my English, but it did not seem like their perspectives were as diverse as mine because it was limited in the sense that what they knew was what their life was like in Minnesota and that was that. And there's nothing wrong with that, like it's not a bad thing at all. But I felt that I was much more enriched having both the perspective of growing up in Minnesota and having American culture and values ingrained in me through my peers and schools. But I also have at home my Vietnamese culture and heritage and those cultural values at the same time, because I thought they are very complimentary, and there're aspects of both that I really like, and I'm trying to integrate in my own life. For example, with more western cultures I feel there's a lot of emphasis on independence and really striving for your goals and that motivation-hard-work factor. I think that's very important lesson I have learned. And then with my Vietnamese cultures there's a lot of emphasis on community and giving back and also respect for your family. So those were just really values that I've grown up with and really respect and hope to maintain as I go on.

SHP: So at home your parents speak Vietnamese to you?

TNT: Yep, at home my parents speak just Vietnamese to us. Even though they're both fluent in English, they just speak Vietnamese because it's something they don't want us to forget and lose, and I am very appreciative of that actually. I have a lot of friends growing up who were in the same situation as me, like their parents were Vietnamese and they were born in the U.S. But then

they lost their Vietnamese skills because it's something they did not use regularly. And I'm just so glad my parents have done that. At first I was a little annoyed because I'd go, you know, "I'm living in a U.S. and I should be an American English speaker." But now I realize how valuable and how appreciative I'm of that because I am able to retain my culture, and I'm able to communicate with my family. I am also able to communicate with other Vietnamese people. It's a skill I really want to retain as I become a doctor and hopefully practice in the Vietnamese community, because being able to communicate effectively with someone in the language that they're comfortable with makes a huge difference in feeling connection with them. So I really want to improve my Vietnamese skills actually and keep working on them.

SHP: Has it always been that way or is it later, when you got older, that you can appreciate?

TNT: I think it was something that I appreciated when I got older and realized how important it was. Like when I was little my siblings and I were all put in ESL class even though we were born and raised in Minnesota our whole life, never have left the country, and we learned English concurrently with Vietnamese, and could actually speak it much better. So I think in a way I was a little... not ashamed... wouldn't be the right word but just a little resentful of the fact. Why do we have to learn Vietnamese so much and use it so much if all my friends are speaking English at school, if English is the main language being used, and I don't get to use it Vietnamese in school at all? So I was kind of... a little resentful of that, but then when I got older I realize how important it is to keep my Vietnamese culture, learn the language and be able to use it.

SHP: At home you eat Vietnamese food?

TNT: Uhuh.

SHP: All Vietnamese food?

TNT: We have a mixture of both. Mainly, I am really lucky my mom and dad are both really good cooks and feed us super well. So we have a lot of Vietnamese food, which is great. I love it. I love eating Vietnamese food. All my friends would come over to have Vietnamese food all the time. At our graduation parties our house was always the most popular because of the Vietnamese food. So I am really glad about that too because I think it's another way to retain culture and be able to experience my Vietnamese heritage. For us having fast food at McDonald's was considered a reward. It wasn't a regular part of our diet at all. If we did good on a test, that's when we got American food at McDonalds. So Vietnamese food was our staple, and still is.

SHP: If you had a choice, which one would you choose?

TNT: I would choose Vietnamese food. Now that I'm living on my own I miss home cooking. My parents have been really good and have brought me lunch. They brought me Pho once, even in a lunch bag. So I do really miss Vietnamese food, I've realized, because it's so much more healthy and tastes a lot better.

SHP: So McDonald's is no longer a reward?

TNT: No, no longer a reward. That's just an option if I don't have time before class or on the run. It's not a reward any more.

SHP: In your family do you keep all the festivals and important dates from Vietnam?

TNT: Yes, my family has been great in the sense celebrating all the different festivals and events. The big two that I can think of are the Vietnamese New Year, which happens in January or February, and the Mid Autumn Festival, which happens in the fall. My family has been very involved with the Vietnamese community. We try to do a lot of volunteer work and try to organize community-wide festivals so the community, not just the Vietnamese community but also the surrounding general community, can learn more about the Vietnamese culture and celebrate them.

So we attend these festivals and help put on activities for them. My sister and I help co-teach a Vietnamese dance group. We've been doing that for about seven years now, I would say. Every other week or so we have girls from the Twin Cities area come and learn traditional dances, to teach them about the culture and have fun. And then we perform at these different cultural events and festivals. It's been a great experience because some of the girls in the group are adopted so for them it's a way to learn about the Vietnamese culture. Their parents have said that my sister and I have been able to serve as positive role models for them because a lot of times they don't have Asian role models or someone that looks like them to serve as role models. So it's really touching to hear their parents think that about us - that we are able to have a positive impact in their lives. Hopefully we can continue and be that support for them. We are Buddhists so we do a lot of traditional things like having altars for ancestors or doing offerings to the gods. So it's just great to have that aspect of our culture still retained.

SHP: Your whole family's involved in these activities. Right?

TNT: Yes, my whole family is involved. My sister and I are the artistic side, doing the dancing, performing. I help with emceeing sometimes. My mom is like the chief organizer, organizing all events, planning them, getting people together, and recruiting volunteers. My dad is like the default photographer snapping away pictures. I swear he takes so many pictures you can put them all together and make a flipbook because he captures every moment. And then my two brothers are always there willing to help. They'll do the jobs that no one wants to do, and they'll do it with a smile. They'll staff the silent auction table for six hours even though it's the most boring job ever. Or they'll help clean up, they'll help set up, they'll do whatever. So it's great that we are able to learn more about the Vietnamese culture and also do something together as a family and have fun while doing it.

SHP: But you are not forced to do it?

TNT: We are not forced to do it. It's something that we do voluntarily. We aren't forced. It's something that we do together.

SHP: That's wonderful, wonderful - the whole family.

Let's go back to the dance group. Say more about that dance group. What are the ages of the girls? How do you choose the music, the dance? Where did you learn all that?

TNT: Our dance group is actually pretty informal, so it's a lot of fun in that sense because there's not as much pressure and structure. We started about seven years ago when I was a high school freshman... It was eight years ago then, longer than I thought. My mom at that time was doing story telling because she just started as a librarian. She noticed that at cultural events there weren't dance groups performing in Minnesota, so she thought it would be a good idea for my sister and me to start a dance group. So we did. We are called Hoàng Anh Vietnamese Dance Group. Hoàng Anh means "Yellow Bird." And from there we just used the resources we had and went off of that. Like my aunt and my mom danced when they were younger, so we asked them for some advice about moves and props and songs to choose from. Other than that my sister and I would watch the *Paris by Night* music videos, which are very popular in Vietnamese culture with songs and dances, and just find songs that we thought were cool that we can dance to, and then think of our own moves based off of their movements and watching other dance groups. So we would choreograph the dance, find the props, get the costumes together and just teach the girls to dance. It started out with girls that we knew, like they were our neighbors that were interested in dancing. Since then, as we performed, more people would see us dance and they ask to join. So our group over the years has fluctuated in terms of our members and who's in it. It's been great.

So the girls, we've had girls as young as five. I am the oldest one. I am twenty two. So we've had a wide range of girls in our dance group. It's a lot of fun to hang out with them, to teach them how to dance, and kind of bond with them too. We try to do fun things together with the girls. For our dances we try to dance according to what cultural festivals are coming up. So we would do New Year's springtime dances when it's New Year, Mid Autumn Festival dances in the mid autumn season, and in the summer there are a lot of summer festivals and events the Vietnamese community holds as well. So we try to do fun, upbeat dances. It's very informal but a lot of fun.

SHP: You perform free of charge for the community? Do you have any funding?

TNT: Generally, we dance for free. We do for fun. And it's more about teaching people about culture and educating them about the Asian community. Sometimes at dance events they do provide honorarium for performing groups. So if they do we use that money to buy snacks for the girls, or go towards buying props and costumes, or doing some sort of fun activity together.

SHP: You create props and costumes yourselves?

TNT: Sometimes we make our own. Otherwise we'd order them from Vietnam. The Catalyst Foundation, an organization that works with children in Vietnam, has been great in helping us get props like lanterns. Or we'd ask friends and family that are going back to Vietnam to order and bring stuff back.

SHP: I saw your dance. The last time was at the 35th anniversary of Vietnam, *Pride of Vietnam* at the Mall of America. The girls looked natural. They smiled and looked very comfortable on stage.

TNT: Yeh, we tell them to smile. I think they have fun and they enjoy it, and hopefully that comes through when they are smiling on stage. Sometimes they don't smile, so I'd tell to imagine Justin Bieber or Zac Efron in the crowd cheering them on. This is unfortunate because those are my celebrity crushes, but they don't like them, so it doesn't work too well. So I just tell them to think of something goofy, or my sister and I try to goof around, try to make them smile. The main point is to have fun. I mean, if we make a mistake that's fine. If it's not perfect that's okay. We are not a professional dance group. We are not *America's Got Talent* or anything like that. So we don't strive for perfection, but we strive more for them to have fun and enjoy themselves and get something out of it.

SHP: It's interesting that you brought up Justin Bieber and those of American pop culture. And here these girls who are Vietnamese trying to dance the Vietnamese...

TNT: Learn tradition...

SHP: Yeh, yeh. There we go again, bicultural, bilingual. That's great. So, you graduated from college. At the U of M?

TNT: That's right.

SHP: What was your major?

TNT: I graduated this past May 2010 from University of Minnesota. The University has smaller colleges within it. I graduated from the College of Biological Sciences with a biochemistry degree, and from the College of Liberal Arts with a B.A. in physiology and a minor in leadership.

SHP: So while in college you were still doing volunteer work, dancing, and helping your family with all kinds of Vietnamese cultural events?

TNT: Yeah.

SHP: OK, how did you find time?

TNT: It was a lot to balance, and it was difficult at times being able to balance your family responsibilities, schoolwork, and extracurricular. I was applying to medical schools at the time, so there was a whole long process that's involved with that. So what I tried to really do was just to stay organized, keep a schedule. Every start of the semester I would buy a planner from the bookstore, like the U of M planner and then just write everything I need to do. I would make detailed to-do list, color-coded everything. Every Sunday night I would make a to-do list of what I needed to do for the week, day by day, literally almost down to the hour just so that I could keep on top of things. And my planner was literally chucked full, like there was no space to write. Every semester I'd have to buy two or three different planners 'cause they would rip and everything. So just trying to be on top of things, and just maintain balance was what I tried to do. And also to try to do things I enjoy doing, so that it didn't seem like it was taking that much time

or that much energy. There were points in my college career where I was doing activities that I wasn't happy doing, but I felt like I needed to do them, and I forced myself to do them. But in the end it was just very counter-productive because doing them made me unhappy. I was slow at doing them, so that at the end everything just took longer. So then I realized what things were most important to me and I just focus on those things instead. Then I was a lot happier, things were much more doable. I was able to work more efficiently.

SHP: How would you compare yourself to your peers in college, being someone from bicultural family? Do you have any advantage over them or disadvantage?

TNT: I think it's definitely a combination of both, I should say. There are definitely advantages and disadvantages. I am a positive person, so I'll start with the disadvantages first, and I'll end on a happy note. Disadvantage wise, growing up in an Asian culture there's definitely a lot of different rules and cultural norms that are vastly different from American culture. And it's not a bad thing but I think it's sometimes hard to reconcile both of them. For example, my parents, if you compare them to my white friends', are a little stricter. I wasn't allowed to date until I was in college. And it was something that they aren't comfortable with. Or going out at night or staying out too late, like that's something that my friends were able to do while they were in high school. They had boyfriends, they went out, could drive cars, but for my parents it's much more of a gradual thing. And I understand where they are coming from -- they want me to be safe, and they were very protective. But just having ten stricter guidelines to go by is something that's different between me and my friends. And also just the expectations, I think. A lot of my friends are very independent, living on their own, and I just moved out less than a month ago and am living on my own for the first time. I think with a lot of Asian cultures, and with my family especially, family's is an important thing. You stay together. You have a lot of respect for one another. Obedience is another important value. So I think that creates a different atmosphere you're growing up in, and so the way you behave is very different.

SHP: How did you respond to all these frustrations?

TNT: I was okay with it because I understood where my parents were coming from, and I knew the reason they were "stricter", I guess, than most of our parents because they really loved me, and they cared, and they're protective. So I wasn't resentful of that. But sometimes it was a little frustrating because if I wanted to go out with friends I had to do a lot convincing and assure them that I would be safe, and that nothing bad is going to happen. I am not going to drink. My friends won't drink and drive. I'll be home by this time. I'll call you and let you know. So it's kind of having those extra barriers and precautions was at times a hassle. And I told them about that and let them know, "You can trust me." And I think to deal with the frustrations I just talked to my parents - not bargain with them, but just try to let them know I'll be okay and not to worry about me. I can handle myself, and I understand where you're coming from. I just kind of try to meet in the middle and compromise on what we can do so that both of us for the most part aren't frustrated but have our concerns met, I guess.

In terms of advantages, I think it's great to grow up in a bilingual culture because you have another perspective, and it makes you more sensitive to others, I feel. So right now I am in medical school, and my classes are about 40 percent minority students, and there's 170 of us.

Often times I feel I can connect more with students from a minority background, just because we have similar upbringings in terms of what was expected of us growing up, the rules and regulations we had to follow. Also just working with a more diverse patient clientele - just being able to identify with them more because of similar experiences. So being able to have that level of empathy I think is good because of that cultural background. Because sometimes my Caucasian friends just don't seem to understand it. It's not by any fault, it's not their fault or anything that they do. I think it's because they weren't exposed to those cultural norms, or at least growing up it's harder for them to grasp. For example, I wanted to go out one night to a baseball game, and I was calling home to tell my parents, "Hey is it okay if I go to the baseball game tonight?" And my friend, who was white, thought it was hilarious. I was a 22 year-old person, asking my parents for permission to go out. To him that concept seemed completely foreign. He thought it was the most ridiculous thing ever. And he kept teasing me for it. But for me, it was just a norm - I have to let my parents know where I am. So I think having grown up with different culture standards and views has set me apart from peers but not in a bad way. It just makes handling things differently, but also it makes you more empathetic, because when you're working with other people who have experienced similar things you are able to identify with them more and kind of understand if they're facing barriers that are hindering them.

SHP: Let's talk about values. Can you name some of the values that you hold from your upbringing, from your parents?

TNT: For sure. I think two of the really important values that I've grown up with are having good health and good education. My mom always said that education is something no one can ever take away from you. It's something that her dad told her. And then from my dad, he said having good health is something you need, because without it you're not able to do anything because you need that health and vitality to be able to carry out what you need to do. So I think growing up with my parents saying both of those things really influenced my decision to go into medicine so I could educate people about how to live healthy lives and also just promoting well being and health in general. So that really did leave an impact on my life, those values.

I think another big value was altruism and giving back to your community and realizing that there's something bigger than yourself out there. You shouldn't be so self-centered or just focus on yourself. Well, it's okay at times to be "selfish" or just think about what your needs are. You also have to think about the community's concerns and how what you do affects others.

I remember growing up my parents were always telling me bedtime stories about a girl who would ride on a giant magical turtle named Mimi. Each night it was a different adventure. The little girl and the turtle would go around and try to do some sort of good deed. They might help an old woman cook dinner. Or one day there was a fire in the village, and they helped to put it out. So each night it was a different story. But the moral was always the same-- it was to give back to your community. That sense of giving back really was instilled in me because both of my parents exemplified that, because they themselves have been active and volunteered their extra time helping with our city or helping with the Vietnamese community. So just having them teach those lessons and then demonstrate them really reinforced them in my mind and influenced the things I do.

I can remember the earliest good deed I did was when I was really little. I found this rusty nail on the ground, and I told my mom we had to pick it up, because if someone steps on it they're going to get tetanus and they are going to get really sick. And I was inspired to do that because of the story of that little girl and Mimi, knowing that doing little simple things like that could make a big difference. So just the value of giving back was another lesson my parents really imparted in us.

I think another big one is family. My family is ridiculously close, which I love. And my friends and peers are jealous of that fact. They're like, "It's amazing how close your family is, and you know, you're lucky to have that." And I agree. My family has always been there for me, just very supportive. Like when I have rough patches or if I didn't do well in school or something tough emotionally, I know that they are always there for me no matter what I need. And my siblings are my best friend. My sister, hands down, is the person I can turn to for anything. So the value family and having that support network there is really important.

I think the last value is just happiness in making the most out of the situation. Both my parents literally came here with nothing, and they were able to make the most out of it. Having that optimism, I think, really has rubbed off on me and my siblings. There's this Italian quote that I cannot pronounce, but it's like, "*Lar.. dera.. choanci...*" or something [*L'arte d'arrangiarsi*]. And it means "The art of making something out of nothing." And if anything I think my parents have demonstrated it is that. Being able to create something out of literally nothing, and making the most out of the situation, and being positive throughout it all have been lessons and things that they have really shown.

SHP: You're in medical school now?

TNT: Umhum

SHP: What year?

TNT: I am a first-year medical student.

SHP: How is it going?

TNT: It's going well. It's best described as drinking water out of a fire hose. That's something almost every med student says because the amount of material being thrown at you and presented to you is enormous. It comes at you fast, and it's hard to digest. It's hard to keep on top of everything. It's a very humbling experience as well, because you're with the best of the best. My peers are amazing people who have done amazing things. So it's motivating to be among such determined, nice, high achieving people. But at the same time it's humbling because coming out of college you... all of us have been type A people who want to strive for perfection. But in med school it's impossible to know everything. So it's hard to let go of that fact and know that you can't be right a hundred percent of the time. You're going to be wrong. Saying "I don't know" is a very common response you're going to have. So being able to kind of be mindful of that fact and not get discouraged is something I have been trying to grasp. At times it's been stressful just being able to master the material. Other times you're feeling great because you

know what you're doing. So it's an emotional roller coaster in terms of being able to handle things and juggle everything, because it's a big commitment in terms of your time, your money, your energy. But it's been enjoyable because you're focusing on something that you love doing, and you're with like-minded peers, and you're within a supportive network. Over all I am enjoying my experience and I am having fun.

SHP: What do you see yourself doing five or ten years from now?

TNT: Hopefully five or ten years from now I'll graduate from medical school and be a resident and do my training. I really want to become a pediatrician. I think it's important for kids early on to learn about how to live in a healthy way. And I'm a big advocate about preventive care. There's a Ben Franklin quote, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" or something. If you're able to prevent problems from happening in the future you can avoid a lot of long-term health problems and diseases. So I want to work with children in that sense. And also I just love the vitality of kids, and I act like a kid myself. I just want to be in that atmosphere working with them and then working with their families. I really want to work with children. And I ideally want to stay in the Twin Cities area. It's a place I've grown up in. I've learned to love it a lot, and I can't see myself being anywhere else. I love the diversity here. I love the vibrant atmosphere. And I really want to work with refugees in under-served communities because there's a lot of health disparities that exist in terms of different populations having differential access to care causing different health outcomes. It's just little things I think that we can work on to improve healthcare access for all and bridge those gaps so people aren't disproportionately affected by diseases. For example, Vietnamese women have five times the cervical cancer incidence rate than the general population. So just statistics like that are very overwhelming, knowing that even though we're all here in the U.S., considered the wealthiest, most powerful nation, that people are still are unnecessarily being burdened by health issues. So I just want to work towards alleviating those issues in some way.

SHP: Something fun. What do you do for fun?

TNT: Something fun. Ha ha. I love trying new things. I kind of joke that I have a really short attention span, like academic ADHD. I just want to try new things. I like the thrill of learning something. I like meeting new people. I try to pick up odd hobbies here and there. My recent endeavor is I took a fencing class couple months ago. I was not very good, I learned, but it was good to try. I bought a whole bunch of how-to books from Border's on clearance. I bought a book on how to play the harmonica. I learned how to play "Mary had a Little Lamb." And then my latest endeavor, which I'm trying to work on now that I have a little more free time at school, is how to play the drums. For Christmas I got a drum set from my parents. It was also a congrats-for-getting-into-medical-school present. So I have a full drum set, and I bought some books and videos on how to play drums and I am learning how to do that.

So that's my endeavor for the time being. But I just really love going out there, trying something different, and also doing a lot of volunteer work. I like to work with different communities, learn about their missions and just being around people that are really passionate about something.

SHP: What were the hardest choices that you ever had to make? Do you feel like you've made

the right choice?

TNT: Yeh, I'd guess the two that come to mind are. They're vastly different. The first one was when I was really young my family and I were at a garage sale. We were buying all these stuff, and we were checking out. A woman was standing by. She was a white lady. My mom was haggling and bargaining for prices, you know, trying to get a good deal, and I think that's pretty normal stuff you do at a garage sale. But she started to make these very racist and offensive comments. She would say things like: "Why don't you pay the woman the prices that you set? We westerners would never do that." And then the man next to her was like, "Yeh, that's so barbaric. It's something like the Russians would do" -- just very insulting to my family. She even told my family to go back home "where you came from." I was stunned. It was something I had never experienced before. Growing up my friends were mostly white. I lived in a predominantly white community at the time, and no one ever made racist comments. And that just floored me, and I didn't know how to react. I felt really ashamed and really hurt. I wanted to yell at her, but I knew that it wasn't the best idea. I was really struggling: "What should I do? What should I do? What should I do? Should I say something?" In the end I decided not to. I just felt that saying something to her wouldn't be good. Like being angry at an angry person probably won't get my point across. Instead I wanted to do something positive. So I entered an essay contest and wrote an essay about justice and diversity. And I won first place, which is great, because I was able to share my message.

So it was the hardest decision for me to make at the time because I didn't know what the best course of action was. It's normal to feel angry or hurt or sad, but keeping those feelings probably isn't best because it's going to keep you down. But you probably should put all the extra energy you have into something more positive, because at least you're being productive about it.

Then another hard decision I had was just recently actually, and that was to move out for the first time. Throughout my college career I lived at home with my family. The first month of medical school I did the same thing too. And a lot of my peers and mentors said, "Oh, won't it be hard for you to live at home. Oh, like commuting." I said, "No I'll be fine, I did the same as an undergrad, and I can manage it as a med student as well, because I don't live too far from campus." But as I started school I realized how hard it was for me to study. Not that my family was a distraction or anything like that. Commuting back and forth from school, you know, it took a lot of time. Then I found myself staying at school really late. I would be at school until 11 o'clock or midnight some nights studying just because med school is so different from undergrad where the materials are being presented to you so fast and it's so time-intensive and literally it felt like every waking moment I spent studying if I'm not eating or in class. So it's been difficult for me to be able to live at home and study. So I made the decision that I needed to move out and have a place of my own and just be independent.

And that was really hard for me because I felt that it made me seem like I didn't love my family anymore or that I didn't respect them, which totally isn't the case. I love my family to death, and I hold them with the highest regard. So it's really hard for me to bring that up with them. And I think it was hard for my family too to realize that fact, having their first kid move out and on their own. So in the end I feel it's the right decision I made because I have been able to focus more on school. I mean it's tough sometimes because I miss my family. There have been some

tough patches in the last month or so, so not having them right there with me has been hard. But I know that they're still there, and they support me. And I have let them know that I still love them. It doesn't mean I love them any less when I live on my own. It's just that I think I need the space to kind of grow, kind of discover myself more, and kind of being independent because I won't be living with them forever. If there is any time to go on my own, might as well be now. So I can just explore and learn on my own, maybe make mistakes, make some bumps and bruises or whatever. Just kind of learn how to handle things independently and grow from there. But it's good to know that they're still there to support me if I need anything and that I am always going to love them, no matter where I am.

SHP: You're very smart and articulate young lady.

TNT: Thank you

SHP: And I wish you luck with your studies

TNT: Thank you

SHP: And thank you for taking the time to do this even though...

TNT: Yep, no problem

SHP: All your studies and the pressure you're going through. Great. Thank you.

TNT: Thank you

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