

Title: Oral History Interview with Leila Tran

Narrator: Leila Tran

Interviewer: Geetika Sharma

Location: remote- over phone call

Collection: Race and Oral History Course, Spring 2020

Length of the Interview: 1:06:14

Geetika Sharma: Hello, (thank you so) much Leila for taking for being a part of our interview here, so and to-for finding the time to meet with me I know a lot of things are going on right now in our situation is very unique and circumstances are very extraneous. But I'm just going to ask you a few questions like about your life, your thoughts and you know your experiences. But before I do that, I'm going to ask you if I have your consent to be able to archive your video so others can access, listen to, and use. If you can, can you please read the verbal consent form to show that you understand and give your consent for this interview to take place? Okay.

Leila Tran: Read the whole thing?

GS: Yeah, yes, please. If you can.

LT: Okay, I Leila Tran, hereby transfer to the university the rights to publish, duplicate or otherwise use the recording and transcribed interview and any photographs or videotape footage taken during the interview. This includes publication rights in print and electronic form, such as on the internet the right to rebr- rebroadcast-rebroadcast the interview, or portions thereof and permission to transfer the interview to future media.

GS: Okay, thank you so, so much Leila. Okay, perfect. Let's start with the first question. How are you? How are you feeling today?

LT: I'm feeling very blessed. Yeah, very fortunate. Given the circumstances.

GS: Mm hmm. Right, with everything going on. Is it okay if you can tell me a little bit about yourself?

LT: Um, so I'm a mother of four boys. Ranging from five years old to 18. There's a set of twins in there. Actually, it's, you know, he just had a birthday.

GS: Oh wow!

LT: I work full time. I run a restaurant, a family owned business. Yeah, pretty much that takes up all the time I have every day.

GS: That's, that's so interesting. And twins- twins are a lot. That's, that's it must be super super uh. You must be very, um, like ambidextrous with everything going on. You're learning to juggle a lot of things at once. Um, can I ask a little bit about your business? Like when you know when you when did you start your business?

LT: Um, so it's a family business that my parents started about 30 years in the making. So you know, basically grew up in the restaurant, and we're here, you know, in Oakland, California.

GS: Mm hmm. Um, so you grew up helping your, uh, your parents with the business like, they're the first. They're like the original owners?

LT: Yeah, they're there. They're still the owners. They were immigrants from Vietnam. So, you know, being immigrants and at the time, it's like we're just, you know, had to always help out with the- with the business. Meanwhile, still going to school and, and uh, everyone pretty much had to chip in and help out. And even though we were really young, we were you know, the translators for our parents who didn't know any English and help them and whatever they needed. So, here we are, and it's still, um, still there. It's still the business is still ongoing. You know, 30 years later So, in hindsight, I kind of give my parents a lot of credit because, you know, every day there's new competition and novelty of new businesses, new ideas, new concepts, and, you know, we're still, we're still around little mom and pop shop. So, I think I give him a lot of credit for that, you know,

just being there. It's just along with all this new competition that's always coming out you know. It's a really tough- it's a really tough competitive business. Selling food, you know?

GS: Oh, yeah, would you- That's very interesting- Would you say that like, cuz you're in Oakland, correct? So, would you say that like your business, your food business there- there is a lot of like, new innovative, I guess like businesses go popping up in your area? Or would you say that there are also a lot of like, mom and pops just like, restaurants just like, you know, your parent's restaurant?

LT: Um, it seems like well, when we first started or when my parents started, there weren't many places at all. You know, Oakland was kind of like an area that people didn't- was- didn't attract a lot of traffic. We were one of the first, you know, Asian owned/ Asian businesses in the area. It's an area that's not very attractive for- for, you know, tourists or anybody visiting. It's a high crime area. So, it's very, we were one of the first ones there, but now it's filled with, you know, new businesses and, you know, people coming over. A lot of people were trying to escape the- the non-parking issue in Chinatown so they, we all like went to this area called New Chinatown, and it's around the International Boulevard area in Oakland. So yeah, now it's it's very saturated with new businesses. You know, that's why there's always new competition there's franchise-franchises that you know come in, chain, well-known, name brand places to eat, big selection. Oakland's been growing quite a bit last few years, especially downtown in the lake- around the lake Merritt area, so-so-there's Yeah, I have to say it's grown quite a bit since when we first started.

GS: Wow, um, I'd-I didn't know any-anything, anything about that I-I barely, you know, visit Oakland like around that area. And it makes me realize that I-I actually don't know much about Oakland. Is it-Is it okay if you could give a quick description on-on how-how it's changed a little bit more from the past years?

LT: The past years, definitely in the area that we're at, there-it's filled with, you know, businesses, like I said, a lot of businesses are congregating to that area because rent is cheaper than you know, traditional areas like Chinatown that attracts a lot of people, but

the lack of parking and so forth, a lot of people have dispersed into the area where I'm at and you know, kind of escape some of the issues at Chinatown. So the area that I'm at when we first started, I wanna say this location, we started 20, I don't know, 28 years ago, we- there was just like, maybe less than five Asian restaurants or grocery stores or Asian businesses in that area. But now, it's-it's, you know, it's grown quite a bit. But yeah, we were one of the very first ones there. I want to say, less than five, you know, and before it was just like a really high crime, very undesirable. Rent was cheap and plenty of parking and so the value was there. But over-over time, it's, it's grown considerably, considerably, and it's very, up to par to Chinatown, you know, and up to par along with the same issues as Chinatown, like parkings not available as it used to be, just more traffic and, you know, less space, rent has gone quite high, I want to say, you know, pretty up to par to Chinatown rents as well. So, yeah, so it makes it more difficult to-to run and to sustain a place. And, you know, this COVID thing that's happening, I don't know a lot of businesses are on a sinking ship.

GS: I- yeah- when I was talking to Jenn, she did mention, that was kind of an issue for quite a few businesses. Do you- do you think that I guess you might have hinted at it before but I'm getting the I'm getting the inclination that the area that you're around in Oakland is kind of becoming the next Chinatown. Would you- would you agree that maybe it's kind of getting there?

LT: Um, it's-it's becoming the next Chinatown in a sense, but in a sense, it's not. It doesn't have the kind of walking traffic that's dense in Chinatown and Chinatown is just, you know, a dense area with a lot of traditionally, culturally like the same group of people with more pedestrians and the area around internationalists. It's you know, not as dense with a foot traffic. But you know, but people are moving. I want to say I would think they're getting away from Chinatown because challenge Chinatown is getting really hit. It's getting hit pretty hard with a lot of crime and a lot of vandalism and, you know, with the city not making resources available like a walking officer that patrols that particular areas, it's people it's getting very difficult for business owners to sustain themselves from all this stuff that's happening around them, you know, so and-and in the area that I'm at, we are, you know, facing the same issues that Chinatown's facing with you know, a lot of

crime and not resources to help us to handle all the crime that's happening and the lack of parking.

GS: Mm hmm.

LT: So a lot of-a lot of things. Yeah, are very similar. We share a lot of similar problems with Chinatown. You know?

GS: For sure, for sure. It is hard. It's definitely hard right now given COVID and-and, you know, businesses not being able to, to fully fully, you know, get the income that you know, they usually have been getting. I-for my next question and kind of, I'm gearing away a little bit-a little bit away from the business and I want to ask- what is your favorite childhood memory? Or if not, childhood, just memory just in general. It could be with your children or- or anything like that.

LT: My favorite childhood memory? Um, so I grew up in San Jose and we kind of- my parents just pick Oakland because there was a space available to start their new business venture. But I grew up in San Jose. And I just remember, you know, growing up in San Jose, there's a lot more bigger Asian culture, more population. I just remember like, for example, Chinese New Year's would be such a huge event and the whole city celebrated and there'll be you know, huge festivals and, um, and I just remember you know, having those kind of cultural experiences, whereas, when we moved in to Oakland area, it's not- they don't offer the same things. But you know, the populations out there, the Vietnamese/Chinese population is not nearly as big as San Jose. So, I mean, a lot of traditions don't get passed on or don't get celebrated. So I'm, you know, I want to say like, yeah, I remember my childhood, we would always go to like, you know, these festivals, especially during Chinese New Year's and then something like everyone always look forward to it's like, bigger than Christmas and be celebrated for, you know, not just one day- stretch out for a few days. And, you know, that's when everyone gets dressed up, everyone visits relatives, everything gets, you know, revamped. And so I mean, today that are passed down definitely happened more when I was younger. So, so that's what stands out the most for me. You know?

GS: I see. Um, I remember when we were talking before, you were saying a little bit about how A part of your cultural heritage- you have- you have Chinese a part of your cultural heritage. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

LT: Um, so both my parents are half Chinese, half Vietnamese. And they're both born in Vietnam. And so was I, so, you know, I'm a mix of both and I speak both fluently even though the Chinese dialect I speak it's not as mainstream like Cantonese or Mandarin it's more like a, you know, it's-it's a it's a dialogue that's so different from Cantonese or Mandarin. There's no words that would be even remotely similar. It's just like a whole different language, you know, it's not just a different dialect. It's like it's a whole different language. There's no overlapping. So that's what I speak. So basically, not a lot of people know this dialect. And so I don't know how useful it is. It's just, you know, something that was passed down and, you know, and I speak that fluently and I also Vietnamese fluently.

GS: That's, that's so great. Um, do you do speak to your children as well?

LT: Vietnamese? Yes, I've tried to, you know, pass that down with the Vietnamese. But no, not the Chinese because, you know, that means I think would be more useful. So that's what I try to teach him that language. I think it's just a bonus. It's a bonuses skill, or, you know, knowing as many languages as you can. It's just a talent, you know?

GS: Oh, yeah, of course. And I definitely think that's super, super unique. Um, do-I also wanted to ask if, um, I guess going back to like, your, your business is, what is-what is the best part about-about running your business?

LT: The best part about running the business is that I got to keep it going, something that I've seen my parents, you know, have. They had a goal, and that was to open something that would be sustained itself, and the most satisfying part is yeah, I've kept it going all these years even though I don't know how to cook or I don't know, you know, a lot of things that people assume I know about owning a restaurant. But yeah, whatever I

do know, it's helped sustain it and kept it going for all these years. And, you know, I think, I don't know how to compare success on whatever scale but you know, it's been able to thrive. And like I said, we're still around, even with all this, you know, endless competition around. So, we're still here and I think that says a lot about my parents, you know? Their resilience and their determination and I mean to think about immigrants who had started who-who floated to the US, even on a boat for like 30 days of it, you know, on a boat aimlessly and for them to get here with nothing and, you know, start something with-with nothing and-and have it you know,

GS: Had it flourish.

LT: Yeah, which-which I don't know if I would be able to do, you know that, in that same circumstance, so but they were in to be able to raise a family and all that stuff too. So, they uh, I give them a lot of credit. I've seen them struggle I've seen the hard work. And I think that's what kept me involved, you know?

GS: Mm hmm. Um, I definitely, definitely understand with my parents as well when they came to this country. Immigrants are very resilient, they're very hard working and I feel like a lot of-a lot of people kind of overlook that fact sometimes when they go into- walk into a business that is owned by like an immigrant that you know, there's so there's hidden struggles that they don't-they don't see that they had to face you know, language, you know, learning customs and everything. So I really admire that about-about your, you, you know, your business and your parents. Can I ask, what is your business's name?

LT: Ah, well, I was trying to be anonymous a little bit.

GS: Oh, no worries, no worries. No worries. You definitely do not have to tell me. Okay, um, so it's okay. Moving on to the next question.

LT: Um, but I- yeah, I-I definitely feel like you know, being immigrants is not just- okay being immigrants. I mean, if you think about it, a whole new language that they don't speak, a whole new set of rules to, to, you know, play by for them to like, just open a

business without much funding and just being able to keep it afloat and save because the restaurant itself, it's so hard. It's so-overhead is so high, that it doesn't take much for it to, you know, not to sustain itself. So, so that's, you know, and I admired that about immigrants and families that have come here and to build from nothing. It says a lot about, you know, their determination and working hard and super hard without complaining, because it's all part about, you know, chasing a dream. So it's like, how can I not keep their dream going, when they've cashed in everything they've ever had just to have this dream, you know? So even though my parents are, are older and semi-retired, you know, I just feel like, you know, it's very satisfying to keep it going because I could just easily walk away and then they're forced to retire, close, fail, the store, whatever, you know, but I mean, I know for sure that my kids wouldn't want any part of it. So-

GS: Aw, what makes you say that?

LT: Oh, because I have four boys and my oldest has no interest and he's 18. And he's actually- he's actually going to college out of the country. So he's not even, you know, his and he's, I don't know, it's, it's different with my kids and their generation because, even though they saw me working hard and stuff, it's not the way that I witness my parents working hard. So there's, I don't want to say a lack of connection, but it's like, you know, they're not as- they're not as

GS: Mmm hmm, like there's like, there's like, all

LT: emotionally committed, like, you know, because when I- when I see my parents worked hard and the struggle and the tears and stuff- I'm emotionally invested in it, you know, to witness all that, but with my kids, I can tell them all about the struggles that grandparents have and that I have now it's like, okay, it's not as palatable as-as, you know, when I was growing up. So, I mean, they don't really have an interest and I don't want them. I feel like their generation it was the, you know, with- with their, you know, their um... How do you say that- there's opportunities and stuff I think they can do- I don't want to say better than owning a restaurant, but they can do bigger things, you know.

GS: Mm hmm. Um, but I totally understand what you mean. Um, I- when we were talking before, my mom also, didn't want me to you know, own the nail salon that she owned, even though I would help her every day with- with it, you know, as a tech-eyebrow technician, but you know, there's-there's definitely I guess, like a generational, I guess, gap between- between it with you kind of experiencing your parents, like your parents struggles a little bit firsthand. But I, I, I totally agree with what you're saying. Like, there's only so much, you know, you know, this there's a little bit of- there's degrees of separation, you know that generations kind of have that that makes it a little bit harder to kind of see to see that, you know.

LT: Yeah, they don't have- they don't have the pride instilled in them as we had, you know, in just witnessing how, you know, the where they can, where they came from, how it was built up, like, brick by brick, you know, tear by tear. So it's like, to them, it's just a manual labor job. And that's why I feel like maybe like your mom and my mom, it's like, we don't want our kids to do this hard work, they want- we want them to use their, not their manual labor, you know, to build something even though it could be so wildly successful and you know, but still it's brick by brick manual labor, it's tough and it's, it's a- it's you sacrifice your physical health, you know, physical being, whereas for us, I mean as a parent, we want our kids to use their mind and maybe do some- That's what I meant by do something bigger and

GS: yes

LT: better and stuff, even though- even though running a business like a nail salon or a restaurant, it's not that easy and not everyone's made- cut out for it as well. So it takes a special you know, I want to say breed of people that can do what we do or what I do or what your mom does, you know.

GS: Exactly, exactly. And I do. Yeah, haha. I'm actually not supposed to be talking as much in the interview and inputting my own opinion but I, I wish- I wish this wasn't an interview so I could totally tell you my opinions, but I- it's not really allowed in this interview, unfortunately. But yes, everything Yes, yes, yes. Ah, but, but it still sucks. It's

still it- still sucks, right when you see the the disconnect. I seen in my younger brother a lot.

LT: Yeah. Right.

GS: But okay, I'm sorry I'm gonna stop talking. Yeah, I'm gonna keep going. Um, so, um, oh, I think we touched upon this a little bit, but I'm gonna just you know, just if you want to add something to this question, I'm gonna ask, did you have any struggles that you had an anticipated when um helping, you know, run the business that you have.

LT: Um you know, I've always seen my parents work hard, and the hours and the physical labor, but the struggles that I didn't anticipate was dealing with different personalities with your, I wouldn't call them my co workers, right? I know, I don't say employees, I just they're just my co workers, because we're all in the same page, like I'm there with them. I leave, you know, when the last person leaves, you know, so I feel like that's how I have to prove myself because for someone to just work for you, you get to work with them. And so what I didn't anticipate is how hard it was not just managing a business but I think the biggest part of managing the business and, for it to go smooth, is having to deal with so many personalities and not- attitudes and not having these, you know, getting along with these people, but they along Have to get along with each other. And so that was like a struggle sometimes. And it still is because it's hard to, you know, manage moods and personalities and people that have a chip on their shoulder or people, people problems. I think it's better- it's harder than, you know, than what I thought it would be, you know, to me, it's like, okay, you came and asked for jobs, do your job, this is your job, but it's not just that it's like, it was- it's, it's a juggling act to just, you know, get people to get along with each other, to work as a team. You know, they want more so than just doing the physical labor part. You know.

GS: I definitely, definitely understand what you mean by that. And you know, it I think it's also very, very difficult when like, you know, because you are put in a position of authority right? as being the owner or, you know, our, you know, family of the owner, like you are put in, like this position of authority of like trying to navigate these different

personalities, right? Because, ultimately, you know, if a co-worker doesn't want to show up, you know, to work, it's on you to, you know, because, you know, it's, it is your business.

LT: Yeah. And it's like, how do you how do you balance when someone says that, you know, something's not fair. Yet, how do you make it fair across the board? Or how do you mediate an argument or mediate an issue where you have to satisfy everybody and, you know, and then get them to actually, you know, mesh together and work as a team because they have to work together as a team to make it smooth, you know, because restaurant is just so stressful when you know, when you're hit with like, ton of traffic at one time or unexpected traffic and, you know, so it's like it's a stressful you got to deal with, you know, a lot going on at the same time. And yet everyone's not in a separate cubicle- hoods everyone has to mesh together.

GS: Exactly.

LT: Or else you cannot accomplish anything. So, to me, yeah, just how do you be fair without being, you know, too harsh. How do you be unfair without being too soft? or How was this- you know, so it's like, not taking sides, but, you know, just being able to just balance all of that. More like people issues is the hardest part.

GS: Exactly. Mm hmm. I'm sorry for interrupting you. What were you saying?

LT: No, that's it.

GS: Oh. Yes. I-I wish I could tell you stories. Yes, like, especially if people are from different cultures and ethnicities and you know, they all have to work together. But you know, if they have family going on their children, you know, trying to navigate that as an owner it could be this super, super difficult because it's so- oh, well would you say actually that this this work is very community-based, like very kind (of) people based but also kind of culture based and community based. Like, do you do you hire like a lot of people who are also Vietnamese?

LT: Yeah, I hire Vietnamese. I, uh, yeah. Just you know, male, female, it doesn't matter. It's just whoever, you know, wants to- wants to have an opportunity. I'm open for lack of clarity. It's not something that You know, I think it's not something that takes a whole bunch of skills. You know, I think it's just something that's, you know, you just gotta have to have some type of common sense, you know.

GS: Yes.

LT: Just a commitment and just, you know, have some type of integrity because with food you know, it's a big liability, pushing out food. And also with a nail, I mean- nails shop- with a nail work as well. I think there's a lot of common ground there, you know, you, I mean, you can cause a lot with someone's- when someone's not being careful and being careless. It could be such a huge liability for the business owner, you know, so, I mean, I can have someone that just not being careful and mess up on something and just get everyone's sick. And so it's- it's you know, on the line, so yeah, like I said, doesn't take a whole bunch of skills, I just need someone that, like, you know, is willing to work as a team, not too combative, you know. We're not there to, like, you know, argue all day and just have some type of, like, integrity just to like, you know, and-and some type of standard, you know, because what we're doing it's, I cannot watch everybody all at the same time and watch what they're doing. So you know, there- there's, I gotta have faith that they're doing the right thing and not taking shortcuts because that could cause me so much at the end, you know?

GS: Of course, yeah. Because I also- a lot of work that a lot of businesses that you have mentioned, right, like food and nail a lot of businesses immigrants usually end up going into, it's very- it's manual, but it's also very personal like, you know. For nails, you touch people, you know, you take care of their hands. With food, that it goes inside their bodies and it nourishes them so it's- I-it's-it's maybe seen some at some people as like menial or manual or, you know, very much but it's also I feel like people don't realize sometimes how-how much you have to think about, you know, the people that you're serving.

LT: Mmm hmm.

GS: Yes.

LT: Yep. He's like, no, no shortcuts allowed, you know, you know, that's what I always tell my staff is like, don't take any shortcuts. And it's, you know, just, I always tell them: would you feed your own child with this. If you don't, then throw it out. You know? So that's- that's my- that's my- that's what my one line, which is because if I will give it to my kids, I'm sure not going to sell it. So, it's like would you give it to your grandkids, would you actually feed this to your grandkids? You know, I mean, because there's like I said, I cannot watch everybody they have to be have some type of, have some integrity where they're not taking shortcuts because you know, it's a big liability like the nails you know, you can just like, you know, make one wrong cut it, someone can get hurt. Or, you know, get an

GS: Infection. Mmm hmm!

LT: Yeah!

GS: Yeah!

LT: You know, so and then it's on the owners You know? So, a lot of common, common issues, nails and restaurants I've figured out today.

GS: Oh same. Yeah, it's- you have to be careful. Don't know. But um, okay, moving on. I could talk about this forever. But I want to move on to a different kind of note and ask about the Oakland Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce. I kind of wanted to ask you what is, you know, your relationship with the OVCC? How do you know, you know, them?

LT: I'm not very active with the Oakland Chamber of Commerce or I honestly, even though, um, you know, I think I can be more stickler than maybe my parents and stuff, but I'm not very active with the community programs like that, or-or the only, you know,

like, I only met Jen because she approached me but I've always stayed away from all that just because- like even my parents have never gotten involved. So it's just kind of like, you know, just, you know, focus on our business and chugging along, you know, and we never really had any we've never really ran into anything where I would- where we turn into the Chamber of Commerce or some body of representation for, you know, and maybe that's also like, one common, I see like a common, I don't want to say, approach that a lot of business owners, especially in my area. We kind of like just keep to ourselves. And we're not very involved. Or I speak for myself and I've not- I'm not very involved. And this has never been really involved. Going back to my parents, they were really never involved. They just kind of like, focus on-on our- our business and trying to keep it afloat and just, you know, and so yeah, you know, and I've- we've never really had representation. Or had someone approach us for- I don't remember an issue that you know, Chamber- Chamber of Commerce has reached out to us or so, you know, the one person that has reached out to us was Jen and Gino. She's kind of- she's younger than me. But she's very you know, she- she's physically like, gotten involved with the area. Issues that our area that- my area the business is in- have come across like, you know, there's a project that they're building putting in a busing system that really affects everybody. It's just basically put traffic at a halt with all the construction. So you know, I think that's how I met Jen was you know her coaching us about- Okay, how do we navigate through this, you know, while this project is going on because it's affecting everybody, and people can't access you, they can't come and support you. They can't come buy for you if there's no access that's taken away and, you know, streets are being blocked off. We're not talking about okay, 4873, we're talking about weeks and months at a time. So, you know, that's really my only exposure to- to Chamber of Commerce or any bodies of, you know, representation.

GS: I see. I see. Um, do you- hmm. Are you glad, um, because-because even though you said that, you, um, a lot of you know, businesses, you know, they have to work- think about themselves, you know, and make sure you put, you know, make sure keep their head down and make sure that they, um, they keep-they keep their business, you know, going and you know, make sure they're okay. But do you- do you? Not- I don't think the word like is the- Do you? Like I guess I'll say like. Do you like the? Or are you? Is it- oh

my gosh- is it nice that you know? Or do you like the fact that there is, you know, there is some even though your exposure with Jenn is-is still a little bit limited, that there is some sort of body of representation for your, your community that you could go to maybe for to get, I guess, exposure or things like that or help.

LT: Yeah, I mean, I think it definitely did help because I think, you know, being there as long as I have, you know, we've- we've put up with a lot of things, you know, like, all the time, that's going on. All the, you know, because the police didn't really respond, so when people stop responding, when you call out for help, like the police dispatch, people tend to just not reach out for help. So, you know, so I think, you know, still need time where so we just kind of like learn to just navigate and keep chugging along and, and you know, not make huge and not make a lot of noise you know, for example, you know, cars getting broken into people getting mugged every day, people getting violently assaulted every day, dealing with homelessness. People- the homelessness coming into your business and just like, you know, making these daily interruptions, I mean, you just kind of like- and then when the police stops responding or they don't never come or- then you just kind of like have to figure it out how to deal with those issues, you know. And so, when this BRT project came along, and- and, you know, Jen came along, and there's actually a person that actually came along and said, Hey, this is what's going on, we're having community meetings, come speak up, come to voice what the issues are and stuff. So it gave us some type of path to- to actually follow to see if there's, you know, any results as to be favorable, you know, to what's happening there, you know, so, yeah, I mean, I think without that, I don't think a lot of people, you know, there wouldn't be community meetings to even go to so someone has to initiate and, you know, start those things, you know, and so, we're in the area that we're at we haven't had much representation for any of that. I don't even know who's on the Chamber of Commerce. I, you know,

GS: I see- I see.

LT: It's not very advertised.

GS: Do you? Do you go to these meetings?

LT: Yeah. So I went to... think I might went to one or two meetings regarding voicing up about the construction that's going on and how it's just-just, you know, questions that you might that business owners who've been impacted have for-for people that showed up like any council woman or and the police department and, you know, a representative from the project that's heading the project and just questions that we have, like, logistically like the question, my main concern was, okay.... um, when you take with all the parking how-to how to suppose businesses can sustain themselves. Logistically, how does that make any sense? With when you take away all the parking? And we need people to come, you know, how does-how is putting a bus station that supposedly freeing people to uh- because that whole goal was to bring people to the lake. You know, this, this bus system that goes from I don't know, wherever the whole goal is just to people bring-bring people to the new revamped up lake, you know, but in between, it's like you have businesses like us, that are-that are suffering because all the parking is gone. It's like how do our customers access us? It can't they're not bus riders, buses already existing. You know, you're just putting in a better system, you know, or whatever. So they're not bus rider. You know, because if they are, you know, I wouldn't have these questions. So, you know, and, and so a lot of business owners in the area showed up. You know, I think we all have the same concerns, you know, like, how come there's no police presence? How do you suppose like, you know, when-when crime is committed, and, you know, we're victims, you know, or crime is getting increased, I mean, exponentially, and yet the perpetrators are not even prosecuted? So how do you-how do you, you know, expect us to remedy that, you know, and when there's no police presence, you're just-it's just being encouraged for crimes content more time, you know,

GS: Mmhmm, there's no active- active you know, action I guess there's- there's no directive-

LT: Officers, there's no active police presence. There's before many years ago, there's your-your area was always assigned a walking officer. It's called officers that's familiar with your, um, you know, your radius of an area, you know, who knows... who has a

heads up and is just has some familiarity with, with concerns, you know, with me, but now all that's gone because there's no funding, of course, you know.

GS: Oh, they got they got rid of it. They got rid of the program.

LT: There's, yeah, there's nothing there's no officers assigned. There's no nothing, there's no one that you can call, and when you can talk to, no one to express concerns. You know, if you were just dealing with crime and just, you know, everyone's sitting duck, so it's like, you know, the message out there is don't your make yourself a victim. But now everyone's being a victim. Because, even though you leave nothing, for example, even though you don't leave anything, your car, your cars are getting- are still getting smashed in because they're going to check out what's in your trunk that they can't see, you know? Before it's just okay, they're just breaking, they see your bag or whatever backpack in your car, they'll break it for that, but now it's like, I can have nothing but I'm still gonna grow into because they need to see what's-what's not back there, you know, and they're not being prosecuted. So, what do they have to lose? You know, so, there's a lot of there's a lot of, you know, crime That's just growing. Growing. Yeah, every day, you know, and everyone's sitting duck. I mean, everyone's just as, you know, sitting victim, you know.

GS: I'm so sorry to hear that. I didn't know that actually, I- I'm learning more and more about Oakland like, the more I talk to you.

LT: Oakland is not a... Oakland is not a place for-for-that's why when I hear new businesses come to Oakland, I'm always like, why? Is there like, really nowhere else that you that you can like, open up shop and not in, give yourself a chance to be successful? But I'm just lucky, we've been here for like, 30 plus years, but for new businesses, for a new business to come to Oakland. It's like, good luck, you know, because Oakland has- it's not a place that-that has a lot of answers. You know, like the homeless issue. It's like it's getting so bad and so out of control. When homeless, you know, I mean... I-I just want to run my business without having to deal with, like, homelessness coming in and- and just interrupting us because it's not just okay. shoplifting, whatever. I mean, these

are long interruptions, you know, and for the police to get involved in me taking hours out of my day dealing with homelessness every day.

GS: Yeah.

LT: Yeah

GS: And you always come in-

LT: And they think they can do whatever they want because you know what? They can, they don't get they, you know, get in trouble for anything, you know, but you know, they don't ge- there's no repercussions. Yeah, so it's a tough place to be, to have a business.

GS: I see. Wow. Do you-do you think that with COVID going on right now, have you seen like a rise in-in crime?

LT: Oh, yeah.

GS: As of late?

LT: Oh, yeah. There's a you know, there's there's a rise in crime and it's getting more brazen and more bold and it's happening in front of crowds in all hours of the day. So it's because no one's getting prosecuted, you know, and no one's getting arrested. No one's getting stopped. So, it's happening not just more, but it's getting more and more very... brazen, like, like I almost I-I got mugged at 7am walking, you know.

GS: Mm hmm.

LT: Walking 20 feet from my car to my store with like, a crowd of people around.

GS: Wow.

LT: So, to someone, you know, these guys just jump out the car and just try to snatch my purse off of me. And it's a cross body. So it's like, you know, it's not just a fast snatch. They would have to like, drag me down and take it off me. But, you,

GS: Yeah, so yeah, that and that kind of shows how desperate, I guess. Or even brazen, you know that they are.

LT: And it's not, you know, it's that out of desperation because, to me, these people that's committing these crimes. It's not out of desperation. It's not like okay, they're desperate to, to have money or to whatever.

GS: Oh, sorry I misspoke.

LT: Oh, no, no, no, it's me, because they're driving nice cars. They're in Lexus and BMW and Mercedes.

GS: Oh WHAT

LT: One driver. Yeah, that's driving around and causing these crimes is to sustain a lifestyle that they want. You know, it's just to sustain that lifestyle. It's not desperation I need to eat. It's more like, or, you know, even on-you know, it's-I see it as to sustain that lifestyle, you know.

GS: Wow. Wow, do you- is it okay if I can ask you why? Like what have...Because I-I'm noticing, right like the police are, you're saying they're kind of- like they're not really useful in this situation. They haven't been for a while. Can I ask like in what ways do they-are they not really useful? Like when you call, you say that they don't come or they take forever to? Can you-can you talk more about how the police have not been a reliable source of protection for you? And, you know, I guess Oakland in general, given your experience?

LT: Yeah, I think uh, you know, I think that police are just very um, spread out too thin. There's not enough policing. There's not enough police officers. You know, for, from what I understand it's being a police officer in Oakland is not very desirable. You know? That's why they- they advertise, you know, we need more police, come work for Oakland. Their, you know, it's not a (don't know) because, you know, the police-to be a police officer in Oakland you have your own set of challenges, and it's like, I get it, why would they-why would they come and try to stop crime when even if guys get caught, tt's not being prosecuted. Like, you know, like, they don't get arrested.

GS: They don't. Oh.

LT: They don't, because that's how the system is. And I, you know, talk to police officers that feel like why are they gonna come and try to, you know, involve themselves in something when, you know, the guys that gets arrested or doesn't get arrested and if they do they get let go, you know? There's no prosecution whatsoever there's no, you know, they-so it's so-that's why you know things are happening the way it is and that that the rate that it is, you know, I mean, I literally have the video tape guys just walking around every car that my camera can zoom in and just trying to open every car and breaking windows and feeling things and this is like 12 in the afternoon okay ,when there's so much-

GS: Oh my god

LT: -activity and people around and then how bold they are. Because, how do you go up against that? You know, and then, so, I mean, it's not the police's fault. I don't think, you know, they have you know, worse things going on or, or more prioritized things going on than property crime. The property crime, I've tried to explain, is not just property crime. When a crime is committed against you, it stays with you. Like the time I got mugged. It stays with me. I-I might have lost a property, like a purse, which you know, is not very relevant. Right? You know, at least I didn't get physically hurt, but yet-

GS: But the trauma is still there.

LT: Yeah! so it's like, how do you say it's just property crime? /Property crime is linked to trauma and trauma and, you know, now, my car has been broken into so many times that I keep my back. Seats flip forward, so that my trunk is can be easily seen, you know, or I'll keep my windows down, it's like you don't need to break these glass windows. Just yeah, I keep it out just so that, you know, but then I wish someone vandalizing whatever. But, um,

GS: Mmhmm.

LT: Anyway, so it's-it's very- so you know, Oakland has not prioritizing they call property crime, that's not even prosecutable. But, me, it comes hand in hand with you know, assault and trauma you know.

GS: Exactly. And I, I also notice in our- like, while you were talking that, I feel because property crime is not a- it's very common I'm seeing and it's not a convictable-I guess, like you can't be prosecuted for it. So, I feel like it leaves a lot of immigrant businesses kind of vulnerable, especially in the areas where property crime is-is very active to-to these-these traumas.

LT: Yeah

GS: Yeah, I'm so sorry.

LT: And you know, and usually, you know, people who, who are being assaulted or being mugged, they're on the way to work, or they're on their way to somewhere, you know, and it's like, they-they get this happen to them and they can't wait for like, stay around stick around for hours for the police to show up. So people go on their days not even being reported, you know, and-and so it's like you have the police that can't solve any of your problems. Why even could reach out, you know, where, so that's why they say, you know, Asian people like myself have a stereotype of not-of being very non-confrontational and being very, you know.. the perfect victim, you know, the perfect

victim, we don't report things or, you know, we don't make noise and stuff but really, it's it's because, you know, it's because of just you're not getting solutions. Not getting any, any, any response, it's like, you know, you're just kind of like, deal with it yourself, you know, and try to make yourself to be not a victim next time, you know, and not carry a purse anymore like I do, you know, and not and, you know, so it's like... you kind of just try to, you know, just make yourself less a victim because that's the only-that's the only remedy you have, because there's no other remedies that you can get, you know, anywhere else.

GS: I see. Wow. Thank you so much for answering that question. I-before we leave, for-I just want to ask for this interview. I just want to ask you, I guess one last question on the topic of COVID-19, um, because that is definitely taking up, you know, a lot of people's, you know, issues, changing a lot of people's situation. So, and it's impacted a lot of businesses, so I wanted to ask, before we conclude this interview, how has COVID-19 impacted you and your business?

LT: Um, COVID-19 has, definitely- well, I was closed for a big chunk of time, after the shelter in place was-was announced, and it's, what it has done is like, instill a fear in me that, uh, that I've never had before. Instill a fear of like, dying, if I go to work and get infected and- and just like things. I go to work, so we open back up right? And I do work knowing that my life in someone else's hands, it could be in my coworker who, because I can only control what-how much I've quarantine myself and how careful I am and, you know, all-all the guidelines that that how much I follow the guidelines. But I can't control what someone else does, right? So I'm exposing myself to co-workers, to customers, to vendors that has to come in. I don't know, how, how careful they've been or you know, if their asymptomatic or whatever. So, it's like... I go to work with a fear now, you know, a fear of like, becoming a patient- because- and becoming another statistic because I have- I'm immunocompromised I have, you know, health issues that if I do get infected? I'm not going to make it. I know that for sure. You know? So, I'm in that high-risk category. That's why I closed the shop for like, a good month just to reassess myself. And just to like, calm down and just, you know, put in protocols and put in barriers at the place just to make it safer, and having less fear, but the fear is still there. And for what? And what

is this all for? It's because I have a lease, that I have a monthly obligation that I have to pay, you know, getting back to the front end the beginning of our interview, it's like, rent is high. I have-I still have the obligation. How am I going to afford that? It's not being waived. It's not being you know, it's not going away. It's-so if it was then I would just say, okay, it's all stay home and ride it out like I did for a whole month but so that's why I decided I had to go-come back. And, but that's what it has done is like, you go to work, not just to work hard anymore but to work part for basically not profit. But, you carry this fear around, you know?

GS: Mm hmm yeah, it seems. Yeah. I definitely understand what you're-what you're trying to say. It's like-It's like you're working, you know, not for profit but I guess, and tell me if I'm if I'm interpreting this wrong, but like to survive, almost, like to survive the business. You know, it's so you know, you-you can you can keep going keep your families-families, I guess, legacy of this business also going, but there's-

LT: Yeah, it's like, it's like a sinking ship and you just try not to sink the ship. Mm hmm. You try to just, let's just hopefully this-you know, and the only way I can see things going back to any type of-or is even having less fears like if there's a vaccine, but yeah, I don't know when that's going to be. So basically it's like, okay, trying to keep this ship from sinking, for as long as I can and it's, and then unfortunately, it's not for profit or it's not for you know, but it's like, I'm just trying to balance not losing the business beat but you know, am I going to lose the business or am I lose my life? It's got to be one of those, you know.

GS: Wow. Thank you so much. Thank you so much Leila, for this interview and everything that you have to say. Wow, wow, this is so much. Do-do you have anything else you would like to say? Before we-we conclude this interview?

LT: No, I mean, hopefully... it's just unfortunate, like, just three months ago. It's what, like, in the span of just, you know, short time I think everyone's just like having the whole life turned upside down and-and I'm one of the fortunate ones actually because, you know, we still have our health and we still are well, and, you know, my children are

still, they're doing fine. They're-they're quarantining, quarantining, they haven't been actually-today was like, the first time they ever stepped out of the house in two months, in over two months. You know, so they're-they're still happy children because I know that and I think because they're younger, they're not losing their mind. Like if, you know, I have friends who have kids that's in their teens are like in their early 20s and so it was hard for them to, you know, to convince their kids to stay in, you know, Oh, yes. And-and, and it's hard for them being at that age to sustain a healthy mental health, you know, and but I think because my kids are younger that we're able to keep them, you know, entertained and but this year all for my kids were supposed to graduate from something my oldest from high school, my twins from middle school and even my youngest from, you know, preschool you know the-

GS: Aw.

LT: Oh, yeah. graduations this year and, you know, we couldn't do any of it. But you know, I mean, it's all compared. You know, it's all just then you have people that's getting sick and for no reason so it's like, you-

GS: You have to take your blessings where you can get them, yeah.

LT: Yeah. We just have to say we're the fortunate and lucky ones. So, I want to conclude it on that is just, we will look back and say, "yeah, wow we went through that". Like I didn't even know what a pandemic is. Like that's something in the movies-

GS: Mmhmm

LT: Or something in third world countries that are so poor that couldn't even, you know, afford salt. That-that's not something that the whole world will be going through, so I don't even know that it would even be possible, it's like, something that's science fiction movie, you what I mean?

GS: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

LT: But I-I but here we are so... you know, um, this is just very unique and- and we'll look back and say yeah, we were a part of that, you know.

GS: Yeah, exactly. Well, thank you so much Leila. Thank you for everything you have contributed to this interview, I really, really appreciated it.

LT: No problem, hopefully we'll talk soon. Thank you.

GS: Of course. Thank you.