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"IN SILENCE I STRUGGLE": VOICES OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE LIVING IN AMERICA

A Dissertation

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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Doctor of Philosophy

By

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“IN SILENCE I STRUGGLE”: VOICES OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE LIVING IN AMERICA

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

WHY SOUTH VIETNAMESE VOICES MATTER

I want people to know what happened to us when America abandoned us to the Communists, what it was like to live under Communism not as idealized in books but as people actually live it. Americans should hear how our freedoms were taken away, how we were sent off to reeducation camps, starved, put in metal connex boxes for punishment, overworked with excessive labor, and allowed to die without medical treatment. I remember the horrible screams of prisoners as their gangrenous limbs were sawed off without anesthesia. We must never forget those who resisted reeducation at great personal risk of torture or execution.

Captain Hùng[1]

One of the most disturbing phenomena about the post-Vietnam War era is the lack of awareness among Americans about the plight of former South Vietnamese political prisoners and their families. For most Americans, the Vietnam War ended when the last Americans evacuated Vietnam before North Vietnamese troops raided Saigon. In American literature and in school curriculum regarding the Vietnam War, voices of former political prisoners remain unheard and obscure. Currently, no anthology in American literature commemorates the lives of South Vietnamese political prisoners and their families. History books fail to mention the 65,000 Vietnamese who perished in the reeducation camps or the torture and abuse of millions of South Vietnamese as part of the

[1] Hùng, "Ten Indochinese Days: 1975-1978" in *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese-American Lives*, ed. James Freeman (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1989), 256.

casualties of America's war in Vietnam.[2] South Vietnam's failure to defend its nation is directly related to American foreign policies that cut financial, military, and intelligence support to Vietnam. Yet Americans continue to ignore the suffering of the Vietnamese in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. In this rhetorical silence, Americans assume no responsibility for the full extent of war casualties suffered by the Vietnamese.

Reference and history books in local libraries refer to the end of the Vietnam War as April 30, 1975.[3] Americans know little or nothing about what happened to their defeated former allies—the nineteen million South Vietnamese who stayed in Vietnam after the Communist victory.[4] The aftermath of the Vietnam War is a chapter of history absent from the general discourse on America's war in Vietnam. Historical accounts of the Vietnam War are incomplete and one-sided, written mostly from the perspectives of Americans. The Vietnam War continues to be invoked, especially since 9/11, by political leaders, policy makers, journalists, commentators, and the general public as a dark reminder from the past, a syndrome, or a mistake never to be repeated again. In effect, the current social and political discussions about the Iraq War are shaped by U.S. actions in Vietnam. At the heart of the 2004 Presidential election is an overwhelming concern for American soldiers. The main lesson from Vietnam is the 58,000 dead American soldiers who still haunt our national consciousness. Voices of American veterans of the Vietnam War who fought in battlefields, trenches, and dugouts, carry credibility and

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[2] Peter Bui-Xuan-Luong, "South Vietnamese Officer Prisoners of War: Their Resilience and Acculturation Experiences in Prison and in the U.S." (Ph.D. diss., The Fielding Institute, 2000), 37.

[3] See James S. Olson, ed. *Dictionary of the Vietnam War*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988); Stanley L. Kutler, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War* (New York: Scribner's, 1996), xxxi; Harry G. Summers, Jr., *Historical Atlas of the Vietnam War* (New York: Houghton, 1995), 202-09.

[4] The United Nations estimated that the population of South Vietnam was 19,370,000 in 1975. Newspaper Enterprise Association, *The World Almanac and the Book of Facts* (New York: Newspaper Enterprise Association, 1976), 667.

authority. Notably, for example, John Kerry ran his presidential campaign drawing upon his heroic deeds during his Vietnam War service and his courage to protest the war. While these veterans' voices are important, they are limited in scope in assessing the destruction of war fought on foreign soil. In America, the Vietnam Memorial commemorates and honors the Americans. Books, articles, and photos portray Americans experience in Vietnam. In Vietnam today, the Revolutionary Museum, the Ho Chi Minh Museums, the Reunification Museum, and various other museums represent the victories of the North and the sacrifice their soldiers made in order to obtain the victory. But the defeated South Vietnamese have no permanent collection of which to represent their experiences or history.

Without their own country, the defeated South Vietnamese have neither the means nor the resources to build a society which honors their lives. What they have are their stories. Captain Hùng is one of among ten existing voices who spoke about the horror of the reeducation camps. This dissertation hopes to remedy the absence of Vietnamese voices in the current discourse on the Vietnam War. It will add four South Vietnamese political prisoners' narratives to the collection. This dissertation expands the few published works of Vietnamese political prisoner narratives by including the voices of two women who are related to one of the political prisoners. It will represent the survivors' past life as well as their current lives.

While methods of oral history including interviewing, documenting, and recording were applied to the process of writing the narratives, this dissertation does not represent these narratives as historical narratives. Reconstructed almost three decades

after the actual historical events, lapses in time and memory call into question the historical accuracy of the narratives. These narratives are appropriately presented in the English Department, instead of the History Department, because they were reconstructed through imagination and memory. Imaginative reconstruction of a historical event makes no claim that what is presented is objectively true and factual nor that the style of presentation is objective. Rather, the imaginative reconstruction of these narratives allows readers to gain a perspective into a particular group's beliefs, their values, and their motives. Readers gain insight into the lives of a small group of Vietnamese-Americans living in Oklahoma City. The imaginative reconstruction of the past enables the voices to become part of a larger American immigration story.

This dissertation documents the survivors' narratives from an insider's point of view, drawing analogies from personal experiences, detailing observations and conversations between the interviewer and the interviewees, and narrating the subjects' stories through a journey motif. Written as a personal journey, I will include my personal experiences as a survivor of the Vietnam War. On April 1975, my family escaped the collapse of Vietnam and was rescued by an American ship. After three decades of living in America, I still live with the trauma of war. I am finally able to record the devastating effect the war has had on my family and me.

This dissertation, written for the English Department of the University of Oklahoma, weaves my experiences of war, loss, and assimilation into the stories of Vietnamese political prisoners and their families living in Oklahoma City. These stories are about loss, exile, and homelessness; they are told by Vietnamese people who want Americans to know about their experiences. I am aware of the stark contrast between

imagining oneself to be imprisoned and the actual experiences of being a political prisoner. The collection of stories in this dissertation presents multiple perspectives of the aftermath of the war. These stories explore the common experience of living in America while carrying within ourselves a dark and troubled past from Vietnam. The condition of exile is a mixture of loneliness and despair in addition to financial and material comfort. This dissertation presents an updated twenty-first century perspective of a small group of Vietnamese men and women who still grapple with the past, three decades after the fall of Saigon. These Vietnamese narratives, never before recorded, depict prison experiences, metaphorical and physical, in the aftermath of the war.

Unlike *Reeducation in Postwar Vietnam: Personal Postcripts to Peace,*[5] the only known anthology devoted entirely to Vietnamese political prisoners in the reeducation camps, this study includes my voice and the voices of one prisoner's spouse and his daughter. The narratives of one family admittedly do not represent a systematic pattern of treatment. However, the inclusion of female voices in a male-dominated genre[6] and the inclusion of perspectives from a younger generation offer a broader picture of what life was like for the Vietnamese people after April 30, 1975. This study differs from *Reeducation* in that it balances the focus of the historical experience in Vietnam with the contemporary exiled experience in America. Central to the narratives of former Vietnamese political prisoners is the past, which is Vietnam. The narratives in this collection provide a clearer picture of what life in America has been for some Vietnamese

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[5] Edward P. Metzner, ed. *Reeducation in Postwar Vietnam: Personal Postcripts to Peace* (College Station: Texas A & M UP, 2001).

[6] Female political prisoners made up less than 1% of the total South political prisoners. No English collections feature female prisoners. Trần K. Them, *A Profile of Vietnamese Reeducation Camp Detainees in U.S.A.* (Los Angeles, Unified Vietnamese Community Council, 1992), 12.

because it explores the survivors' attitudes, personal, social, and political struggles in America. The focus on their contemporary American life also expands their discourse as part of America's immigrant stories that reach out to a broader audience.

Chapter 1 discusses the relevance and purpose of the dissertation. Chapter 2 is a narration of my personal struggle as a Vietnamese immigrant in America; it is about the domestic prison which shaped my thoughts, actions, and identity. It examines the purpose of narratives and why writing my life's story was an essential way to cope with my family tragedy. In Chapter 3, I narrate Mr. ThiŒt's story. I present his contemporary life lived in America and how his fifteen years spent in the reeducation camps still affects him. In Chapter 4, I present historical facts of the Vietnamese gulags in order to provide a historical context out of which these narratives were produced. Following Chapter 4, are the stories of Mr. Nguyên Van SÙ, Mr. Báo Võ, Mr. Nguyễn Phúc, Mrs. Lš Hạnh, and Ms. Nguyễn Thảo in this consecutive order. In these chapters, the italicized passages represent my interactions and observations of the interviewees, introducing them to the readers. The non-italicized passages are the interviewees' own words recorded in taped interviews or written by the subjects themselves. Chapter 12 will be an analysis on the narratives that I have collected and the ten published Vietnamese prison narratives. The final chapter, Chapter 13, will be my narration of my trip to Vietnam.

War casualties are not only military men who die on battlefields. On soils where wars are fought, casualties include families, homes, schools, communities, and religious institutions—the way of life that gives people's lives meaning, identity, and purpose. Survivors of the Vietnamese gulags testify to the demise of South Vietnam's people,

culture, political and economic independence, infrastructure and state. South Vietnamese who stayed in Vietnam after the fall of Saigon witnessed first-hand the complete destruction of an entire way of life. Their personal testimonies speak of cultural annihilation. They tell of the methodical process of oppression, abuse, torture, and slow gradual killings committed by the Vietnamese Communists.

One way to reconstruct what was irretrievably lost is through personal narratives. Personal narratives enable victims of oppression to restore the loss through memories and dialogue. Without narratives of former political prisoners, their spouses, and their children, the damage done to generations of South Vietnamese after April 30, 1975, is omitted from history as though the Vietnamese gulags never happened.

Voices of South Vietnamese who survived the gulags have important significance to the current situation in Iraq. If America is to fully assess the cost of wars, then it is critical that perspectives of local people, Iraqis and Vietnamese, whose homes become battlegrounds in wars, are included in the general discussions of America's international policies. It is important to understand that America may do more harm than good to people whom we "liberate" in our democratization of other countries.

Currently voices of South Vietnamese political prisoners are particularly necessary as they bring to bear on what could possibly happen to men and women after America leaves. These voices offer a perspective about the life of a people once America pulls out its troops, journalists depart, and public attention turns away. The aftermath of the Vietnam War must be included as part of the American debate because it carries implications not only in the current situation in Iraq but for any state which is occupied by U.S. military forces.

CHAPTER 2

WRITING PAIN: A PERSONAL JOURNEY INTO CHAOS & DESPAIR

For twenty-four years, I have tried unsuccessfully to write my life's story, to reconstruct my life through words. As a young girl of thirteen, I came home to a sad house in Oklahoma City where I would go to my room and write poems about the ship that brought my family and me out of Vietnam to America. I shared these poems with my older brother who loved them and encouraged me to submit them for a poetry contest in high school. I did not submit them. Instead, I tore them up when things got bad for my family. In my adult life, I wrote fragments and stored them in my filing cabinets, never sending them out for publication. I would begin with something very dramatic, a traumatic horrible scene from real life. I would read it and hate myself for writing it, then I would quit. Doubt, shame, grief, and depression paralyzed my ability to write. I believed that what I had to say was not worthy of people's attention.

All through my adult life I felt there was something that I needed to tell the world. I carried a notebook in my purse or in my backpack anticipating that I would sit down and write my life's story. My mother would ask me why it was so important for me to write. "I just have to write like I have to eat," I would reply. When I told her this, my eyes would swell up with tears as they do now. "Just forget about it," she would say, trying to comfort me. "Why relive the past?" She would say. She was worried. She had seen me lose sleep and get sick because I had not written my life's story. I eased my mother's worries by telling her that a book was on its way. My mother has been waiting for me to finish so that I could live in the present moment of life. "You've been absent

from me for a long time," she has been saying this for quite sometime. She was right. I have been somewhere back there or dreaming out there for a long time. She has concluded that I was fated to have a difficult life. Even my spiritual director told me that if there were a hard way to do something, I would surely do it that way.

Writing one's life story for the public is a hard road. It is like opening sores for others to see. The Vietnamese have a saying about people who make public their private affairs: ripping the back of the shirt so that others can see through (V¥t áo cho ngÜ©i xem lÜÖng). It warns people to not expose their weaknesses or their family's weaknesses for others to see. It is viewed as betrayal and disloyalty to one's family and friends. Talking about oneself to a public audience is disrespectful and demeaning. So why write your life's story when the task is so difficult and painful? Why struggle with the past, the horror, and the unresolved? Does it matter to anyone else? Who cares about what happens to you? When does your private life become a concern for the public? What good does it do? I have been asking these questions for most of my adult life.

Part of my answer is to them that writing one's life is a way to come to terms with the chaos, traumas, and unresolved conflicts. Though painful, writing is the only way that I know to give order to chaos and to make sense of my family's tragedy. Writing my life's story has made me miserable and ecstatic at different times, and yet I know I could not have proper peace any other way. I have been at war with the voices inside for a long time. I needed to confess the part I played in the destruction of my sister's mind. I needed to expose the wounds, so I could close them and go on. Writing is a confession chamber in which I tell my sins and sorrow in order to obtain grace and peace.

For over two decades, I have tried to breathe my sister's life on paper. Chi‰n is my older sister, five years my elder, whose name literally means war. Chi‰n has occupied my thoughts, dreams, and nightmares ever since I came to understand that there was something different about Chi‰n. For two decades I have been trying to tell her story. Fragments are scattered here and there of writings done in Creative Writing classes that I have taken over the years—all of them about Chi‰n. She is the muse who haunts me.

I have been collecting records, stories, and facts about my life primarily to understand why Chi‰n lost her mind. In my father's home, silence pervades and honest meaningful communication is not the norm. My father forbade me to ask questions about my family history. He called me a busybody and shooed me away with one headshake. With his slight headshake, my mother and I stopped talking about her life. I accepted voids and gaps in my history because I had no recollection of my eight years of childhood in Vietnam. It was like living with an excised brain in which eight years of collected memories and experiences were wiped out.

I gathered the details in bits and pieces about my family's past and jotted them down in my journal. The scattered entries became incomprehensible, and they were not accurate when I repeated them to my mother. Sometimes dates, events, and names differ from one entry to another. Information and stories were disjointed, scattered, and inaccurate, but they were all I had since my father's headshake prevailed over truths. The accounts below are written from memory based on things that I have heard and things that were told to me. Things left unsaid were filled with my imagination.

When I spent the nights in the hospital with my mother during her recovery after suffering a heart attack in November 2001, I asked her what had happened to Chi‰n. There was not much to do in the hospital except talk. My mother almost died during surgery. I did not want her to die without me knowing what had happened to Chi‰n.

"Chi‰n should have been dead by all accounts. She was two months old when she came down with a fever. She got sweaty, then she vomited. She would just lie down shaking. I could not see the pupils in her eyes. I took all my money and rushed her to the hospital. I paid for a rickshaw to take us to the hospital in Biên Hòa. When I got there, the doctor said to me, 'You women wait until they're near death before you bring them. Why don't you just hang them instead.' The doctor was indignant, but he treated her. She survived, but she was never the same after that," my mother said.

Named for the fate of her country, Chi‰n was born in 1962 during the Vietnam War. My oldest sister's name is ñåi, which means great. The Great War. My oldest brother's name is ViŒt, and another baby boy born after was named Nam (South), but he died. The Great War of ViŒt Nam. With the death of South Vietnam, my siblings' names seem to befit the fate of our country. Chi‰n survived what might have been scarlet fever, but she suffered brain damage. Born with the fate of her country embodied in her name, she suffered from a split personality. Her girlish intellect never aligned to her growing body. She was afraid of water and fire, of extremities of hot and cold, and of people. My mother had no time for Chi‰n's fears. Bearing girls for my father, my mother got no help from him because he detested girls. He came home to see the sex of the child and left.

Once my mother came home from a long day's work and found that Chi‰n had not warmed up the stove. All Chi‰n had to do was go over to the neighbor's house and borrow fire to burn the wood for cooking. She was afraid to ask, so my mother and older sister had nothing to eat after a long day's work. My mother did not starve in peace. She beat Chi‰n with tree branches, breaking them over Chi‰n's until my mother got tired and slept. The next morning my mother set out to planting rice in the dikes. Her feet were soaked in water and her legs were bitten by leeches. My mother has said over and over how sorry she was that she had beaten Chi‰n. "I have marked that event in my heart," she said painfully. But my mother was not the only one who beat Chi‰n and marked the beatings in her heart.

It was so easy to beat Chi‰n because she never fought back. She would just stand still, cower her head, and let a person club her down. My sister ñåi said Chi‰n was not a fighter so she could never survive in the world. I do not remember what Chi‰n was like when we were in Vietnam. The first memory I have of Chi‰n was when my family escaped to America by boat. My Aunt Mạo, my mother's sister, was a multimillionaire whose boat got us out of Vietnam. Three families: Aunt Mạo's family, Aunt Mạo's husband's brother, Chú Ba's family, and my family—twenty-seven people in all— boarded the boat to leave two days before the fall of Saigon. Arguments ensued right away. Chi‰n and I ran from the lower deck to see what had happened. We heard Mrs. Ba crying. Her oldest daughter stepped off the boat and bid farewell to her parents. She was accused by Bích, Aunt Mạo's oldest daughter, of eating too much food and using up too much soap. Mrs. Ba wanted her daughter to apologize, but she would not. Instead, she rebelled by bidding her family farewell and leaving the deck.

We sailed until we came to a big naval ship. Many boats like ours clamored around the ship to be rescued. From the ship hung a ladder and a net. “Jump, jump!” People yelled and cried under the net and the ladder. People shoved, jumped, and fell off the boat to get under the net, which dangled above our heads. We had to jump from boat to boat to get under the net so we could be lifted up to the navy ship. My mother and my oldest sister had to carry my youngest cousins. That was the agreement my mother made with her younger sister in order for us to board her boat.

“Sister, you must help me with my youngest sons,” AuntMåo told my mother, “you promised to help me with my children.” Aunt Mạo had ten children, and she needed my mother to care for them. My mother was my cousins’ nanny. My sister ñåi was my cousins’ tutor. Chi‰n was a live-in babysitter. My mother held her youngest nephew and jumped from boat to boat. My sister held Aunt Mạo’s other boy. My sisters, brothers, and I were left on our own to get to the net. I jumped following my mother. I heard yelling and splashing all around me. When I got under the net, someone picked me up and put me in it. When we got on board, there were hundreds of Vietnamese walking around looking for their families. Some were looking down from above. Hundreds of people walked aimlessly, crying. Miraculously, all twenty-seven of us got on the ship safely. We huddled together.

Chi‰n walked me to the bathroom, which was a frightening experience. Just five feet beneath my feet was deep ocean water splashing against the ship. I was terrified by the immense blue waves hitting against the ship. Anyone could have fallen through the wobbly wooden planks. Chi‰n called me for me to come out of the toilet. When Chi‰n and I walked back to our corner, there was a terrible commotion. A man dragged

my mother across the deck by the hair and beat her. People pulled him off. He fell on his hands and knees and pounded his head on the ship floor. He cracked his head, bleeding. Men in uniform strapped his hands, placed him on a carrier, and brought him to the lower deck. People gathered around my mother. She explained that her husband did not want to come to America and had blamed her for making him. She said it was nothing new in her life. I learned that the man who hit his head on the deck was my father. He would be the man who tormented my mother and his children our entire lives.

I never knew I had a father until that time. I have no memory of him in my eight years in Vietnam. Then I heard my aunt speak about him to other people.

"He has treated her like that all her life," my aunt told the women, "I've told her so many times to leave him. She won't. I give up! He's an ingrate. People would give anything to come to America, but not he," my aunt said. I remember Aunt Mạo's blue raincoat. She brought back rice soup held in her blue rain bonnet. We cupped our hands and scooped out our food. We slept on the open deck: when it rained, we were soaked, and when it was hot, we burned. I did not know how long we were on the ship, but it was terrifying. To this day, my sisters and I will not get on a boat, canoe, or ship.

Aunt Mạo had traversed countries of continents with my mother. They crossed the 17th Parallel in 1954 with their husbands, leaving their mother to the care of their oldest brother who was a Communist. They lived close together in Tân Mai, a village in the province of Biên Hòa about twenty miles south of Saigon. This is where my sisters, brothers, and I were all born. My aunt left Tân Mai a couple years later and moved to Vũng Tầu where her husband became chief of police. They got rich quick making money in the black market. Aunt Mạo gave birth to fifteen children, but five of them died.

When my mother boarded the American ship, she returned stacks of 24-karat gold leaves that were taped to my mother's body to Aunt Måo. AuntM ạo trusted only my mother, whom she knew would take nothing from her. My mother would never have had the means to get us on the ship to America. My mother and father were peasants from the north. My mother continued to chew betel, an indigenous socializing activity dating back to at least the tenth century before Vietnam's first emperor, Dinh Bo Linh, was enthroned. My aunt and her husband, though they were brought up in the same peasant culture, abandoned their rustic background. He became chief of the police in V»ng TÀu, and she worked the market. Together they made millions. Had it not been for them, I would not have been the person that I am today.

The ship landed in Guam, a beautiful hot and sandy island. I liked how the hot sand slipped through my toes. We slept on cots under a green shade held by four poles. The little kids and I went to school to learn to count. Food was so delicious and plenty. There was always a commotion when we returned to the camp. Bích was crying because her husband wanted a divorce. He came from a poor family who owed money to my aunt. He married to pay off his family's debts. When he realized that Aunt Mạo was just as dispossessed as the rest, he left. The marriage was dissolved by him filing as a single man in need of sponsorship. My mother and ñåi bid him farewell. My mother had always liked him because he came from a poor family. Bích was no longer the daughter of a powerful man; she was another refugee like the rest of us. We could start all over again, and my aunt did.

Aunt Mạo came to our tent with her children one afternoon. Her sons carried poles and sticks. I was drawing numbers on the cement with a rock when I heard yelling.

I looked up and saw my aunt's two older sons hit my father. They beat him with a long pole.

"This will teach you. You've beaten my sister long enough," my aunt yelled. She had the backs of her hand on her hip.

I ran to hide behind a tree. I became afraid of sudden movements.

My father sat up after he realized he had been surrounded. I felt sorrow for him because he looked afraid.

"I beg you Aunt," my mother cried. "Please don't hurt him. If he hurts me, let God deal with him. He's my cross which I have to carry. Don't hurt him," she cried. She wiped her tears with the tail of her shirt showing her bra and the laminated picture of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help which she wore as a necklace.

"You've got no right to come at him with sticks and stones," ñåi said defending my father.

"It's not your business," he told my aunt meekly. This made her angrier.

"You ingrate! You are getting to come to America. People are dying to come here, and you tell everyone that you were forced to come. If you are so smart, you can still go back home. Tell the officials you want to go home. They will take you back. There are people going home. You don't know how to count your blessings."

"So I have to be grateful to you. Ah, this is what it has come to," he smiled wryly. My cousin raised the stick to his face.

"You don't be rude to my mother. You ingrate!" he said.

"Shut up, you," my mother told my father.

My brothers cried. The Red Cross workers came.

"You touch my sister one more time, I'll have my sons finish you. They will kill you!" Aunt Mạo yelled.

Three families separated and went in three different directions. I do not know if this was by choice, but my family went to Fort Chaffee in Arkansas to process paperwork before being sponsored while the other two families went to California.

Fear and trepidation followed my father who raged against my mother and sister ñåi. In Fort Chaffee, Vietnamese refugees awaited sponsorship. It was a military base, and we stayed in dorm rooms. My mother, sisters, and brothers slept together in one room while my father slept alone in another room. We were immunized and taught English throughout our stay. My father raged on. He grabbed my mother's head and held it under a water faucet. People tore him away and again my mother shared her life's pain with them. People hid us in their dorm rooms to escape my father.

I understood my mother's life with each beating. My mother's life unfolded with each passing storm. She told of her arranged marriage to him when she was fourteen years old and the violence that plagued her life. After the first beating, she left my father and came home to her mother. My grandmother was so ashamed of my mother for leaving her husband's family after they had arranged the marriage that she beat her nearly to death so that she would never want to return home again. A runaway bride was a source of shame in a culture regulated by family pride and honor. This save-face culture was cruel to young girls who grew up to be apathetic mothers. Later in life, my mother would tell others the stories of mistresses who slept in our house. She told of how my father beat her with shoes, fists, belts, or whatever he could find. My eyes swell up with tears when I think of it. I wish that I do not think about it, but this is not possible. I

believed that if I understood a person's childhood, I could explain his interior life and it would lessen the pain.

I write to learn about my father's pain. My father's name is Hách, which means pride; my mother's name is Thuốc, which means medicine. They were born in the village of Ngọc Châu in north Vietnam. In the 1940's when both my parents were in their early teens, there was much famine and in north Vietnam, then under French occupation. My father lost his father at this time. My father starved; he went into the jungle and ate what he could find. He came down with beriberi, diarrhea, and other intestinal diseases. My mother said that when she was young she would see people begging in the morning; when she came home, they had stiffened and fallen over dead. The mother was very afraid of the French. The whole village hid in the church when the French came. My mother dirtied her face with mud to keep from being rape. My father fought with the Việt Minh at Điên Biên Phụ. The top two parts of his right index finger were cut off. Afterwards, they feared the Communists more than the French. My mother witnessed rich landowners being buried up to their necks, and their heads chopped off by the Communists. One night, a large group of people abandoned the village of Ngọc Châu and walked the Häi Phóng River taking the open mouth boat south. Most of them were Catholics and feared religious persecution by the Communists. These escapees heard that a Catholic priest in Tân Mai would welcome them, so they asked for directions to that village. My father's mother, my mother's sister, her husband, her husband's brother, and his wife crossed the 17th Parallel and settled in Tân Mai. My father's mother lived with my mother who cared for her until she died. Her son, my father, drifted back and forth between cultures. He detested my mother's peasantry ways. My father had no brother

and no education to guide him when Vietnam was ravaged by war. From a poor peasant boy, he became a soldier trained by American troops, he had good looks, a steady income, and lots of chances to frequent the cities. He, like Chi‰n, was an underdeveloped child in the body of an adult. He wandered aimlessly from his family coming home only when he wanted to see his own mother. In contrast to my father, my mother built her life on the foundations of the teachings of the Catholic Church. She clung to the church for directions and raised us to suffer and endure through war and peace. And suffer we did. As an adult, I concluded that my father had no childhood, therefore he was determined to rob us of ours.

From Fort Chaffee on, the beatings by my father worsened, and they extended to ñåi. She hid in people's dorm room. Ms. Nhiệm, another Vietnamese refugee who became my mother's friend, told my father to leave his family alone. She told my mother that she had left her husband in Vietnam because he beat her and forbade her to visit her mother.

"Those miserable types! Those cowards!" Ms. Nhiệm would say with her clenched teeth and fist of anger even when my father was there. Her skin would turn from clear to pinkish red. Ms. Nhiệm warned my mother to leave my father, to claim that he was dead or in Vietnam. But my mother would not listen.

ñåi was a very beautiful, tall, slim nineteen year-old girl with light skin and big eyes. She was courted by many young Vietnamese men at Fort Chaffee. In Vietnam she had passed the exam to enter Ngô Quyền High School and had earned a scholarship. This was a great accomplishment for my mother who had very little money. ñåi was everything a Vietnamese girl should be: dutiful, obedient, caring, virginal, educated,

religious, self-sacrificing, and enduring. Some families at Fort Chaffee offered to adopt her or marry her into their families so she would not have to endure my father's beatings. But she and my mother were very close, so there was no chance that she would leave my mother.

At Fort Chaffee, I received the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the Sacrament of Holy Eucharist. I was taught about the devil and his ways, but nothing made sense to me. I knew that Chi‰n and I should stay away from my father. My family got sponsored by a Catholic church in Dixon, IL. Before we left, we exchanged addresses with many families at Fort Chaffee who admired my sister and mother.

Our First Home in America

When we landed at the Chicago Airport, three American families greeted us. They were happy, and their children smiled at me. Loud buzzes on the airport intercom startled me. One of the sponsors asked my father questions, and he answered. He knew conversational English because he had worked as a cook for an American base in Vietnam. We followed our sponsors until a man grabbed Fern's purse. Fern was one of the main sponsors who smiled and was happy to see us. Fern ran after him. The others called Security. We waited until a man in uniform returned the purse to Fern who inspected it.

The ride in our sponsor's car from Chicago to Dixon sickened Chi‰n. I sat on her lap. The buildings soared over us. "Oh God, Oh God," she whispered and laid her head on my back, her face shaking against my back. Fern turned her head toward us and smiled.

"Mother," Chi‰n whispered, "my stomach hurts."

“Get away,” I wiggled to get her off my back. She threw up on my purple shirt. I cried quietly. My mother told us to shut up. We walked into a sofa that sat in front of a curtained window. On the left was a dining room with a separate room to cook. Fern showed me how to use the shower, letting me know that she understood what had happened in the car. Fern showed us our beds: the girls had two beds stacked on top and one on the side. All the twin beds had red covers with green mistletoe embroidered in the center. The boys had two beds and my parents had one queen size bed. Chi‰n slept with me on the bottom bunk; ñåi slept on the queen bed with my brothers. No one ever slept on the top bunk. Chi‰n was very afraid of the dark and afraid of ghosts. I told her to hide beneath the red cover for protection. We have never slept on beds before our sponsor’s house. I was mesmerized by our new home: the different compartments in the house and things that were in them. Our house in Tân Mai was a one-room hut where we ate, studied, fought, and slept together. It was built by people kind enough to take northerners into their community.

There were clothes in our closet for all of us. I touched the beautiful patterns on the clothes and danced around in them. Our sponsors came to visit us and took care of our needs. They even washed our hair with lice medicine. We learned to brush our teeth and bath regularly. Eventually we attended St. Ann’s Catholic Church that sponsored us. Fern and Tom and their children came to pick us up. I wore a red dress with red stockings and black shoes. I remember this because they took a picture of all of us in our Sunday clothes. We sat close to the altar. There were people smiling at us, touching us. Fern lifted my elbow, and we stood while the church clapped hands. But what I remember most about that first Sunday was the meal we had in the dining hall which was connected

to the church. Corn ears stacked high like a golden pyramid and lots of other food filled the table. It was continually replenished, and it seemed the more I ate, the more was brought out. I played hide and seek after the meal; I hid under the table after grabbing more food from the table. I laughed with Fern's children: Melissa, Cathy, and Paula. Paula had short red hair and freckles. At first, I thought she was a boy until she gave me some of her clothes. That night, I thought about the food and felt my heart race towards the table covered with edibles. I felt happy, and I loved visiting our neighbors, Mr. Jones and Mrs. Jones, who gave us a badminton set and taught us how to play. I liked wearing the same clothes as Chi‰n and riding to school with my brothers and sister. All of us, except for ñåi, who was eighteen years old, attended St. Ann's school; a small bus picked us up from school and dropped us off. Jennifer, a girl in my class, asked if I could spend the night at her home. It was a two-story home with a deck surrounded by woods. Her home was so peaceful and quiet. Even when her father came home from work, we were not disturbed. She showed me all the little toys in her closet: the nicely stacked boxes of games, the doll house that opened then shut, the nice set of tea cups and the little chairs and tables for all of us to sit. She wanted me to sleep with her. Her bed was high off the ground with four poles soaring up towards the ceiling. I was afraid that I would fall off, so I asked to sleep on the floor.

We had a tutor who taught us to read the Dick and Jane books on the weekends. The first English song I sang was "Red River Valley" as part of a class project. Fern sewed a country dress for me to wear. After school, we came home and watched Bozo the clown and other shows on TV.

My sister ñåi had a good friend, Mary, whom we visited. I remember visiting Mary who had four different pianos. On top of her pianos were ships in bottles. Chi‰n and I looked at everything with amazement. Mary played all these beautiful tunes for us. I asked my sister to ask her if she would teach me. Mary smiled and nodded her head. I loved sliding on the piano bench. When Mary turned on the piano, which played by itself, Chi‰n and I were amazed. After Mary showed me it was a mechanical invention, we were still amazed.

That year in 1976 with our sponsors was the closest that my sisters, brothers, and I came to having a normal childhood. It was filled with numerous wonderful first experiences of snow, Christmas, a nativity set, a birthday party, a picnic cookout, regular classes, and a semblance of peace and tranquility at home. My mother and ñåi had a chance to learn English and skills, to start again with the help of our sponsors. Yet, these good things that happened, happened only once. Our dreams were shattered because my father's demons again took control of him.

My sister and mother worked at a cleaner's while my father worked in the meat department at a grocery store. It was not like any work he had ever known or done. This was not work that he was used to as a former soldier for the Republic of Vietnam. He had no tolerance for 8 hours on the clock; he had no tolerance for the refrigerator that chilled his bones; he said he was sick. Fern and Tom brought him thermals and sweaters, but it seemed impossible to get him to work and support his family. He loved to drink beer and talk all night with other Vietnamese men who lived close by. When Monday came for him to work, he called work purgatory for his sins.

Darkness pervaded around him. There was just something so awfully defiant and disgusting about how he saw the world. Women and children were there to serve him. We were not important in this world. Our entire family revolved around him. He was the head, and we were his appendages. In my father's house, no one, not my mother, my sisters, my brothers, nor I had an individual room. We had our own rooms, but when he was in his dark spells, he forced to sleep on the floor in the living room. My mother and father never slept together in the queen bed. He told her that she was ugly to his eyes. My mother and ñåi originally went to school at night, but they stopped because he forbade them. He wanted them to serve him when he got home from work. When Chi‰n cooked him something he did not like, he threw the plate at her. I ran to my room. My father hated the sponsors coming to check up on us because they knew that we were not happy. They asked many questions and got no answers. At night, he would ask me quietly if anyone had been over threatening to hang me on a tree limb if I did not tell him the truth.

Fern came regularly to check in on us because she saw the bruises on my mother's face. She told my father, "You go to jail next time." My father hated Fern and called her a fat bitch. That was the way he talked in front of us, foul and insulting. My father hit my mother in front of Fern. Fern shook her head in disgust and got up to call her husband Tom. She pointed at my father's face.

"You never never never do that again. You can't do that here, no not in America. You go to jail for that. Police come get you," she crossed her wrists, signaling handcuffs. "Next time, you go to jail. Police come they . . ." My father leaned over Fern with his furious eyes.

“Catham [God damn] you. You no tell me what to do. She my wife. Catham, catham!” he yelled and punched his head.

“No, no, me no care she your wife, you no do that here,” she made the wrist gesture again. “I go call Tom.” She dashed to the phone in the kitchen where my mother and sister stood. My mother sat. She was crying. I stood behind the curtain in the living room, about ten feet from where my father sat.

My mother cursed in Vietnamese. She was afraid of the police. My father sat leaning back. He held his right knee above the ground and rocked slowly. ñải begged Fern not to call fearing that he would just get madder and hit us more. Fern called her husband and not the police.

When Tom came, he said the same things to my father.

“Hack, you cannot hit her. No, you control yourself. I never hit Fern. Never hit children. Okay?”

My father was leaning back with both his hands behind his head. Then he leaned forward and hit his forehead repeatedly with the fisted palm of his right hand. You could hear the thumping sounds of hard knocks. I held the curtain over my face, but I watched.

“No, you no need do that, Hack. No need for that,” Tom waved his right hand. But my father beat his head more violently as he paced back and forth around the coffee table. With each beat he muttered, “Catham. Catham…” [God damn.] You, ThuÓc, why did you bring me here?” (Con ThuÓc mày mang tao Çi làm gì?) He struggled to get out of his sweater. He was a small body in white thermal underwear and hair that flared up.

“Uncle, what are you doing?” ñải said. (Cậu làm gì đấy?) We called this stranger who was our father uncle. My mother stood up from where she sat, “No, chỉ dả bộ,

thàng qủy," which translates as, "He's faking. He's the devil." My father was on his hands and knees on the living room floor. He leaped up at my sister ñåi like a dog and bit her. He barked. He rushed towards Chi‰n who screamed. He never came after his sons, but he growled at my mother. Tom told Fern to call the police. My father crawled to the bathroom. Tom followed him and watched as my father plunged his head in the toilet bowl, then threw it back, then plunged in again and again and again. When he came back to the living room, he tried to bite my sister again. When Tom grabbed him from behind, he locked his teeth in Tom's arm. Tom pinned him to the sofa. The ambulance workers strapped him to a stretcher—just like they did on the ship—and took him to a psychiatric hospital.

Our first Christmas in 1976 was so magical because it was the first time we celebrated Christmas as a family but also because it was the only one without my father. Coming home from church, we saw what we had never seen before: a Christmas tree lit with a star at the very top and wrapped gifts underneath. Our sponsors awed us with what they had done. We asked Fern's family repeatedly if these gifts were really for us. I played with the nativity figure rearranging their positions. My sisters, brothers, and I were so happy that night.

Our happiness would turn to grief because my father was released from the hospital about one week after the New Year. No one at the hospital knew how to treat him because no one spoke Vietnamese. He knew enough English but he would not speak. We never got to the heart of what was wrong with him. When he left the hospital, he became more vindictive and more violent.

Twenty-three years later, while I was on a business trip in Chicago, Illinois, I visited Fern and Tom. They told me that they had enough grounds to deport my father back to Vietnam that first year we were in America if only my mother would have okayed it. But she would not. I keep thinking back to what my mother told me about her mother, how she beat her to the point where she could hardly walk when she returned from husband's house after he had beaten her. My grandmother traumatized my mother for life. She made sure that my mother would fulfill her obligation as a wife to a husband whom she had chosen for her. It was that old culture of chewing betel of building family dynasties for generations to come. My mother's decision to stay with a man who abused her in spite of her own happiness was inbreeded in her for at least a thousand years. Duty, save-face, family honor, and animism shielded her from searching new ways to live.

When my father came home from the hospital, he forced us to move away from Fern and Tom, isolating his victims to better dominate us. Moving away from people who cared about us, who knew the American terrain, who valued children and women, and who had the moral and legal authority to put an end to my father's dark side proved fatal for Chi‰n, who was entering puberty. After we moved, my father's dark side won over reason and love. Fern and Tom: farewell friends and heroes! From here on out, tears. Nothing but tears! I grieve when I think about what our lives could have been if my parents had decided to stay in Dixon.

The Hot Beating Oklahoma Sun

My father flew out of Dixon first and stayed with Aunt Mạo who had resettled her family from Denver, Colorado to Oklahoma City. My mother, brothers, Chi‰n and I rode the bus with Ms. NhiŒm and Ms. Thành, Ms. NhiŒm's sister. ñåi hitched a U-haul to the station wagon and drove the goods that our sponsors gave us to Aunt Mạo's three bedroom house in Oklahoma City. Always, there was male priority ruling over everything. My father flew while the rest of us took the long road trips. My mother knew no English, and she had to keep all four of us children close to her. At each stop, she hurried us into the bus fearing that we would be left behind. When we rode into Oklahoma, the landscape was so different. Everything was different, the weather, the land, and the home. I felt alone in America. I remember Dixon's winter and Oklahoma's heat. The sun was like my father—it beat down on us, and there was nowhere to hide.

At my aunt's house, nineteen people shared three bedrooms and one bathroom which was stopped up the whole time I was there. We were piled on top of our cousins. Mice and roaches ran over my feet at night. Chi‰n screamed nights she felt something crawl past her.

After a couple of months at my aunt's house, we rented the bottom of a two-story duplex divided into three living units. We lived on the half of the bottom. Against the wall on the right side was a piano which was covered by red carpet and nailed over in the dining room. My father drank through the night with Vietnamese men whom he met at work; some were young enough to be his sons.

Before leaving Dixon, ñåi had written to my aunt about my father's condition. She informed my aunt's family that he had been taken to the psychiatric hospital. She warned my uncle that my father was ill. When my father arrived in Oklahoma City, my

uncle gave my father the letter. When we moved to the rental house, and he got all of us alone to himself, ñåi got the beating of her life. He belted her all over, chasing her through the red-carpeted dining room. I watched it all. He would show her how crazy he really was. I knew about what dying was like when I was eight. Dying was wishing that you were not alive to witness the horror before you. Dying was like wanting to sleep and never wake up.

ñåi rose from the beatings and worked two jobs to help buy the house where my parents still live. At nineteen, she was the head of the household and supplanted my parents in all their essential duties of caring for their children. She enrolled us in school, drove us to school, made doctors' appointments, and made sure we got there. She cosigned with my parents when they bought their home, which she and my mother had chosen. She bought her own car, a white Thunderbird. All the paperwork regarding immigration, health care, home, and schooling were done by her. When my younger brother, ñÙc was failing at Gatewood Elementary School, it would be ñåi who enrolled him, my brother, ViŒt, and me at John Carroll, a parochial school. She would be the one to plead with the nuns and bargain for an affordable price. Yet, though she fulfilled her duties as an adult, she remained a Vietnamese child. She had to be loyal to her parents and did what they wanted her to do. My sister became my mother. I used to envy my friends whose parents were able to drive them to wherever.

ñåi worked at Villa Teresa catholic school as a daycare provider, at dry cleaners, at restaurants, wherever she could to support the family. She never got a chance to go to school. She was the only adult in the family who knew how to drive. My parents never learned English, so they never learned to drive, fill out applications for our schooling,

enroll their children in schools, take themselves to the doctors, tell the doctors what was wrong with their children, or apply for their own jobs. In short, they stopped being parents in America. They stopped doing the things that parents do. They depended on their children to carry on the duties of their lives before they were fifty. Everything was left to ñåi and on down the line to the other children, and yet when my father got drunk, he went after us.

In My Father's House

It is possible to live in a home where you are clothed and fed, where you attend school, where you come and go, and still feel like you are in prison. Two years after they moved away from our sponsors, my parents bought a house across the street from Tony's Italian Restaurant where my mother and ñåi worked. The house was the first house on the corner of a busy intersection behind the alleys of a drug store, a photo shop, and other small businesses. My mother and ñåi paid for most of it, but the house belonged to my father. I had the most traumatic experiences of my life. In that house, I witnessed Chi‰n's madness, the deterioration of her mind.

What my father did to the physical house, he did to us. The house had bars of its own—black iron bars in front of all the windows and the front door because of a daytime robbery. My father painted over the white columns of iron vines with a glossy black paint. The windows were painted shut by Vietnamese workers hired for cheap. The evergreen row of bushes on the porch was dug up and tossed aside. Same with the cherry blossom tree and the oak tree in the backyard. He tore down the drapes of hanging bells and curtains of men on horsebacks and put up plastic strips that never opened or shut because he could not read the directions. Wallpapers of patterned flowers were painted

over with a sick aqua blue. White baseboards and the doors were painted a glossy burgundy red. He built an altar which protruded from out the wall of the living room: a wooden arch board set against a 4-foot plank. At the center of the altar stood an ivory statue of the Virgin Mary with her hands clasped wearing a long gown and a gold crown on her head. On the upper left side of her was a silver crucifix. Plastic flowers, candles, and lace adorned the feet of Jesus and Mary. He put up Christmas lights and cleaned the altar religiously. My father hung a print of the Last Supper that slanted from the ceiling to the top of the door's frame in the dining room. He hung pictures and wooden carvings of the Holy family and crucifixes throughout the house. He hardly ever missed church. He, my mother, and sister paid for my two brothers and I to attend John Carroll, a parochial school affiliated with our church, Our Lady's Cathedral of Perpetual Help, because a Vietnamese priest recommended that we do so. We had priests over for meals regularly. I grew up aware of two different families: my family and the Holy family. As a Catholic, I believed in the Heavenly Father through the embodiment of Christ. I believed in the Holy family, praying to Jesus during mass at school and on Sunday when I was in church. I stared at the picture of Jesus which hung on the left side of my bed. It was a picture of Jesus painted mostly in brown. His face, turned towards a light brown light, slightly lifted upward. Long wavy hair sat on his shoulders. His expression was peaceful and kind, and I realized how much I liked brown. Brown was a humbling and quiet color. I wished my father were like Joseph, a carpenter who loved his family and like Jesus, the kindest man who ever lived. But he was the antithesis of Joseph and Jesus.

My father could go to any room in the house and dominate it. He barred, shut, blackened, dug, killed, tossed, and stripped his family of joys and laughter as he had done

to the house. Anything breathing and beautiful was sure to be destroyed or at least be tainted by his mind's shadow. He accused us of despising him, so he tortured us before we could despise him. He worked up irrational accusations then stormed at us. On Sundays when my mother was off from work, my father invited his friends to drink with him from about noon into the late evening. My mother served his friends, not sitting down to eat herself but rather serving and cleaning up after them. We were thankful for his friends who kept him company until we slept.

Every day from 2 to 11 Monday through Saturday, my mother and sister worked at an Italian Restaurant across from the house. They worked through the important hours of our lives. We had to be with my father everyday after school and not see my mother and sister. For the rest of my young life, and even after I became an adult, my mother and sister stayed away from us. For the next ten years, my brothers and sister and I would never experience the presence of our mother and our sister at suppertime. They accepted working conditions despite what was happening to the children. Chi‰n had to go to Classen High School, a big public school which was so different from St. Ann's. Coming home, we ate whatever we could find, usually ramen noodles and canned ham. There was either silence or violent outburst or my father would call his friends over and drank all night.

Many nights we waited up for my mother and sister. They came home in white aprons smeared with orange spaghetti sauce. Sometimes they came home to a group of strangers, men my father had invited to drink with him. My mother and sister did not want to talk. They just wanted to eat in silence and go to sleep. My mother could not get used to the food at the restaurant. She ate rice and vegetables when she came home. My

mother reached out to the community of Vietnamese families who settled in Oklahoma City.

Since 1975, Vietnamese people have been coming to Oklahoma City by the thousands. Vietnamese priests and deacons at Our Lady's Church were eventually able to celebrate masses in Vietnamese. Near the N.W. 23rd and Classen area, a Vietnamese community centered around a church, a Vietnamese food market, and Vietnamese restaurants. My family was one of the first Vietnamese families to settle in this area. The Vietnamese have done quite well, and most of them have bought bigger, newer houses, but I felt like my family would never change. Many Vietnamese men and women advanced to better paying jobs with benefits, their families became adjusted, but my family was in deep trouble.

My father could not keep a steady job. He got fired everywhere he worked. I could tell new jobs by his shirts—Coca Cola, Intempo, and companies that did not have logos. Drinking, staying up late, and fighting his demons made getting up early in the morning a miserable task for all of us. A typical Monday morning was a storm. At 6:30 a.m., before the morning sun crept through the cracks, the house broke with arguments. My father's ride was honking outside. My father clumsily hopped into his pants and cursed at my mother for not getting him up earlier. She hurried to pack his lunch. He rushed out the door gritting his death in anger.

At night, my father's black lunch box, which opened into an upper and lower half empt,y sat on the kitchen counter. Chi‰n, Việt, Đức, and I ate whatever was in the refrigerator and watched TV in the back half of the house. My father called Chi‰n out to the living room. He ordered her to make dinner. Chi‰n, fearful of water and fire,

feared the chicken which was wrapped in plastic, the cleaver, and the skillet. She was about fifteen years old. It took a long time for her to cut up the chicken. She did not have my mother's skill of chopping meat with the cleaver. She jabbed the chicken, poked holes through its flesh, and stuck it in the oven. She baked it on a cookie sheet. Hours went by. My father drank his Martell and fell asleep on the sofa. Chien and I went to the room to study. He called us out and asked for his dinner. Chien carried the whole chicken out on the plate and set it in front of my father on the coffee table. Blood dripped on the side of the plate and a puddle of pink fat settled in the middle of the plate. My father cursed a storm. Chi‰n laughed nervously and uncontrollably; she had the habit of laughing out of fear. My father thought she was laughing at him. He pulled his belt off and whipped her. She fell on the floor. He pounded on her head and shoulders with his fist.

Nobody knew what was happening to Chi‰n back then. She was paralyzed with fear. I slept with her and saw that she would not get up to go to the bathroom. She would shake her legs, then wet the bed. She spat along the side of the bed rather than brushing her teeth. She was so terrified of water. She stopped bathing herself, brushing her teeth, and washing her face. Acne and bumps covered her cheeks and forehead. My mother asked me to bathe with her so that I could wash her hair and make sure she did not smell. I was so ashamed of being her sister. She talked to herself and conversed with the voices inside her head. She pointed to the ceiling at night and said, "Devil stay away from me." She zoned in and out of existence. She sat paralyzed with her head down, immobile. People around the community called her crazy Chi‰n. She hid all day from school for an entire semester before a Vietnamese teacher reported her absence to my

mother. Vietnamese kids at the school called her crazy Chi‰n. She stopped going to school. After my mother forced her to go back to school, she came home writing "James Cowden" on the pavement and in small pieces of papers. She was in love with this boy and had no way to process what was happening to her body. She masturbated in bed with me sleeping beside her. I pounded on her in my rage. I was becoming like my father, and I was so ashamed of my life and all the people around me. Chi‰n went to a place where no one could reach her just like the time when the pupils of her eyes disappeared leaving on the white of her eyes. But nobody tried to reach her.

I hated staying at home, so I walked over to Tony's Italian Restaurant where my mother and Đại was working. I helped out with the dishes and later cleaned the tables. Tony, the owner, hired me at $2.00 an hour. I did not get home until 10 p.m. on the weekdays and 11:00 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays. I was tired at school and fell asleep during class. But it was better than being at home. After Chi‰n totally quit school, she worked for Tony too. But she did not follow orders right, and Tony eventually fired her. "Something's wrong with your sister," Tony warned. After she got fired, Chi‰n became obsessed with Tony's son, Joe. She said his name, Joe Anzelmo, over and over. She made repeated calls to Tony's restaurant and would say nothing.

One day when Đại went to pick Chi‰n up from a Chinese restaurant where she was supposed to be working, but she was not there. She wandered around the city, and days later the hospital called us. She was admitted to the state's psychiatric hospital where she did not recognize us at first. She never told anyone what us was going on with her. I visited her one time, and she made me a red box with stickers of birds and flowers

on top. No one at the hospital spoke Vietnamese, so they released her. Neither my father nor Chi‰n was ever treated for their mental conditions.

The years in which my mother, Đại, and I worked at Tony's, when Chi‰n was left at home with my father, were dark years for Chi‰n. My father never picked on my brothers, focusing his rage on her. We got to see a glimpse of it one night when Chi‰n threatened to call the police on my father. When we came home, my father screamed, gritted his teeth, and punched his head. He told us that he had told her to do something, and she did not do it. Instead she cursed at him, so he beat her. How dare she threaten to call the police? Would she be satisfied if he was handcuffed? Did she want to ruin the family? He announced. After that, he backed off from beating her, but he would start an argument with her by insulting her. He called her a dirty ugly. I heard him say throughout her young adult life that even if he were desperate, he would not touch her. He stared her down, intimidated her by raising his fist to her face, and gritted his teeth at her. She lowered her head and shook it, especially when he said this in front of others. She had no friends, and she stopped driving because she drove the family station wagon into a tree when she picked us up from school. She said she heard voices that told her to drive the car into the tree trunk.

My mother saved Chi‰n the only way that she knew how. She tried to marry Chi‰n off. Men in Oklahoma City knew Chi‰n, so nobody ever asked her out. My mother asked people to introduce men who were from out-of-state. Mrs. Ba, whose daughter left the boat in Vietnam, knew a man named DÛng who had just moved to Oklahoma and was interested in Chi‰n. These young men came to America by themselves. They wanted to settle down with a wife and make enough money to sponsor

their parents and siblings to America. My mother spent money setting the table for DÛng and his friends. DÛng and his friends were more in love with my mother's hospitality and charm than with Chi‰n. He agreed to the engagement. My mother prepared tables for about 70 people for the engagement party and gave DÛng money. Before the wedding, DÛng left Chi‰n, and took the money. Chi‰n felt so guilty, and she blamed Mrs. Ba for introducing her to a thief. Chi‰n called Mrs. Ba and told her that she was the demon incarnate. She whispered Mrs. Ba's name saying she would kill her. When she saw Mrs. Ba, she called her the devil.

Then, our next door neighbor, Mr. ñÜ®c, introduced Hånh Phåm, a man from Houston, to Chi‰n. She could not wait to get away from my father, so married him on the rebound from DÛng. My mother warned Hånh about Chi‰n's mental condition, but he did not care. He wanted a wife and my mother made the offer so enticing for him. She paid for the wedding and promised him that whatever money the guests gave the couple, he got to keep. Vietnamese people are traditionally very generous in giving cash as wedding gifts. My mother wanted Chi‰n to stay in Oklahoma City, so that she could help her. She knew there was something wrong with Chi‰n. Hånh lied to my mother and told her that he had planned to live in Oklahoma City. The day after the wedding, he said he was taking Chi‰n to Houston. I wrote this scene in a play for a college course. It was unbelievable how awful it was. Hånh had been drinking with my father and my father's friend. My father's friend and Hånh got into a fight. They threatened to tear down the house. I ran across the street to get my mother from work. Hånh threatened to beat my father and his friend. He declared he was not going to live in Oklahoma City,

had never planned on it, and that if anyone tried to stop him, he would kill them. My father had met his match and was frightened.

Thus Chi‰n went from one crazy man's house to another. She married a version of my father. She lived in and out of shelters and apartments and was homeless with her children. Hånh beat Chi‰n and the children. Chi‰n would take the children to shelters and then return to Hånh. This went on for seven years. When they visited us, her children came with gum in their hair and without shoes. They were never properly dressed and were dirty and underfed. Chi‰n's teeth caused her much pain, but Hanh refused to pay for her to get treatment. So she came to us in pain, with her children who were out of control. I visited Chi‰n in her home at Houston when I was nineteen after I had completed one year of college. The bathroom walls were stained with feces, soiled diapers were left open, roaches crawled around the counters, food was uncovered, and the house smelled like old urine on carpet. I did not want to spend the night, but I stayed. Hånh drank with his friends all night while his children ran around the coffee table nibbling on food that they picked from the table. It was like I was back in my father's house.

Then in August 1992, when I was accepted by the Peace Corps to go to Botswana, my family received a phone call from Laurelwood Psychiatric Hospital. Hånh had broken a ceramic bowl on my sister's head, and she and the children had been taken to the hospital. Would my parents please come and pick them up so they would not return to Hånh? The social worker pleaded, but my parents and ñåi said absolutely not. I happened to be at my father's house from college for a weekend visit when I overheard my parents talking about Chi‰n and her children. I called Laurelwood and talked to

Chi‰n's doctor who said that she was diagnosed with schizophrenia. It was the first description of her condition that I could relate to having taken a couple of psychology courses in the undergraduate program.

I felt like something dark and awful had been unveiled. It explained the voices, the delusions, the hallucinations, the paralysis, and the inability to adjust to normal life. There was no such word in the Vietnamese language for her condition except kung which means crazy. I went to Laurelwood with my boyfriend, who later became my husband, to pick up her four children: Minh (7), Pauline (5), Augustine (3), and Christine (2). I knew schizophrenia in theory, but I did not know the extent of her illness. I was appalled after settling her family into a university apartment that she had plans to return to her husband with the children. I did not know that she had never matured into motherhood and that protecting her children and providing for them were not important to her. I became an instant Mom and an adversary to my sister. The Peace Corps was out of the question. Chi‰n, like so many abused women, like my mother, unconsciously and consciously chose their abusive husbands over their children. Chi‰n and her husband abandoned their four children, and because no one else would take them, I was left with the responsibility of raising them.

I had no money, no career, and no experience. I had my demonic father and my apathetic mother as models for proper parenting. Sometimes, I lost control and raged against Chi‰n's children, marking their bodies in my dark hours of fear and despair. My stolen childhood had fostered anger and resentment towards them. I hurt them, and I am so sorry. I am sorry that I was not able to change the patterns of violence soon enough. I am sorry that I did not heal in time to enjoy them when they were small. I am sorry that I

was not able to value their childhood. I am sorry that I played a part in hurting them and making them feel less valued as human beings. For all these things and more, I am sorry. Now they have to carry on with their own stories of sorrow in which I played a part. But as we have all grown, I have tried to reconcile with them with each passing day.

I experienced the Vietnam War—the horrors and pain—through my father and Chi‰n's insanity. I left for college, but the war never left me. A phone call from home or a weekend visit home would leave me to wonder why the hell I wasted my time with my family. My worldview was shattered by my father's violence and the destructive effect it had on all of us. For a long time, I wanted to check myself into a mental institution where I could break down, sleep deeply, and wake up a different person with different parents, different sisters, and different brothers. I hated being Vietnamese because it meant being in chaos, in crisis, and in anguish. I could not separate my family trauma from my Vietnamese identity. Enmeshed as one, I was ashamed of myself, my family, and my culture. I made a personal vow that I would never get involved with a Vietnamese man. Depressed and desperate, I searched for explanations about my life in the periphery, taking classes in psychology, literature, and history in order to piece together a picture of my family's tragedy. My junior year in college, I took a class called Vietnam in Literature. All the books were written by native-born Americans. With the exception of Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country*, all the books were written by male authors, veterans, and journalists writing mostly about American veterans and the battles that they fought. In 1987, no Vietnamese voice could be found in the university campuses. Around 1990, I read Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Placed: A Vietnamese Woman's Journey from War to Peace* about her experiences of

being raped by two Vietnamese comrades, her one-time prostitution, and her marriage to her American husband who saved her from the atrocities in Vietnam. I was stunned at the content of the book. I did not think that personal experiences of rape and prostitution could be revealed in literature. I was deeply moved by the memoir and related to the impoverished condition of losing the family's ancestral home and the brokenness of the new home in the city. However, Hayslip's journey differed from mine. As suggested by the title, America was a place of peace where Hayslip felt secure and safe to relive her Vietnamese past, whereas for me it was the starting point of my war. Hayslip's father killed himself because he could not tolerate the destruction of his home; my father inflicted his wounds on his family for reasons that were unknown to me. While Hayslip's memoir struck me as powerful, I identified more with Mason's about a family torn apart by a raging Vietnam veteran returning home. My journey began in America. My war was not fought in the battlefields but at home. For a long time I was not sure that I had a valid voice to speak about the war. I burned with shame and guilt that damaged my ability to confront my family's history. It was by knowing Mr. ThiŒt that I was able to overcome my insecurities about writing about my life. Mr. ThiŒt was the first Vietnamese man whom I knew who had written a manuscript of his life. In addition, he had written numerous poems and spoke to different groups of people about his prison experiences. He opened up to me as an adult which gave me a perspective into his hellish journey.

I could relate to the rage, anger, and destructive impulses that Mr. ThiŒt carried from the wounds of war. I knew a different sort of prison from him, but I could empathize with his agonies when it came to his relationships with his family. He inspired

me to return to the English Department at the University of Oklahoma, after I had left it, and write the stories of Vietnamese political prisoners. In the process of interviewing the former prisoners, it became apparent to me that the stories were incomplete without addressing what was happening to the families. Over and over again, I heard prisoners talk about what had happened to their wives and children before, during, and after their imprisonment. They claimed that had it not been for their wives they would have been dead. They talked painfully of how their children were deprived of a good education and job opportunities because of their relationship to their fathers. For the Vietnamese whose culture is marked by deep family ties, no current anthology in American literature commemorates and pays tribute to the South Vietnamese political prisoners and their families in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. The traumas suffered by Vietnamese women and children have not yet been included in the discourse of the Vietnam War. I requested permission to interview wives and children of the prisoners, and the permission was granted. I focused on one particular family because all the family members of that family living in America were willing to share their stories with me and with a larger audience.

The damages of the war continue to be felt and lived among the third generations of Vietnamese whose parents were born in Vietnam but who are themselves born and raised in America. I think about my family, particularly my sisters and I and our children, who continue to suffer from the war. My personal narrative is a testimony of how our lives, thirty years after we left our country, continue to be plagued by the past. I weave my story of trauma with those of the political prisoners because it was through Mr. ThiŒt that I was able to complete my own personal narrative. I found a way to relate my

past with his. It was easier for me to talk to people whose past trauma was completely different from mine because of the distance created by the differences. I could be more objective in how I presented the prisoners' experiences and less condemning of my family's. However different, we share a common ground: the Vietnam War and its aftermath changed our lives forever. The war left its marks on us, and we left them on our children. I hate war; I hate what it has done to us.

CHAPTER 3

KNOWING MR. THIỆT: KNOWING PRISONS

I had never known anyone who was imprisoned until I met Mr. Thiệt Nguyễn. I was thirty, and he was fifty-nine. "Thiệt" means truth or damage. It is a fictive name, one which I made up based on a former Vietnamese political prisoner whom I have known since Christmas of 1998. This composite protects the identity of the man, respecting his private life while enabling me to explore core struggles that he faced as a former prisoner. Although Mr. Thiệt is a fictive character, how I met him and how this dissertation project began are factual. The details of my own life are also factual.

Around Christmas of 1998, I was a manager for Lucent Technologies, a leading company in technology equipment and designs in telecommunication. My main job was to investigate cases of misconduct involving violations of Title 7 of the Civil Rights Act. I had come to Lucent after leaving the English Ph.D. program at the University of Oklahoma. I could not concentrate on my studies, and I needed to make money to support my sister's four children. In that year, Lucent's stocks doubled with each share valued at more than $100.00. Thousands of employees became millionaires through their long-term investments. All employees who worked in the office got pagers and their own phone line. Lucent's managers went to conferences and stayed at 4-star hotels. Each had his/her own credit card account. We ate full-course meals ending with rich desserts and cappuccinos. There seemed to be no limits to how much we could spend. I remember once ordering a $22 dollar dish of bull steak somewhere at some expensive restaurant. I ate heartily, but my heart was sick inside. I was suffering from a spiritual kind of

sickness, a hollowness from within. I was unpleasant and judgmental toward my colleagues. My peers were women from diverse backgrounds: African-American, Hispanic, Jewish, Chinese, White—all professional women, yet I could not connect with them. When I went back to my hotel, I felt lonely, burdened, and out of place. It was such a terrible dilemma to feel unsatisfied when signs of success were everywhere. I felt like a fake, a phony. Life was heavy, intense, and dark. I felt no happiness with the money that I was making though it enabled me to purchase a house and a new car. I could not shake the blues. The gap between "real time," that is the time in which you feel present at whatever is before you, and being crippled in time was a daily experience.

I bridged the gap of my discontent by reaching out to the Vietnamese employees at Lucent. Together we formed an Asian non-profit organization to support each other and people outside our workplace. We committed to serving the needs of less-advantaged Asians who had not climbed the ladder of corporate success. We raised money for our social cause, and the Company matched the money. As president of the organization, I could decide on which cause I wanted to donate the money to for Christmas. I chose Catholic Charities because they sponsored Vietnamese families who were still stranded in Thailand or Cambodia awaiting sponsorship. I remembered my family's own connection to Catholic Charities, who assisted us in getting St. Ann's Church to sponsor us.

In those days at Lucent I tried to lift myself out of this terrible cloud and be in the moment-to-moment of each day, but I retreated into a state of darkness. Some afternoons at work, I locked my office door and lay down under the desk covering my head with my coat. I was paralyzed with fear and loneliness when I met Mr. Thiệt. Mr. Thiệt worked

as a clerk in the Vienamese Refugee Resettlement Program, one of the programs of Catholic Charities. His supervisor, Andrew Greene, whom I contacted, introduced me to him. Mr. Thiệt's face was oval and slender as was the frame of his body. He stood about 5'4", weighing no more than 120 pounds. Nothing about his gentle manners or physique indicated that he had spent time in the brutal concentration camps in Vietnam. Meeting him for the first time, I thought he was one of the Vietnamese who settled in America at the same time my family did. Watching him interact with Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese and talking to him, I knew he was different from other Vietnamese men of my father's generation. I remember thinking that he was the only Vietnamese man of that age who was working in an office. My father and his friends worked in factories, restaurants, or opened their own shops because they did not know English. Mr. Thiệt read and spoke Vietnamese, French, and English fluently. I was stunned when I learned that he had been in America for only seven years.

Mr. Thiệt treated everyone who came to his office with respect and dignity regardless of their status as refugee or director. He sympathized with the struggle of newly arrived refugees and was compassionate to them by the way he talked to them and by the time he spent with them outside of work. He was very thorough in explaining to them what their benefits were and what they had to do in order to keep those benefits. He was very patient. Many Vietnamese who settled in Oklahoma City in 1975, like my family, kept their distance from the Vietnamese who arrived many years after 1975. Underneath this distance was fear and hatred for who we were and what we went through.

The first mass of Vietnamese who settled in Oklahoma City confronted agonies known to first-generation of immigrants. Changes in language, culture, food, and climate were some of the immediate problems that tried them. The Vietnamese differed from other immigrants because America had fought for them and lost. We heard about the 58,000 American soldiers who died in Vietnam. My sister told me that in Dixon when my father rode home from work on his bike, young men threw rocks at him and told him to go home. There were jokes about gooks. In the early 1980's, when I was in high school, a friend told me she heard a joke on the radio which was very hurtful to her. A disc jockey on one of the major Oklahoma City radio stations said, "What do you do with an extra large closet? You rent it out to a Vietnamese family." In the late 1980's, Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." was played repeatedly adding new fuel to the already bitter feelings about Vietnam. Growing up, I did not like telling people that I was Vietnamese, and I wished people would not ask.

The Vietnamese newcomers of 1975 in Oklahoma City desperately held onto their culture, their language, and their beliefs. As first-generation of immigrants, they resisted branching outside of their circle of acquaintances. After my parents left Dixon, they did not develop relationships with any non-Vietnamese person. My parents, like hundreds of Vietnamese who attended Our Lady's Cathedral, met on the weekends with other Vietnamese families. They resisted assimilation into the new society. My mother worked long hours at hard laborious jobs. Their leisure time was spent at church or at the homes of other Vietnamese. They stayed within their circle of friends and did not move past those boundaries. Relationships like these were strong and prominent in establishing Vietnamese social, religious, and economic institutions. The Vietnamese in Oklahoma

built a Vietnamese church, two Buddhist temples, businesses, a Vietnamese-American association, and a Vietnamese staff in the Refugee Resettlement Program which served mostly Vietnamese.

By the time Mr. Thiệt arrived in Oklahoma City in 1997, the Vietnamese had constructed shops, markets, and restaurants throughout the city. They had social and religious centers, and had begun to participate in the social and political fabric of their new society. Residents of Oklahoma City, Vietnamese and Non-Vietnamese, could point to the surrounding areas on Northwest 23rd and Classen as the Asian markets. The Vietnamese in Oklahoma City reinvigorated the landscape in ways that had never been done before, revamping entire sections of the city into viable businesses located within walking distance from their homes and church. Signs of their economic, social, religious, and cultural life were visible everywhere in the community. They had achieved remarkable success after twenty years. But something else was happening. But there was a price to pay for their successes. The older generation of Vietnamese did not pass down their language, culture, and stories to their children. My friends and I knew little about the world that our parents left behind.

That Christmas in 1998, I came to Catholic Charities to have lunch with Andrew, the supervisor who was to give us information on a Vietnamese family whom our Lucent group wished to sponsor. Because it was a couple of days before the Christmas break, the office was empty of workers except for Mr. Thiệt. He sat answering phone calls. I approached him and told him that I had heard he was a poet and wondered if he would entrust me to translate his poems into English. He immediately shook his head and raised his hand to tell me that he was not interested. I took the motion as a rebuke and backed

away. I did not ask anymore. There was a reverential and respectful way in which young Vietnamese women were expected to address men who were their father's age. Younger women call themselves daughter (con) or niece (cháu) and refer to older men as uncle (bác). These relationships do not go beyond the point of casual familiarity. I thought that I had violated this formality. I have never tried to get to know any of my father's friends, and I felt ill-equipped to relate to him. I was so surprised when Mr. Thiệt called me one day at Lucent and asked me if I still wanted to translate his poems. More than half a year after "the rebuke," Mr. Thiệt told me he had dreams of publishing his poems in English.

"You know I had written my entire life down about what happened to me in prison when I first came to America. It was still fresh in my mind. I was living in Boston at the time. But I burned it." He said over the phone.

"You burned it? You don't have it anymore? Why? What happened?"

"My son. I asked my son to send it off for me, but he was not interested. I got so mad, I threw it in the fireplace," he said reflectively.

Mr. Thiệt had burned the manuscript of his life. Records of his fifteen years in prison turned to ashes in front of his family. After being in America for only one year, he had constructed the past as part of his private and public record of his imprisonment.

"I remembered everything as if it were yesterday. Everything was in that book," he said mournfully.

I grieved with him in silence on the phone. I know the pain involved in writing about the past. Numerous times, I started on my family history only to quit because I did not have the strength to continue much less complete it. But he did. And then destroyed it.

"I wanted him to send it off, contact people who would be interested, and get on with something else, but my son was not interested. He did not want to do that," he said.

I wanted to move away from pain, and I thought changing the topic would. "I did not know you lived in Boston. When were you there?" I asked.

"In 1992. My sister lives there. I discovered that I had eye cancer after I got to America. I was living in California with my oldest daughter. We had no health insurance. My sister told me there was a Catholic hospital in Boston that would treat me for nothing. I know Mother Mary cured me of cancer. I don't have it anymore," he said in confidence.

I was so happy that Mr. Thiệt opened up to me. I told him I would be honored to translate his poems. I did not tell him that I hardly knew Vietnamese. I had only a second-grade knowledge of Vietnamese. I have not had any opportunity to learn Vietnamese. I did not want to let Mr. Thiệt down, so I vowed to learn as much as I could for the sake of translating his poems. I told him that I wanted to translate 25 of his poems to commemorate 25 years after the fall of Saigon. We projected that we would complete everything in the year 2000.

The translation of Mr. Thiệt's poems was the beginning of a friendship that I never thought was possible. Because I did not know Vietnamese well, I relied on him to explain to me what he meant. Word by word, line by line, poem by poem, I came to understand Mr. Thiệt's fifteen years in prison. His poems were extraordinarily vivid and spiritual. The physically torturous conditions were integrated into the fabric of Mr. Thiệt's spiritual journey. The poems mirrored his development from a man who was at

the height of power, though spiritually empty, to a man who was reduced to a prisoner but regained his spiritual life. It was a deep parable lived out in full.

"I met a priest in prison who taught me about God. He was exemplary. When his family sent him things, he would share the best portions with everyone. He gave his last piece of bread to others. I saw him praying. I asked him who are you praying to? He loaned me the Bible. I read it night after night. I asked him many many questions," Mr. Thiệt spoke solemnly.

"I thought you were born Catholic from your poems since you evoke Mother Mary so often," I said.

"No, I studied the Bible in prison. Before that, I honored my father and my mother. The priest who taught me the Bible later baptized me. Later when I got out, I told my wife and children about Jesus and Mary. They were all baptized," he said.

Mr. Thiệt confessed, "The more I studied, the more pain I felt for my wife and children. What I had done, how I failed them. I was so sorry for my actions," he said sadly. "I had enough money and connections to send my children abroad to study America, but didn't. I could have taken my wife or gone there myself before the collapse."

"It's suicide to think like that," I said.

Andrew told me that Mr. Thiệt had everything before the collapse of South Vietnam. I was stunned into silence because there was not trace of social elitism in him. Nothing in Mr. Thiệt's person indicated that cutting shrewdness, competitive instinct, and worldly ambition characteristic of high-ranking officials. It was a stretch to imagine this

frail, mild-mannered man arguing in front of a courtroom. It was shocking to know that at one point in his life he was not poor but affluent and socially powerful.

Mr. Thiệt laughed when he talked about what he used to be and what he had. When we went out to eat at a Phª Hòa Restaurant, he said, "Imagine, Ms. Thúy, I had everything before Saigon fell. Then, overnight I had nothing. Huh, can you imagine?" There was so much pain in his laughter. I wanted to leave. But instead I said something about myself.

"No, I cannot imagine having more than $5,000 in my hands," I said. It did not take away the bitterness in the conversation.

"It is nothing, the past. None of it matters now," he said softly. I have never known him to raise his voice or get mad. He has the temperament of Buddha: understanding, compassionate, and detached from worldly cares. His dark side is revealed mostly in his poetry.

Mr. Thiệt's poetry reveals a deep remorse at being entangled in sumptuous living.

"I hurt my wife deeply," he said.

"I am sure you did," I said. I bridged the world that was unknown to me with the familiar world of deception and pain. I was reminded of my father's younger self in that distant land of Vietnam where he had affairs with young women and fathered numerous unwanted children.

My father was not a millionaire like Mr. Thiệt, but he earned a good steady salary as a soldier of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Unlike Mr. Thiệt, who provided for his family, my father was irresponsible with money, and my mother had to work in the rice paddies and for her younger sister as a nanny to my cousins. It was such a terrible

shame, an issue that none of us discussed openly. In my home, discussions of the past were muted. The dust of the past swept in when my parents argued. Amidst their screams, I got glimpses into bygone days.

Piecing together the fragments of my parents' lives, I realized how much our personal lives were affected by the war. There was only one picture of our entire family taken in Vietnam, and even then my father was absent from the picture. My mother had her hair rolled up in the tradition of a northern peasant woman. She stood next to my oldest sister who was at that time about eighteen years old. Four other children stood in front of my mother. No one smiled in the picture. We stood before the flag of the Republic. Under our feet a sign read, "My family does not accept the Communist government." The photo identified us as pro- American and anti-Communist. I found the picture when I was looking through information about my family for a class assignment. It was stashed away with our birth records that my parents kept in a red-cloth bag. No one ever talked about it.

I developed a theory when I was young that Vietnamese, unlike non-Vietnamese, rarely spent anytime alone. A room of one's own which enabled a person to read, write, and be was a foreign experience to many Vietnamese. Even in America, the idea of reading in one's room and examining one's self through literary texts is a foreign experience to many Vietnamese.

But Mr. Thiệt was different. He had lived in a luxurious home and had a personal collection of rare books in Vietnam. Mr. Thiệt had read Dostoevski, Tolstoy, Pasternak, and Hugo along with Vietnam's great poets, novelists, and historians. He valued time alone more than any Vietnamese man I know. Mr. Thiệt said he needed to talk, to get

things off his chest so he could be healed. He was willing to share with me about the past, knowing that I was studying to get a second masters in Human Relations in order to become a counselor. I was more than ready to hear the story of a man who was my father's age.

"I want you to help me heal," he said laughingly but then got serious.

"I am very depressed, Ms. Thúy. Many many things I cannot handle. My job, my family, what I want to do," he said.

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to go back to Vietnam to live and to die. I want to do something for my poor people, and I have so little time left. I just want to go build a school and teach English," he said quickly. "What do you think?"

"Man proposes, God disposes," I said, thinking about his teenage daughter and his wife who depended on him.

"Why would you ever want to go back to a place which had unjustly imprisoned you and taken everything away from you?" I asked, quite confused about his desire.

"America is not my home. Vietnam is still home. The people, the land, it is so beautiful. I will never become a U.S. citizen. My son and I still have Vietnamese citizenship."

"What about your wife and daughter?"

"If I make arrangements for them, maybe they can stay with one of my older children," he said coolly.

"Does your wife know your intention?"

"Yes, she knows I want to go back."

“What does she say?”

“She’s quiet.”

“What about your daughter? Does she know you want to leave her?”

“She knows something.”

I was beginning to learn about the cracks in Mr. Thiệt’s world. I had the impression from meeting his wife and daughter that his family was close, united, and inseparable. America was the only stable home that his youngest daughter has ever known, and his wife and other children have accepted America as the best possible alternative. I could not believe that he would ever leave them. Mr. ThiŒt said he has no home in America. A foreigner in America and an enemy in Vietnam, he was restlessly trying to find a place of his own. He had been uprooted from his homeland.

“What are you planning to do there?” I asked.

“Teach English, build a school, read, write. It is so much easier to live there than here. You don’t have to worry about a place to live or food to eat. Not like here where you pay rent each month until you die. No. I have it set up with people I have kept in contact with all these years. There are at least three places I can go and live.”

“Is it safe with your status?”

“That I don’t know,” his voice wavered. Then he laughed, “You are right. Man proposes, God disposes. We will see.”

Mr. Thiệt wanted space and time to read and write. He was ready to retire. In an ideal world, a sixty-year-old man would be approaching the time in his life where leisure and a lighter workday went hand in hand. But in reality, he was at the green stage of

supporting a teenage daughter, Linh, and his wife. His youngest daughter was fifteen when I met her, a tall beautiful young girl who spoke Vietnamese better than I did.

What struck me about Linh was how I felt about her the first time I met her. I remember being so jealous of her. She had manners indicative of a well-brought-up Vietnamese daughter. I could tell meeting her for the first time that she came from a home where traditions and stories were passed down for generations. When Mr. Thiệt told her to greet me, she folded her hands, bowed, and said, "*Dả chào cô Thúy*." (hello Ms. Thúy). This greeting shows the utmost respect for the person being greeted. Her manner told much about her family. Vietnamese parents who care about passing down their tradition teach their toddlers how to fold their hands, bow their heads, and say "dả." You can tell immediately the family's value by the way a child greets the family's guests. I could not believe it when Linh greeted me in that manner. I never greeted my parents or any of their friends that way. None of my teenage children would think to greet me that way. I remember thinking that I wished I had Linh's upbringing; I wished Mr. Thiệt were my father.

I knew Mr. ThiŒt for about four months before I met Linh and her mother, Mrs. Thi. The family was victimized by the May 3rd tornado in 1999. Mr. Thiệt lived in Midwest City, and his house was struck by the tornado. He had no renter's insurance. A corporate grant from Lucent to tornado victims enabled me to offer Mr. ThiŒt money, which he gladly accepted.

"I got nothing for myself from the tornado," he said. "I barely make enough to survive. At the end of the day, I have nothing in savings."

This was the first time Mr. Thiệt revealed his vulnerable financial state to me. I was shocked by his forwardness and happy that he was honest with me. I have always wanted to know how he got by with one person working. His house in Midwest City was twenty miles from his workplace. His job at Catholic Charity paid him a little above the minimum wage. He paid insurance premiums for him and Mrs. Thi. After the tornado, I became very good friends with Mr. Thiệt. I entrusted Mr. Thiệt to distribute the rest of the money to needy families. Mr. Thiệt said there were people he knew who badly needed the money.

Mr. Thiệt brought bags of rice, boxes of fish sauce, and boxes of oranges to desperate families who lived in London Square, a HUD approved housing project. Mrs. Thi, Linh, Andrew Greene, Mrs. Nhãn (Mr. Thiệt's cowoker), Mr. Thiệt, and I went to the apartments to donate the goods. It was dark when we went. The gray rectangular two-story apartments looked drearier because of the rain. The water filled up the red dirt potholes that dipped into the uneven ground. The breezeway was cluttered with small rusted charcoal grills, old bikes, and pairs of worn-out shoes. Most Vietnamese leave their shoes outside their homes. None of the windows opened. No trees blocked the tall light poles that arched high over the gray landscape. A yellow plastic slide and a red tilted swing sat on a dirt slope that was fenced in. Small children climbed in and out of the playground.

"When I first came to Oklahoma City, I used to live here. This one," Mr. Thiệt pointed. We carried in the goods. The others had been there many times, but this was my first visit to what is known by many as the Vietnamese ghetto.

These residents pay from $5.00 and up based on their income. They have to prove to the government that they would be homeless were it not for this program. It usually takes up to a year or longer to get in.

We walked into apartments with leaks from the ceiling, peeled tiles, stained carpets, and smells that reeked from walls. One family had buckets and towels underneath where dirty water from the second floor dripped onto their kitchen floors.

An old Vietnamese widow greeted Mr. Thiệt with tears. She held onto his hands. He told Linh to "då" her. Linh bowed her head.

"It is so sad here, day in and day out, I just walk in these walls," the old lady said and cried. She wore a scarf wrapped around her head, a brown button-down shirt and black polyester pants. We did not sit; the old woman talked real fast. "I can't live by myself. It is so awful. I'm afraid," she said desperately as if fearing that we would leave in the middle of her talk. She did not look at the gifts. She continued to clasp Mr. Thiệt's hands as she talked to all of us about her fears. She begged us to come back and said we did not need to bring her anything. Linh went up to her and "då" her again. Linh referred to herself as "con" which means child. This is a deep form of respect and deference to an elder. It is something I have never thought to do. When I saw it done, I was filled with awe and insecurity. Mr. Thiệt looked at Linh proudly.

On our way to the next home, Mr. Thiệt told me that the old woman's husband had died not too long ago. Her son had sponsored her and her husband to America. The son and his wife live in a six figure home in some faraway suburb. The woman told Mr. Thiệt she wishes she could die but she cannot. She has a son and grandchildren in

Vietnam who want her to live with them, but her son here will not help her return to her native land.

In another unit lived a family of two deaf adults and their father. Their father spoke Vietnamese with a heavy Huế accent which I could not understand. The deaf women smiled at us. Later, Mr. Thiệt explained to me that the family want to return to Vietnam because the father had no means of caring for his deaf daughters here. Applying for disability for his daughters and getting them connected to a community of other deaf people were impossible tasks for a man who knew no English and had no relatives in America.

After seeing these broken homes, I dreaded going to the next apartment and the one after that. In the third apartment was a young Amerasian mother with two young children. She held the baby so we could sit on the one lawn chair. She walked around the living area carrying her baby while she talked. She said she was cut from welfare because Catholic Charities did not certify her eligibility. She told Mr. Thiệt that she did not know why Catholic Charities kept the money from her. He assured her that he would take care of it. Mr. Thiệt told me that it was unethical how Catholic Charities was running the program because the director did not allow people time to go to school or stay home with their young children. She wanted them to work immediately after their arrival, or else their benefits would be cut.

In the last apartment lived six adults and one child. That was the one that had buckets and towels on the floor to catch the dripping waters. They were getting ready for dinner and invited us to eat. Mr. Thiệt thanked them, but we quickly left because we were all bunched up in the doorway avoiding the drips and the cluttered furniture.

After our visit, Mr. Thiệt talked to Linh about the conditions of these families. His wife sat close to him and listened. "What a beautiful family," I thought. My family would never, as a family, visit others for almsgiving. After living in America for more than twenty years, we have hardened ourselves to the pain of other Vietnamese. We have never lived in these poor conditions because our American sponsors made sure we got a house with a front and back yard. It was only when we left Dixon, Illinois after one year that we lived in crowded quarters, at first with my aunt and her family, and then we moved into a duplex. Catholic Charities employed Vietnamese to help newly-arrived Vietnamese immigrants and Mr. Thiệt earned the trust of everyone he met.

Mr. ThiŒt reflected on his time at London Square. "It was filthy. When things break, they never come fix it. One time the toilet flooded our entire apartment. It took them days to come fix it. They never changed the carpet." Mr. Thiệt said. "I told my children not to come see me."

When I went home, I imagined Mr. Thiệt, his wife, and his children reading in their home in Vietnam. The change in their status did not make them bitter or hateful. Instead, they were compassionate and kind. They were teaching Linh to be just that. Linh not only had character training from her parents, but they also taught her to read and write Vietnamese. When I visited them at their home, Mr. Thiệt showed me her composition in Vietnamese. He told me she was writing an essay about Vietnam. When I had a hard time understanding one of Mr. Thiệt's poems because I could not visualize what he was describing, Linh drew a picture for me. We used the picture as a cover for Mr. Thiệt's manuscript. Linh and Mr. Thiệt wrote music to accompany one of Mr. Thiệt's poems. She sang this song at her father's reading of his manuscript which was

held at my house on February 19, 2000. In front of thirty guests, her parents, and one of her father's best friends, Linh and her father sang a song which he had written while he was in prison. What a moving day that was! I thought about the deep bonds between Mr. Thiệt and Linh that come from shared experiences of imprisonment and escape and wished that I had that connection with my own father. Linh had the support of her parents who modeled ethical and moral responsibility. With a strong father and a devoted stay-at-home mother to guide her, Linh had all the opportunities to excel in America. She also had an older brother and three older sisters to help her. She had the potential to complete college and have a professional career. This was Mr. Thiệt's dream for her.

"I wished my children could finish college. Without a college degree, they will never have a career. They will struggle all their lives," he said. "They will never know who they are," he said sorely. "I was not there to teach them. During my fifteen years in prison, they had no father. They became adults without me there to guide them. I don't want them to just make money. I want them to know skills and have careers. But it is not possible. They have to work using their hands and feet rather than their minds. It is a trap, an awful trap. We cannot get ahead in this society," Mr. Thiệt mourned. He was robbed of fifteen years with his children. Their education was fragmented and fractured.

Coming to America as teenagers, Mr. Thiệt's children missed opportunities to get a solid education in Vietnam as well as in the U.S. Their education was disrupted after the fall of Saigon. Their villa was confiscated. Her mother, sisters, and brother moved in with the mother's family. Mr. Thiệt's oldest daughter, HÒng, escaped Vietnam when she was eighteen years old. She settled in California and married her husband without any of

her family members being there. She single-handedly opened her own beauty salon and in 1991 sponsored her family to America. Mr. Thiệt's entire family lived in her home in California for a short time before moving to Boston. Her younger sister eventually worked for her and also opened her own shop. Mr. Thiệt's son became a computer technician having earned an associate degree. His other daughter in Florida quit school and worked for Walt Disney. None of his children were as well-educated as he was. Mr. Thiệt earned a law degree at the University of Saigon. He became an attorney and later an elected official before he was 30.

"You got Linh. I know she's going to make it," I said confidently. I said this with genuine belief that Linh was a straight arrow.

Mr. Thiệt and his wife pinned their hopes on Linh. Mrs. Thi was a quiet woman whose smile was pleasant and kind. She knew no English and did not drive. She had no friends except for a woman who worked in the office with Mr. Thiệt. Mr. Thiệt was determined not to let his wife work. She stayed at home taking care of Linh. She cooked and cleaned. When I came to visit, their home was warm and loving.

But one year after the February 2000 reading, something changed. When I came to visit Mr. Thiệt's family, Linh would not come out to greet me. She stayed in her room. Mr. Thiệt did not call her out though I asked about her. At times, though it was late in the evening time, she would not be home. I saw six pairs of high heeled shoes lined up along the entryway. Linh was entering the prime of puberty.

Mr. Thiệt met me on his break at work. "I got a letter from Vietnam. I just want to get on the plane and leave for good," he said desperately. "I am burning to get away."

"Wait until Linh goes to college and then go," I said assuredly.

“They are different here, children in America. They don’t need you as much like they do in Vietnam. What they want most of all is the freedom to do what they want. Then when they get it, they don’t need you,” Mr. Thiệt said sadly. Then he showed me pictures of people and places in Vietnam that awaited him. There was a picture of a cottage surrounded by huge trees.

“Do you know what these trees are? They are tamarind trees. I’ve been sending money to this couple so they could start a business. They have added acres to their businesses from the profits they made. I could start a school there. That’s in Central Vietnam,” he smiled. The thought of him sending money to Vietnam shocked me. He was barely making ends meet with a minimum-wage salary and having to support an entire household.

“My goodness, Mr. Thiệt, you should keep the money for yourself,” I exclaimed.

“No, it is okay. They do so much with so little there,” he said, then showed me another picture of a monk standing in front of a temple.

“And here is the beloved monk who runs an orphanage. He has been writing for me to come home to teach the children for years. I don’t know if I can wait any longer.”

I felt uneasy and sad. I have been on both ends of the spectrum. I know what it was like to have a father disappear for years, then show up. I also know what it was like to pick up the pieces where family members abandoned their responsibilities. When I met Mr. Thiệt in 1998, I had been raising my sister’s four children for six years. I had gone to court for custody of the children and won. Eventually, my sister went back to her husband and left her children. I became an instant mom to two boys and two girls when I was twenty-three years old. I knew about the desire to flee when I felt drowned by

familial duties. I know what it is like to want to live for yourself and not be bothered by the needs of others. I have always wanted a room of my own so I could write and sort things out, but that was luxury that would have to wait. I had time, but Mr. Thiệt felt he had no time left.

"You will regret leaving now while Linh is still so young. I know she will get a scholarship at a university. Just wait until then," I said.

Mr. Thiệt was quiet. Then he asked me, "Is there a curfew law in America as to how long a child can stay out? I'm asking for a friend of mine whose child has been sneaking out of the house."

"There is. The parent can call the police. I would ground the child, take privileges away," I said.

"What if he sneaks out again?"

"I would lock him out. Take the house keys away. You've got to set curfews. You can't let a child dominate the household. Get the police involved."

"Is there a law that says they have to be in a certain time? Will the police really come out for that?"

"Yes."

We talked in this coded language for months before Mr. Thiệt identified the child who was breaking curfews and sneaking out the window as Linh.

"This is worse than prison," he said. "In prison, I knew what I had to do to stay alive. I knew who my enemy was. Even in the worst days of torture when I carried buckets of feces and shit fell all over me, I survived it. When they set us out to cut down trees, we ate frogs or whatever we could find, I knew who I was and who the bad guys

were. I am lost here. I don't know what to do. She won't listen to threats. My wife will not allow me to lock her out. She gets the keys and gives them to her. I have no say so in my own home. She comes and goes whenever she wants."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"A military man she met working at McDonald's."

"You need to report him to his superior because he is dating a minor."

"No, my wife will not let me. The guy will come after us out of vengeance. I have heard stories where they come shoot the girl's families. My other children will not let me do that."

"Then the only thing to do is put her on the pill," I said.

"No, that would be unthinkable. My wife would not go for that. She will talk to her."

I volunteered to talk to Linh, but Mr. Thiệt could not accept the idea that his daughter was getting involved with a man before marriage.

"It happens to the best of families," I said trying to comfort him. He was pale and troubled. He started to smoke. I met him for lunch, and sometimes talked to him for hours in the evening. Every chance I got, I tried to get him to look at the reality of the situation, persuading him to talk to her about birth control. It was unbearable for him.

"I've met this guy. He's no good. No father. His father left when he was a child. His mother—who knows. He honks the car for my daughter to come out. At times he parks his car far away from the house. He drops her off and picks her up to who knows where. He knows I do not like him because Linh told him."

Mr. Thiệt was confronted with raising an American girl in a traditional Vietnamese home. The beautiful girl who bowed her head to me no longer bows to anyone except the desire to fulfill her passion. Mr. Thiệt took the rejection hard. He was determined to save her from herself. He could not accept that Linh was not going to obey him as he obeyed his father. His relationship with his father was profound. His father, a retired postmaster, had traveled to north Vietnam to visit Mr. Thiệt when he was in prison. Mr. Thiệt told me what his father said to him.

"My son, I will wait for you when you get out. I will not die until I see you free."

Mr. Thiệt's father stood outside the prison and hugged him the day he got out of prison and said, "Now I can die in peace."

Mr. Thiệt would not leave Vietnam while his father was still alive, though his father urged him to go. "There is nothing here for you, my son," he told Mr. ThiŒt.

When Mr. Thiệt's father died, Mr. Thiệt buried him with the full rites of a traditional Vietnamese burial.

"I hired men to carry my father's coffin. I placed a small glass of whiskey on top of the coffin. If one drop spilled, they would not get paid. My father's final passage in this world was without a tremor. Not one drop spilled; the glass stood just as I laid it." Mr. Thiệt said proudly.

Mr. Thiệt's mother died when he was a young man. His father never remarried, devoting his entire life to his children. Mr. Thiệt showed me his parents' pictures.

"Every night, I pray to them. These pictures sit over my bed," he said.

Mr. Thiệt's relationship with his father and mother exemplified loyalty, obedience, duty, respect, commitment, and love. His relationship towards his parents

was based on his original religion, which was the worshipping of ancestors. Linh's rebellion went against the core of that religion. I could not imagine a teenage Mr. Thiệt in defiance of his parents in search of his own identity. And yet this was what was happening to Linh. It happened at a time when Mr. Thiệt had come to view the positive aspects of his prison experience—that something good and holy had come out of it. He was looking forward to the idea that his poems could be published.

When the poems and their translations were bond together at the end of 1999, Mr. ThiŒt sent copies to his children.

Thumbing through the manuscript, Mr. Thiệt said proudly, "You cannot believe what it was like in prison. I saw so many things that you cannot believe. There were great and beautiful things that I saw about people, not just the ugly. Yes, it was awful. Some days you thought you would die from hunger. You could not carry one more load on your shoulder. But there were so many wonderful stories of people who were marvelous. My best friends today are men I met in prison. Some have died, but three are still living. We have kept in touch after all these years."

I sat quietly and listened.

"You know, not all the comrades in the camps were bad. There were some descent ones who helped us carry letters to our families. They slipped in food for us. The guards were different. When I went north, it was a different story."

"What was the difference?"

"Northern camps were run by professional guards, men trained to punish. We were sent to places that were once used as prisons. We worked all day and at night we

were locked up in cells. A cell as big as your bedroom held about 200 people in there. You can imagine the smell. The comrades were local boys hired to secure the area."

"Why were you in there so long? Fifteen years is a long time."

"I tried to escape. They also knew my history," he said. I had read what happened to prisoners who tried to escape. The guards kept them in dark cells chained up for days. This was not something Mr. Thiệt discussed with me. They locked Mr. Thiệt up along with all the elite South Vietnamese government officials. He told me that he was in Saigon City when President DÜÖng Van Minh announced a complete and total surrender. He was one of the loyal men who stayed behind believing that the Republic would stand and that America would never abandon Vietnam. It also seemed impossible to leave a powerful and privileged life consisting of marble tiles imported from Italy, a personal collection of rare books, two Peugeots, nannies, and chauffeurs. Mr. Thiệt believed that he lost the material world but gained his soul in prison.

"Prison was a spiritual gift to me," he said assuredly. "I realized how much I had wasted my life." This was an astounding statement coming from a man who was living in a modest two-bedroom home in Midwest City, 25 minutes away from his workplace where he was a clerk. He could discuss the past with some distance but he was not always consistent in his conciliatory attitude against his enemy. He shifted between peace and fury.

"Why could we not unite like the Zionists did and bring them to justice? Our people could never unite like the Jews after WWII," he said bitterly. "They slaughtered us in silence. I saw hundreds die in my fifteen years, not to mention the damage done to

the people. We did not know they were lying to us all that time. I wrote the truth in the confession which condemned me," he said.

Months after his discussions with me about Linh and her boyfriend, he became silent about her. We talked more about his prison experiences instead.

"Are you writing any of this down?" I asked.

"What time do I have to do this? I get up so early, drive to work. When I go home I have no energy. On the weekend, I work with my wife at the *Daily Oklahoman*. I am so tired by the end of the day," he answered curtly.

Writing was one of the avenues that made Mr. Thiệt feel that everything was not lost. He could shape the past into the present with an eye toward the future. It was the one thing he could control, but he had no peace of mind to do so. He wanted to leave his story behind for his children. But living got in the way. He was becoming more depressed and said nothing about Linh.

One day at work I got a call from him.

"I need to see you. When can I see you?" It was a voice of desperation. "Do you need a new sofa? I'm getting rid of everything in my house. I want you to have the sofa because you liked it so much."

The sofa was the only new piece of furniture that Mr. Thiệt had bought with his wife in America. I liked it because they picked a simple blue pattern and left the tag on it because they were so proud of their purchase.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I'm leaving Oklahoma City and moving in with my son," he said as if he had planned to move all along.

"Why are you doing that? You're going to leave Oklahoma?"

"Yes. There's nothing for me here."

I was appalled. "Doesn't your son have a family?"

"Yes, but he needs us to help with him with his children."

"You can't move in with them. What about your wife and Linh?"

"Linh is pregnant. She will live with her husband."

I wanted to cry, but I did not. It was just a matter of time. I begged him to consider other options.

“You do not want to be like King Lear. You have to have your own home. You've got to stay and work towards a future for you and Mrs. Thi."

"No. It is all settled. I've got a realtor. Will you take the sofa?"

I was losing one of my best friends to a terrible situation. The whole family was locked into a trap of their own making. They were all running from each other. Mr. ThiŒt gave up fighting for Linh, his wife, and himself. The only way he thought he could avoid losing a power struggle with his daughter was to leave her. He was raw from his fifteen years away from his children. He was in prison when Linh was born. He first knew her when she was seven. He felt guilty because he was not there for her in those critical seven years. Guilt is irrational; it makes no sense, but it is driven by our emotions. But emotions are powerful, and we act out of them! Mr. Thiệt was more susceptible than most because he was a deep thinking person. It affected him profoundly, and he reacted out of it.

Linh did not have a home until she was thirteen. Linh experienced prison and freedom at a very young age. Mr. Thiệt attempted to escape Vietnam with his family 17

times by boat and by land after he was released from the re-education camps and after his father had died. As a result of these escape attempts, the family was imprisoned three times, once at the Cambodian border and twice in Vietnam. Throughout her childhood, Linh was in and out of prisons with her parents. Now at the young age of seventeen, she had to make a home for herself without her parents.

Mr. Thiệt felt personally responsible for her bad choices. He could not get a perspective on his daughter's rebellion. He had no cultural reference to accept that he had no control over her. He wanted her to have a brighter future than anyone in his family, but it did not happen the way he wanted.

"You're going to regret this," I said when I picked up the sofa. "I'm saving this sofa for when you get back," I said angrily.

With Mr. Thiệt, I could express disappointment and frustration with him because he knew how much I loved him and cared for him.

Mr. Thiệt did not write his story. He and his wife lived with his son's family until it got unbearable. Then he and his wife moved in with his daughter in Florida. What was home to Mr. Thiệt? Since his release from prison, he had lived on the outskirts of home. If home was the outward expression of peace, comfort, happiness, and purpose, then Mr. Thiệt raged against home. Restlessness, exile, displacement, and discontent marked his retirement age.

Mr. Thiệt introduced me to other former prisoners and their families. I have come to know four families by knowing Mr. Thiệt. Vietnamese families characteristically pride themselves on their children’s accomplishments. Vietnamese parents often make enormous sacrifices so that their children will have better lives than they do. In three of

the four prisoners' families, adult children have not advanced beyond their parents' education or career. They are less educated than their parents, hence their social mobility in American society is hindered. Their knowledge of Vietnamese history and culture is hampered because of the discrimination practiced against them in Vietnam while their fathers were imprisoned. They are caught between two cultures, not able to claim either as their own. This legacy of the war continues to leave its mark on the second and third generation.

The fragmentation in the family is revealed by the desire of children to escape these homes at great costs to themselves. The children in all three families were so anxious to make a home for themselves; two young daughters married against the wishes of their fathers and bore their children without their fathers' blessings.

I was given a glimpse into the mind of Mr. Thiệt as he was trying to find a way to express what had become of him after the fall of Saigon. War and peace inhabit his daily existence. He has inspired me to study the lives of those who lived through the Communist concentration camps post-1975. In knowing Mr. Thiệt, I have come to know a segment of American society who lives on the outskirts of America's mainstream culture and the Vietnamese communities that were established by some of the first Vietnamese settlers in America. Like Mr. Thiệt, their voices are silenced by their very own suffering. Knowing Mr. Thiệt, I have come to know about prisons with walls and without. Knowing Mr. Thiệt, I have come to know the silence of his struggle. He was the one who gave me the title for this book, "In Silence I Struggle." Mr. Thiệt was haunted by his past and his truths. The past and the truth paralyzed him. He could never

reconcile his truth to the failure of the South Vietnamese to unite, America's betrayal, and the demands of America's capitalist society.

"It just continues, Ms. Thúy. They'll do to the Iraqis what they did to us. We are dispensable to them."

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE VIETNAMESE GULAGS

The Vietnamese gulags were manifestations of North Vietnam's vengeance and America's quiet abandonment of South Vietnamese. On April 11, 1975, a little more than two weeks before the fall of Saigon, Alexander Solzhenitsyn predicted with Communist victory that "all of Vietnam will be transformed into a concentration camp."[7] Other writers were sure that Saigon would be bathed in blood.[8] Both predications proved true. General Trần Van Tra held a press conference on May 12, 1975, at which he announced to an assembled group of foreign correspondents:

> The United States has taken many Vietnamese away from their home[s] by fabricating a 'mythical reason' that if liberation soldiers came to Saigon, they would carry out mass executions. If any of you has witnessed or heard about such executions, I want you to speak up now.[9]

General Trần Van Tra dared reporters to find evidence of mass graves and executions among the southern landscapes of Vietnam. His public statements suggested that he would not tolerate heinous acts of violence against South Vietnamese. According to the

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[7] Alexander Solzhenitsyn said this in a televised interview with Bernard Pivot during a broadcast of *Apostrophes* cited in Olivier Todd, *Cruel April: The Fall of Saigon*, trans. Stephen Becker (New York: Norton, 1990), 427.

[8] Cited in Jaqueline Desbarats and Karl D. Jackson, "Political Violence in Vietnam: The Dark Side of Liberation." *Indochina Report* 6 (April-June 1986): 20. Ken Kashiwahara from ABC talked about rumors of bloodbaths as the North Vietnamese troops moved South in Larry Engelmann, *Tears before the Rain: An Oral History of the Fall of South Vietnam*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990) 164, as did Reverend Peter Dinh Ngoc Father Que in his memoir, *Memoirs of a Priest in the Communist Reeducation Camp (1975-1988)*, trans. Trần Van Dien (Baldwin Park: privately printed, 2000), 72. Le Huu Tri also mentions such bloodshed in *Prisoner of the Word: A Memoir of the Vietnamese Reeducation Camps*, (Seattle: Black Heron Press, 2001), 13.

[9] Reported in the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) IV. 14 May 1975: 8. Cited in Desbarats, 7.

declaration, the Governor of Saigon's military would personally hold those committing such acts accountable.

General Trần Van Tra, a two-star general of the North Vietnamese army, had fought to defeat the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) for most of his adult life since 1959. [10] He coordinated the attack on Saigon in 1968, masterminded the proposal to attack Ban Mê Thu¶t by surprise, and commanded the attack on Saigon in 1975 which led to the complete defeat of South Vietnam. Tra's public statements at the May 1975 press conference were supported in Hanoi by broadcasts proclaiming the policy of nonviolent reconciliation with the South Vietnamese:

> The victorious Vietnamese nation is opening its arm[s] to welcome its stray children. In Saigon, the enemy's den, hundreds of thousands of officers, troops, and policemen and thousands of people who formerly served the puppet administration apparatus have responded to the revolution's call, handed over guns and rejoined the nation, and not all of these took part in the recent general offensive and uprisings. This is a victory of our nation's traditional unity and a brilliant success of the national concord policy which reflects the sentiments of love and loyalty and the noble ethics of our nation. The path has been wide open for our entire people to join efforts to rebuild the country, to heal the war wounds on our territory, and to restore the relationships and natural sentiments within each street, hamlet, and family. . . . All mistakes are forgiven and all suspicions eliminated. All of us are participating in the great joy of the nation over the complete liberation of the South.[11]

Addressing the South Vietnamese, the Hanoi government promised more than nonviolence. It guaranteed clemency, forgiveness, and equal integration of all Vietnamese into the newly reconciled society. The passage cited above suggests that all Vietnamese would be treated as equal citizens regardless of their prior political allegiance during the war. The tone was celebratory, uplifting, and positive. And the rhetoric

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[10] The Provisional Revolutionary Government was a product of the National Liberation Front (NLF). It presented itself as an independent party, but in reality it was guided by Hanoi. Todd, 17.

[11] Reported in the *Foreign Broadcast Information Service* (FBIS) IV. 23 May 1975: L3. Cited in Desbarats, 6.

trumpeted the end of the war as a victory for all Vietnamese: "All mistakes are forgiven and all suspicions eliminated" meant that one's past would have no negative impact on one's future. Indeed no mass graves were found immediately after Communist victory. However, when foreign correspondents left and the world was assured that no bloodbath had occurred, Hanoi carried out a strategy of systematically killing its enemies, South Vietnamese men and women.

A bloodbath did take place in South Vietnam after the Communist takeover, though not immediately. Hanoi managed to severely punish its enemies while simultaneously convincing an international audience that large-scale liquidation did not take place. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was admitted to the United Nations on September 29, 1977, at the same time it had incarcerated an estimated 2.5 million political prisoners.[12] Laws and edicts pronounced by the Vietnamese Communists, along with survivors' personal accounts, however, reveal that clemency toward and integration of South Vietnamese was but a rhetorical fabrication, a "mythical reality" used to gain international praise and respect. In reality, the Vietnamese Communists created a totalitarian state, one in which terror, coercion, violence, and vengeance.

Vietnam became a giant gulag of sorts with the following facts pointing to various types of oppression. One week after April 30, 1975, the Saigon-Gia Dinh Military Management Committee, headed by General Tra, issued the first order which required all

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[12] Stephen B. Young, "The Legality of Vietnamese Reeducation Camps," *Harvard International Law Journal* 20, no. 3 (Fall 1979): 527 and Douglas Pike, "Vietnam in 1977: More of the Same," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 1 (Jan., 1978): 72. Father Andre Gelinas left 15 months after the fall of Saigon, testified before the House that about 300,000 people were held in reeducation camps. House of Representatives, Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights in Vietnam*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 16, 21 June and 26 July, 1977, 37-39. Reports that prisoners did not have access to proper medical treatment was reported by Amnesty International mission to South Vietnam December 10-21, 1979. *Report 10-21 December 1979* (Amnesty International Publications, 1981), 14-15.

former soldiers, officers, policemen, or civil servants of the Republic of Vietnam to register with the new government.[13] One month later, the Committee announced its plans to "re-educate" persons who registered. The transcription of the announcement shows a shift in the clemency policy. The Committee announced the following on June 10, 1975:

> Now that the country has become completely independent and free and peaceful forever, this is the once-in-a-thousand-years opportunity for the soldiers, officers, policemen and personnel of the puppet administration who have, for one reason or another, more or less sinned against the compatriots, to struggle to reform themselves into genuine Vietnamese.
>
> With our nations' traditional clemency and humanitarianism and fully understanding President Ho's ethics and implementing the policies on the great unity and national concord promulgated by the revolutionary government to create conditions for soldiers, officers, policemen and personnel of the puppet administration to reform themselves and cleanse their wrongs in order to quickly become honest citizens loving the fatherland and peace, and to return to the nation, the Military Management Committee of Saigon-Gia Dinh city makes this appeal:
>
> Soldiers, officers, policemen and personnel of the puppet administration should be aware fully of the clemency policy and humanitarians of the revolution and should strive to study and reform themselves so as to become quickly genuine Vietnamese citizens. . . . Those who make quick progress will be considered by the revolutionary government for exoneration of their sins and restoration of their rights as citizens.[14]

Adults linked with the former government were condemned as sinners in need of exculpation. Peoples' pasts mattered. Not yet "genuine Vietnamese citizens," South Vietnamese in the clemency program could become "honest citizens" if they "str[o]ve to study and reform themselves." The ideas expressed in these standards are ambiguous and deceptively open-ended. Concepts of sins, cleansing, genuine Vietnamese, and exoneration are indicative of arbitrary and subjective judgments not based on any specific deeds or actions. Punishing people without clearly identifying their crimes was the goal of the reeducation program. No specific laws were cited; no specific crimes were

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[13] Young, 519.

[14] FBIS II, 10 June 1975: LI cited in Young, 520-21.

charged; no trials were set. Vietnam's laws and edicts post-1975 showed that the political and social agendas of the new state were to dispose of former enemies and to annihilate South Vietnamese culture, community, families, and economy. The laws dictated by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) violated the individual human rights of the South Vietnamese. They discriminated against, punished, and eliminated South Vietnamese people who were affiliated with the former Republic of Vietnam. The decree of June 10, 1975 was one of the first edicts issued by the new government that set into motion a different social order for the "puppet administration." This social order consisted of a purging of an entire class of society. It enabled an arbitrary method of determining the fate of millions detained in camps and prisons; it empowered common guards and chiefs to wield control over prisoners; it charged people with crimes against the state or "counterrevolutionary crimes" without specific individual charges, and hence held no trials; it executed without cause. As with other totalitarian regimes, what ultimately followed was the elimination of former foes. A law enacted by the new regime one year later, after detention of its former enemies, was more definite about the fate of those who were detained by the government.

On May 25, 1976, the Provisional Revolutionary Government announced policy statement No. 02/CS/76, which categorized three groups among the former personnel of the South Vietnamese government:

(a) "those who have rendered services to the revolution."

(b) "those who have behaved well during the political course."

(c) "those who must continue their 'reeducation' course or who must be brought to trial."[15]

Soldiers, non-commissioned officers, officers of all the armed forces, and former civil administration who fit in categories (b) and (c) by this law were forced to serve for three years. Most of those who fit in category (c) were top-level officials and officers. Amnesty International identified four types of detention camps: 1) camps that processed individuals; 2) camps that held criminals and political prisoners (detainees were asked to write accounts of their background for the sake of identification); 3) camps that held prisoners based on their past offenses; and 4) camps that held former officers and members of the intelligence services (they were judged as "á*c ôn*" or wicked), which were located mostly north of Hanoi.[16]

Three years after the surrender of South Vietnam, the world became aware of the so-called reeducation program. Reports published by The Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division, Congressional Research Service, House Committee on International Relations, 95th Congress, 2nd Session on Human Rights Conditions in Selected Countries, and the U.S. Response 312 of 1978, Amnesty International, the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, and *The New York Times* noted that detainees were held longer than the ten days or three months that was originally promised. They noted that the reeducation camps were hard labor work camps.[17] Three years after the surrender of South Vietnam,

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[15] Amnesty International, *Report of an Amnesty International Mission to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam 10-21 December 1979* (Amnesty International Publications, 1981), 2.

[16] Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Annual Report* (1978), 196.

[17] Young, 522. *Amnesty International, Report of an Amnesty International Mission to the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 10-21 December 1979*, (Amnesty International Publication, 1981), 2.

hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese were participating in the reeducation program.[18] The promise of clemency and restored citizenship through reeducation programs proved to be a ploy to get men and women to self-identify for the sake of placing them in different detention camps. In this configuration, the new regime created a mass of political prisoners—people incarcerated not for their crimes, but for what they believed.[19] High-ranking officials, professionals, and intellectuals were sent to harsher camps in the north and their time in the camps were much longer than three years.[20] On February 3, 1977, Vô Vang Sung, the Vietnamese ambassador to France stated that there were some 50,000 detainees being held.[21] Prime Minister Phåm Van ñông on September 1, 1978 declared that his government was holding

> only those who had held high positions of power in the war machinery of the old regime and had committed grave crimes, so that they could be transformed into Vietnamese having a homeland, loving their compatriots and useful to themselves, to their families and to society. In this process of reeducation, those who made progress were in turn set free and their citizenship gradually restored. The majority of them have proved worthy of the government's lenient policy. . . . At present we are holding only a very small number of people who committed intolerable crimes in the past for further careful consideration.[22]

The government admitted to a penal system. Leniency was the policy and few were those held, according to Phåm Van ñông. ñôngnformed Amnesty International on December 1979 that 26,000 people remained in detention and that 14,000 had been released since

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[18] Young, 522.

[19] Amnesty International defines a political prisoner as anyone who is incarcerated for what he/she believes rather than for his/her crime. At least 30,000 Vietnamese people were considered political prisoners by Amnesty International in 1978. Cited in Douglas Pike, "Vietnam in 1977: More of the Same," *Asian Survey* 18, no. 1 (Jan., 1978): 72.

[20] Young, 525.

[21] Young, 522.

[22] Quoted in Young, 523.

1975.[23] History disproved both of ñông's claims: the numbers killed and the conditions of the camps attested to totalitarianism , coercion, torture, deprivation, and brutality.

A conservatively estimated 65,000 Vietnamese were killed between 1975 and 1982.[24] The suggestively benign program of *h†c tÆp* (education) or *cäi tåo* (reeducation) had incarcerated about 2.5 million Vietnamese in the two and a half years after Communist victory.[25] Of the 2.5 million detainees, an estimated 300,000 were detained in the camps for three to five years[26] or more. More than 150 reeducation camps and subcamps were created for the purpose of incarceration.[27] The promise of releasing prisoners after three years did not materialize. The government invoked a different law to justify the ongoing retention of prisoners past their three years. This was Resolution 49-NQ/TVQH of the National Assembly of 1961.[28] Resolution 49 made legal the indefinite imprisonment of Vietnamese without provisions for court hearings. Under this resolution, anyone who belonged to "obstinate counter-revolutionary elements who threaten public security" (category a) and "all professional scoundrels" (category b) were subject to an indeterminate term in the reeducation camps.[29] The capricious nature of the laws eroded the possibility of building a "consolidating community." Moreover, it

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[23] Amnesty International, *Report 10-21 December 1979*, 3.

[24] Desbarats, 22.

[25] Pike, 72.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ginetta Sagan and Stephen Denney, *Violations of Human Rights in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam: April 30, 1975 – April 30, 1983* (n.p.: Aurora Foundation, 1983), 21.

[28] Amnesty International, *Report 10-21 December 1979*, 4.

[29] Ibid.

violated basic human rights to justice and a fair trial; it rendered absolute power to those in charge. Laws were put into place or invoked after the fact of arrests and detainment. As a result, thousands of people were detained longer than five years. The Vietnamese government reported that there were still 128,975 political prisoners detained in 1990, fifteen years after Communist victory.[30] The Communist Party released the last four prisoners in 1992.[31]

The machinery of the totalitarian government penetrated fundamental aspects of religious, educational, political, and socio-economic life. Anyone could be detained indefinitely for whatever people in authority considered offensive or obstructionist to the new order. The apparatus of the totalitarian regime uprooted families and communities and exceeded the goal of eliminating those whom the government deemed as wicked or those who had held high offices. The reeducation program had a negative impact on virtually every South Vietnamese in post-1975 reconstruction.

The redistribution of the work force relocated families to uninhabitable areas under the New Economic Zone (NEZ) plan. NEZ, established as punitive communes, relocated 1.3 million people in the first two and half years after Communist victory.[32] Vietnamese who attempted to flee the country were arrested and detained.[33] From the

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[30] Arthur Matson, "Culture, Coping, and Meaning in the Reeducation Camp Experience" (Ph.D. diss., Antioch University, 2001), 8.

[31] Peter Ngoc Father Que Dinh, Reverend, *Memoirs of a Priest in the Communist Reeducation Camp (1975-1988),* trans. Trần Van Dien (n.p.: privately printed, 2000) 31.

[32] Pike, 71.

[33] Amnesty International, *Report 10-21 December 1979*, 2.

spring of 1978 to 1982, 600,000 Vietnamese fled by boat or by land. The exodus of Vietnamese out of their country, unprecedented in history, attested to the oppressive policies implemented by the Communists. Out of this number, more than one third were ethnic Chinese whose businesses and properties were confiscated.[34] Religious persecution took the form of arrests of religious leaders. Fifty to fifty-five Protestant pastors were held in reeducation camps; two hundred to three hundred Catholic priests and six bishops were jailed; nineteen Buddhist clergymen were sent to prison; three known Buddhist leaders were arrested.[35] Desecration of Buddhist temples, closing down of churches, religious schools and institutions run by the churches, restrictions on religious ceremonies, the prohibition of training of priests, and the requirement of government approval for religious activity such as the ordination of priests and bishops were ways that Communists forced people to put nationalistic ideas ahead of their religious beliefs.[36] Buddhist monks and nuns were forbidden from holding retreats, fasting, or accepting new members to their orders. They were ordered to participate in government-planned activities.[37] Father Andre Gelinas, a Canadian Jesuit Priest, a professor of Chinese history at the University of Saigon since 1957, testified before the House of Representatives Committee on International Relations, the 95th Congress, on June 16, 1977 that 12 Buddhist nuns self-immolated by fire to protest religious

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[34] Sagan, 3.

[35] Quang Do, Huyen Quang, and Tuyen An were the Buddhist leaders arrested on April 6, 1977. Sagan, 13. Gelinas, House of Representative, Committee on International Relations, *Human Rights in Vietnam*, 95th Cong., 1st sess., 16, 21 June and 26 July, 1977, 37-39.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid.

persecution. Arrests were made of anyone who opposed the government.[38] Before the Communist victory, South Vietnam published 27 daily newspapers and 200 scholarly journals. After that victory, all publications were suppressed. Magazines, books, records, and cassette tapes were confiscated and burned in the streets in huge bonfires. The government controlled sources of information through publication, television, and radio.[39]

America did not intervene on behalf of the political prisoners and their families until July 1988, although reports of human rights violations against South Vietnamese former allies were made public shortly after the implementation of the reeducation camps. An agreement between the United States and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) allowed South Vietnamese political prisoners and their families to migrate to the United States under the Orderly Departure Program (ODP).[40] The latest figures show that 35,795 former political prisoners and 129,807 family members of former South Vietnamese political prisoners now live in America.[41] Their assimilation in American society is relatively recent, making them the newest political exiles from Vietnam.

The compiled facts expose the lies beneath the Vietnamese Communist Party propaganda. They convey a world where the iron fist of arbitrary laws transformed a country into a society of concentration camps. Vietnam was sharply divided between victors and vanquished without an integrated consolidating community. The annals of

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[38] Amnesty International, *Report 10-21 December 1979*, 2.

[39] 95th Congress, Gelinas, 8.

[40] Peter Bui-Xuân-LÜÖng, "South Vietnamese Officer Prisoners of War: Their Resilience and Acculturation Experiences in Prison and in the U.S." (Ph.D. diss., The Fielding Institute, 2000), 57.

[41] Ibid.

Vietnamese history after 1975 recorded a world "in which need is everywhere present, in which scarcity is the rule of existence, and in which all of the possible agencies of satisfaction are lacking or absent or exist under imminent threat of death."[42]

[42] Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1987), 11.

CHAPTER 5

MR. SỨ AND HIS BAND OF BROTHERS

Unlike Mr. Thiệt who silently struggles to contain his past, Mr. Sứ Nguyễn openly and publicly claims his past. Mr. Sứ is not silent about his struggles. He makes known to the public—Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese—who he is. A former political prisoner of the Army of Republic of Vietnam, he is now an American citizen. His prison experiences make him more determined to rectify the injustices of the past. Vietnam, his homeland, is his past. He will not return to Vietnam unless the Communist system becomes more humane or collapses. He hopes for that day, but in the meanwhile he works to disrupt, dismantle, and discredit the Communist government from where he now lives. At the Họp Ký Restaurant, which he owns, Mr. Sứ mixes social activism with roast duck and pork rolls. Họp Ký is more than a restaurant; it is also a social center. A band of brothers meets there almost daily. His brothers are men who fought for South Vietnam, lost, and were imprisoned. On any given day when the restaurant opens, or on Tuesdays when it is closed, you can walk into Họp Ký and find a group of Vietnamese former political prisoners and their sympathizers talking, sharing a cup of coffee, or just hanging out. A Vietnamese radio station carrying Vietnamese news or talk shows blares in the back. A stack of the Oklahoma Việt Báo Newspaper, a local Vietnamese newspaper, sits on the shelf for anyone's taking. The flag of the former Republic of Vietnam hangs just outside the restaurant. Vietnamese have gathered in front of Họp Ký in years past to commemorate April 30, South Vietnamese National Day of Mourning. Holding hand-size Republican flags, they listened to speakers talk about what it was like to leave their homeland and start again.

As President of the Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners' Association, Mr. Sứ is busy making plans for upcoming activities. His concern for former political prisoners has broadened to include other human rights issues. Events that he helps plan include Vietnamese New Year, the National Day of Mourning-April 30, Honoring Ancestors Day, and Veterans Day. Mr. Sứ writes articles for the Việt Báo, annual bulletins, letters, and petitions. He does not hide how he feels about the Vietnamese Communists. "Old," "bitter," and "wicked" were the words he used to describe them to me.

For him, the Vietnam War was a struggle between freedom and oppression. South Vietnamese wanted freedom, and the Communists wanted power to oppress them. . But the fight is not over for Mr. Sứ. He fights a different kind of war against the Communists. "Former prisoners do not have ammunition or arms to fight against Communism. We have to find other means to fight against oppression," Mr. Sứ told me. He applies the weapons of a free press, due process, voting, and petitioning to bring about changes in the oppressive conditions in Vietnam. Included in his social and political activism are local, national, and international causes.

When one speaks of Họp Ký, one speaks of Mr. Sứ. Họp Ký is synonymous with Mr. Sứ. The place draws people out of their private homes and into a public forum. The Họp Ký Restaurant has been featured in the Daily Oklahoman and National Geographic, as well as in various Vietnamese newspapers across the U.S. Known throughout the metropolitan Oklahoma City and in surrounding states, Họp Ký is a place where Mr. Sứ's personal, political, and social lives intersect. Patrons who frequent Họp Ký knows that they are not just buying roast duck; they are supporting and participating in Mr. Sứ's

struggle for justice and freedom. While growing up, I have often heard my father say, "The Communists would kill him [Mr. Sứ] if he ever sets foot in Vietnam."

Before the arrival of political prisoners to Oklahoma City in 1992, there was not a place where Vietnamese people rallied to protest against the conditions that their brothers and sisters had to endure in the homeland. The Vietnamese in Oklahoma did not seem as united as they are now, according to Mr. Sứ. With the establishment of the Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners Association, the Vietnamese in Oklahoma City had focused political agenda: to fight for human rights and freedom for all Vietnamese. It was Mr. Sứ who helped shape this agenda. His years in the Vietnamese reeducation camps, his office as chairman of the Prisoners' Association, and his restaurant have given him status and credibility as a leader in the eyes of many Vietnamese in Oklahoma City. Most recently, Mr. Sứ gathered thousands of signatures asking Governor Brad Henry to pardon Mr. Hùng Lệ, a Vietnamese man convicted of the murder of another Vietnamese man.

My mother told me, "If you want to go to the rally at the state capitol to save Mr. Hùng LŒ from execution, be at Họp Ký by 10:00. People are meeting there and riding together to the Capitol." Indeed, Họp Ký means "place of gathering."

Họp Ký is a landmark where the private, public, social, and political dimensions merge. Though the South Vietnamese flag is no longer recognized by the world, it lives in the hearts and minds of those owners of this all-Vietnamese strip mall where Mr. Sứ's restaurant sits in the middle. The mall was one of the first all-Vietnamese clusters of shops carved out of what used to be empty spaces left by unsuccessful businesses.

Mr. Sứ agreed to meet with me for an interview at Họp Ký Restaurant rather than at his home. I was disappointed at first because I wanted to have a private meeting without any interruptions. Even though the restaurant was closed on Tuesday, I knew Mr. SÙ does not lock the door and people can still come in. We met on Tuesday July 30, 2001. The meeting began with just the two of us, but this format would not last long. Soon, Mr. Sứ's brothers arrived. Mr. Sứ called his friends, *anh em*, which means "brothers."

Mr. Sứ's band of brothers consisted of five men that summer afternoon. Present were Mr. Lê Thiệp, President of the Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners in Washington, D.C., Mr. Lệ Thu, Mr. Nguyễn Giao, and Mr. Nguyễn Long. I had expected that when a restaurant posted a CLOSED sign no one would come in, or that if they did, Mr. Sứ would turn them away. That was not so. Men came in, sat, drank coffee, smoked, and joined in the discussions.

"My brothers and I meet here regularly for coffee. I told them a little about your project," he said casually.

I was not prepared to talk to a group of men, therefore I did not bring copies of the introduction letter, the questions to guide the interview, or the consent form for five people. I had expected to only speak with Mr. Sứ. Mr. Sứ read the interview paperwork while the men stared at me. I saw Quick Print Copy shop across the restaurant and dashed out to make copies, glad to get away from feeling insecure and ill-prepared. I left the tape recorder on because I did not want to miss anything important. I later heard comments made my inept Vietnamese writing skills. Mr. Sứ reminded his brothers that I was only eight years old when I came to America, and that I had a desire to learn more

about the reeducation camps. When I returned with the additional forms, all the men had read Mr. Sứ's copy.

Thoughts raced through my head about my awkward situation: Why did Mr. Sứ not meet me at his home for a one-on-one interview? Why didn't he inform me there would be others? How do I talk to these men? There is a protocol in Vietnamese culture regarding how a younger person should address older men and women, especially one's parents' age. My rapport with Mr. Thiệt was unique, but even then I had to overcome many obstacles before we came to an understanding. Mr. Thiệt had called Mr. SÙ on my behalf to ask for an interview. Mr. Sứ told him that I could have come to him directly because he has known my parents for years. My parents were long-standing church members of Our Lady's Cathedral Church where Mr. Sứ and his family attend. Vietnamese protocol calls for a relationship with the parents to precede that of their children.

I felt particularly inadequate speaking to a group of Vietnamese who were my parents' age because of my deficiency in Vietnamese. It took days for me to write the form and the letter, and I did it with much editing help from friends. I reminded myself that I could replay the recorded interview over and over until I understood what was being said. The tape recorder became a security blanket. The men read the forms carefully and questioned the usage of words and meanings.

"These two words that you used in your questions when you state, '*tự do*' [freed, free, or freedom], are not accurate. We were not freed from prison. I think the words you need to use is 'was released' which accurately describes what we went through. We were released from prison, not freed. You need to clarify that statement or else people

will misunderstand our condition," Mr. Th¿, one of Mr. SÙ's brothers, said directly to me.

"We lost our citizenship," Mr. Th¿ continued. "Don't think for one minute that we were freed after we left prison," Mr. Th¿ reemphasized. He blasted the words "*tự do*." The misrepresentation of being freed opened Pandora's Box. It became the heart of the discussion.

"The Communists are very clever about their wordings. The prisoner's release certificate reads, 'Release to the responsibility of the family under house arrest by the local government.' House arrest means that the prisoner has lost all his rights. He has to present himself to the local officials who control his life. For a minimum of two years after his release, he has to get permission from the officials everywhere he goes and for whatever he does," Mr. Long, another brother, explained in Vietnamese and English.

Long bridged my ignorance and the prisoners' discourse with helpful pronouncements. In his forties, Long was the youngest man there. In fact, he said he knew my family and hence knew me.

"Communism governs by suspicion," he said. "Two years after prisoners are released, they have to get permission to travel back and forth. They cannot travel with ease. If they are even suspected of subversive activity, they are in trouble. An official could ask, 'Why did you leave the premises without informing us? Are you meeting to protest against us?' That person is in deep trouble. The Communists will make life a living hell for him. Once they consider you an opponent, you are forever branded a sinner. A committee is set up to examine whether or not you have been good according

to their standards. If you do not abide by their rules, you have no rights as a citizen," Mr. Long emphasized.

The others followed Mr. Long's argument.

"That was how they controlled us, by stripping us of our rights," Mr. Thiệp said. He was from Washington D.C., where he was president of the Prisoners' Association. He was in town for his niece's wedding.

"Without citizenship, we could not vote or participate in social or political activities." Mr. Kiệm said. He had been quiet up to now.

"The only jobs we had were the ones we created because no one hired us," Mr. Thiệp said. Their voices merged in unison. Two or three spoke at once. They spoke with conviction and without hesitation, almost forgetting that I was there until they remembered what had started the whole conversation, the misuse of the word "freed."

Mr. Thiệp's voice softened as he said, "I understand your circumstance because you came here when you were eight years old; you do not know Vietnamese well. I suggest that you change the word "freed" to 'released'," he said smiling.

"I will, and I am sorry," I said. I felt more comfortable because my limitation of the Vietnamese language had become a point for clarification about being released and being freed. A distinction was being made about the past and the present, Vietnam and America. Everyone was conscious of the difference between being freed from prison and being released from prison. I felt comfortable just to be silent, to let the dust from the past settle in. I did not want to spoil it with my own words. Mr. Sứ broke the silence.

"After my release in 1981, living with my family was but a temporary condition until I proved to the Communists that I could follow their criteria. If at anytime I violated

any of their laws, I could be sent to the New Economic Zone. Each week I had to meet with the local official who examined me. I had to keep a file which list all my activities down to the hour and minute."

"The whole day had to be accounted for," Long interjected.

"This very day, for instance, Mr. SÙ resumed, "on this day of July 30, 2001 at 10:00 a.m., who was I with? What did I talk about? How long? And for what purpose? I had to answer all these questions to officials who verified my activities. If they agreed, they stamped their approval. If not, they tell you to rewrite your file saying, 'Mr. Sứ, include this activity because I saw you there that day.' It went on like that for 52 weeks. They made life miserable! I wrote an entire book about where I was and what I was doing day in and day out. After one year, I stood in front of a committee to make a case for why I should get citizenship. I had my book with me so that I could highlight my activities. Forty to fifty other men made a case for citizenship. I got my citizenship status, then I had to work to get my residential status," Mr. Sứ said.

The room fell quiet. A man came in wanting to buy a roast duck. Mr. Sứ said he was not open and the man went away.

"What is a residential status?" I asked. I knew that prisoners lost their citizenship, but I knew nothing about residential status.

"It is a family report card," Long answered right away. "Every family even today has to have a report card. It informs the officials about the inhabitants of the home. If they search a home, they match the report card with the people in the home. If there's an extra person not accounted for, the family has to explain why. You cannot have people spend the night at your home anytime you want without getting prior authorization."

"Without the report card, I could not work or buy goods like sugar or a train ticket to travel. So much depends on this report card. I still have my copy that I brought from Vietnam. You can have a copy of it for your dissertation. It is representative of that society. I had to carry at least three documents with me at all times: my certificate of release from prison, my citizenship paper, and my report card," Mr. Sứ said. The others were surprised that he kept these papers after all these years.

"The Communists told my wife that if she went to the New Economic Zone, I would be returned sooner. She left her home, took the children with her, and went to an uninhabitable place hoping for my return. They did not need to come at you with guns and bullets to force you to move. They used the love of a wife for her husband to rob people of their homes. What wife would not want her husband home?" Mr. Thiệt exclaimed. He was a handsome man with healthy brown skin which glows. A quick image of his wife and he eating together at a wedding flashed through my mind.

"The New Economic Zone sounds as glorious as rainbows," Mr. Long said sarcastically. "You need to be very clear to the Americans about the reality of the zones, or else they would say, 'They brought you to a new region so you could start your new life. What more do you want?'" Mr. Long retorted. His sarcasm drew derisive laughter. He continued, "The Zone was far away from the city. Its purpose was to confiscate homes, businesses, and properties. When they see a beautiful home belonging to a former South officer, they drove them out of their homes. The owners have no recourse to claim their homes."

"They did not want us in the city, so they forced us to uninhabitable places so that we would have to create a whole new way to survive! At such places, how could our

children attend schools?" Mr. Thiệp said. I was sure he was still thinking of his wife and children and their journey to a forsaken zone awaiting his return.

"The only reason I got to work in Saigon was because my parents knew these builders who gave me a job. I worked for them building houses in Saigon but could not live there myself, though it was my hometown," Mr. Sứ said bitterly, then added, "My family and I could be sent to the New Economic Zone at anytime for any reason."

I scribbled in my notebook, "New Economic Zone: Reeducation Camps for Women and Children: Exile, Displacement, and Punishment." "A Family Broken." "The Vietnamese Family." The Vietnamese are all about family. I thought of Mr. Thiệt. I thought about my family. It has always been about families. "Family Matters" could be used as a book title to talk about these men and their experiences.

"Our children were not accepted to specialized schools because their fathers were former prisoners. There were separated into a different point system. They required higher points for our children to get into specialized schools," Mr. Kiệm, who had been mostly quiet up to now, interjected.

"They got special discounts if you will," Mr. Long said sarcastically. Laughter followed, and he continued, "They posted this in all the different colleges. If 85 points were the score for college entrance for cadres' children, then it was 90 points for prisoners' children."

"The English word for it is discrimination," Mr. Kiệm said. "The Communist system ranks us as the 14th among the 14 categories of very important people in society. Numbers 1, 2, 3 are reserved for high-ranking Communist officials. We were on the

bottom of their list. So our children were disqualified from schools where they could prepare to work in medicine or engineering."

"It would be extremely exceptional for any of our children to enter such colleges," Mr. Thiệt said.

"Sure, our children could go to school," Mr. Sứ smirked. He had taken on some of Long's sarcastic tone. "They could take all the general classes they wanted, but they would not get skilled jobs."

"Communism organizes its society according to a person's background and history. A high-ranking member of the former government is forever treated as an enemy. He is placed on the lowest level of society. His children will have no chance of making it. He works on the street in secrecy and in hiding. He does the work nobody wants to do. His work is not protected or supported. He does whatever it takes to eat. He works as a street vendor, a peddler, a hard laborer. No laws protect him. He can be forced to move at anytime for any reason. He is an outsider, a social outcast. If he is sick, the hospital does not treat him since it reserves treatment for the Communists. He is trampled down. He is kicked down like an animal," Long said, impassioned.

These statements chilled me. Dust had sprinkled and hit my eyes, my face, and my body. I was thinking that this could have been my family's fate. Everyone was silent. The discussion had come to a halt.

I scribbled "Prisoners: #14, the lowest level in Communist Society."

Mr. Kiệm broke the silence and moved us onto something else.

"All this," Mr. Kiệm said, "and we were never charged, tried, represented, and judged. Kangaroo courts condemned us."

Mr. Long exclaimed loudly, “No trial, no attorneys, no stipulation of time, no one knew when they would be released. Their system is not just. That’s why this dissertation is so important. I am moved by this project because it is more than just completing a Ph.D. degree. It is about telling the truth about people who have up until now been misunderstood. You must write this so that our children could read it. They do not read Vietnamese, but they can read it in English. You must tell the Americans what happened. It is their responsibility to know what happened to the people they left behind! Generations were trampled on and have not yet recovered!”

Mr. Long insisted, “You must explain that the prison system was a completely different system than the one in America. Here you commit a crime, you are charged, you do your time, and you are let go. There it is like being on probation forever!”

After a long pause, when the sun had beamed down and it was hot, Mr. Thiệp excused himself because he had to leave to go back to Washington, D.C. He thanked me for wanting to know what had happened. I thanked him for his story. Mr. Th¿ and Kiệm said they would help me get more information, and they left. Mr. Sứ talked to them privately on their way out.

Mr. Long, I thought, was a philosopher, a pontificator, and a great story-teller. He summed things up in big pictures. I was so glad to talk to him one-on-one.

I asked him, “How long were you in prison?”

“No. I was not a political prisoner. I came here just like you, in 1975. I have been with these men for about a decade. I have heard them talk, and I have read accounts and historical documents about what they went through,” he said.

It was a shocking revelation. His restaurant Ca Dao was two doors west of Họp Ký. No one protested his statements and exhortations. No one minded that he spoke about their stories as if they were his. In fact, they built on what he said. Mr. Kiệm quoted him, “When Mr. Long talked about. . . .” He was an outsider who had lived their stories for nearly a decade. Their story became his story. He understood them, and he was their friend. Most importantly, he knew he could have easily been one of them had he stayed.

A day with Mr. Sứ was a day spent with his brothers in a restaurant where the past came alive, where the South Vietnamese cause was alive. It was a day in which the dust of the past swept in and formed a picture of families surviving in different prisons. I imagined Mr. Thiệp’s wife and her children carrying all their possessions on their backs, leaving their home, and living in an unknown remote place. I thought Mr. ThiŒp’s wife could have been my mother, that my brothers, sisters, and I could have been raised in the New Economic Zone.

CHAPTER 6

MR. SỨ'S LIFE AND HIS CONVICTION

Mr. Sứ wrote his story in the form of a letter to me. I have added parts from the interview to clarify the letter.

April 30, 1975 was the most painful and tragic event for the South Vietnamese people. We lost our country in shame and humiliation! We lost because we were no longer part of America's interests. We lost because America, our *SOLE SUPPORTER*, cold-bloodedly dropped us, left us, and abandoned us! America cut us off totally! We would never have lost if America had continued to support us. Weapons, tanks, gas, food, clothing—every commodity needed to fight a war—were cut! We fought with guns and no bullets, cars and no gas, planes and no fuels. We fought against a well-equipped enemy who was supported by the then Soviet Union, Communist China, Cuba, and other Eastern European nations such as Czechoslovakia, Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Romania. The enemy invaded us firing thousands of rounds of 105mm, 122mm, 130 mm, and 155mm, while we fired five or ten rounds. An army completely cut off against a well-supplied army is doomed. We did not stand a chance; we had to lose. The Communists overran us, and hence, April 30, 1975 has now become our national day of loss, shame, and mourning. Vietnamese refugees from all over the world observe this day: the day the Communists violated the Paris Peace Treaty by invading South Vietnam while America did nothing to stop them. America betrayed us, and I deeply resent the U.S. government for this.

American's policy toward South Vietnam had always been one of imperialism, not of equal allies. We were regarded as a satellite country, a vassal to the U.S., one who had to depend on America for its survival but had no voice in its own government. The murder of President Ngô ñinh DiŒm was an example of how America, through its own volition, fomented a *coup d'état* using the likes of DÜÖng Van Minh, Mai HÜu Xuân, TrÀn Van ñôn, and Tôn ThÃt ñính. They approved DiŒm's murder against the will of the South Vietnamese people. The murder of DiŒm proved to be a terrible mistake in the fight against Communism because it was immoral, demoralizing, and destabilizing to our government. The Republican Party of South Vietnam, a divided house with weak leaders, was infiltrated by traitors, spies, and agents like DÜÖng Van Minh.

The Central region and highlands of South Vietnam were completely overrun by Communist troops in the last days of April 1975. The First and Second Divisions of the armed forces were captured. Soldiers and officers deserted to return to their families or escape with the Americans. Those who stayed fought to the end, many knowing that they would not survive. The 18th Division Infantry fought with limited supplies and troops against five Communist Divisions in Long Khánh. We were the lone tiger fighting against a band of foxes, so we withdrew from Long Khánh to a base in Long Bình, Biên Hòa. The day we withdrew was the day President NguyÍn Van ThiŒu announced his resignation and transfer of power to Vice-President TrÀn Væn HÜÖng. Then, shortly thereafter, DÜÖng Van Minh became president and surrendered. I fought with my men until DÜÖng Van Minh announced a complete surrender. I cried when I heard this. I cried because the surrender was so humiliating and shameful! I evacuated my unit along with the 18th Infantry to the headquarter of the Engineering Corps on Nguyên Tri

PhÜÖng Street in Saigon on April 30, 1975. I rode my bike to the U.S. Embassy on Thong Nhat Street. I saw people climbing fences, shoving and pushing each other to get inside the Embassy so they could leave. Then I rode to Port Båch ñ¢ng, and I saw the same thing. Thousands of people rushed to get ships already packed with people. Everyone was running, and I felt so sorry for them.

I knew the danger of staying because I saw Sargeant ThÎnh, one of my men, dragged and shot dead by a Communist in Ban Mê Thu¶t on March 10, 1975. I also heard of such executions from others, so I hid in a relative's home for one week before returning home when I saw that no one was coming after me. Former officers were very worried that the Communists would seek revenge against us. Two weeks after the fall of Saigon, a childhood friend from North Vietnam, CÆp, came to visit my family. He was a Lieutenant for the Communists.

When he saw me he said, “Why didn’t you go into exile to another country? You will suffer greatly if you stay. It is not too late for you to escape. You must find a way to get out at all cost.” Then he told my parents, “You must do everything you can to keep your house in Saigon. Do not go to the New Economic Zone. It is a death trap for city residences.” After that day, we never saw CÆp again.

The thought of leaving and deserting my family never crossed my mind. I had a four-year-old daughter, and my wife, ñoàn ThÎ Thäo, was late in her second pregnancy. On June 16, 1975, I took my wife to a medical clinic in TrÜng VÜÖng in Sài Gòn to have our baby, who was born June 17, 1975.

As the oldest son, I could not bear to leave my parents, five brothers, and two sisters. I loved them all, so I decided to stay come what may. Moreover, where else could we run to get away from the Communists once they defeated us?

My family had been running from the ViŒt Minh (original name of the Vietnamese Communist Party) our whole lives. I was born in the village of PhÜÖng CÀu in the Province of B¡c Ninh in north Vietnam on August 20, 1945. When the ViŒt Minh invaded north Vietnam in 1949-1950, my family left our village to escape them. My father, a sergeant in the French Army, fought against them until the French were defeated in 1954. Then we self-exiled to South Vietnam to get away from the Communists in 1954, after the Geneva Accord was signed. Then in 1975, when the Communists had completely overrun South Vietnam , where else could we go?

At that time, I knew nothing about politics. Over the years, I have read and studied historical accounts and historians' interpretations of Vietnam and the Vietnam War. North and south Vietnamese, brothers and relatives, fought against each other. So much bloodshed on both sides—why ? Who started this war that spilled so much blood? I have concluded that the Communist Party headed by HÒ Chí Minh was responsible for provoking the war. I believe that the Vietnamese Communist Party, past and present, used every means to gain power. They gained power through deception and lies. They killed their own people without shame or disgust. They crushed the heads and necks of people for personal gains. The Communists have committed unspeakable, heinous, and grave crimes against the Vietnamese people that will never be fully recorded. The "reeducation camps" were examples of their crimes.

The Communists deceived all South Vietnamese who presented ourselves for the reeducation camps. It was not ten or thirty day orientation as broadcasts on radio and television stations has suggested. The *Saigon Giäi Phóng* (Saigon Liberation) *Newspaper* printed a policy of "tolerance and clemency" pronounced by the Provisionary Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. All lies! They lured thousands of military and police officers, cadres who developed villages and hamlets, Republican government employees, and government officials who were intermediate to high-ranking to horrible prisons dubbed as “reeducation camps.” They even incarcerated religious leaders from different faiths: Catholics, Buddhists, and Protestants. Many pastors, mostly Catholics, were there with me in Hóc Môn and in Tân HiŒp: Father Cao, Father Khäi, Father Nam, and Father Trinh. Thousands were killed outright without ever being tried. Thousands were left to starve, to remain ill, or to die in the camps. The Communists robbed people who had money and possessions by forcing them to go the camps or to the “New Economic Zone.” We presented ourselves only to become prisoners for one, five, ten, and even up to seventeen years like Lê Minh ñào, the Commander of the 18th Division. I was incarcerated for six years in various camps.

The first week in camp Hóc Môn, we had to write our personal history: what ou duties were when we served under the Republicans and our family history going back to three generations. We wrote over and over, five or seven times, and still they wanted us to confess more. We had to write a confession at least once a year. It would seem like an easy task, but in reality it was very difficult and dangerous.

After the second week, we were ordered to dig a well, one well for each unit of thirty people. Puzzled and scared, we thought it was strange because we though that we

would be there for ten days and water from our old army base was still running. We asked one of the guards why we were still being held after being there for over a month.

He answered, "Who told you that you would be here for ten days?" We told him the newspapers told us to bring enough food and provisions for ten days. Then he said, "You men were officers, and yet you are so naïve. Reread the order. It says bring enough food for ten days. It never said that you would be released in ten days. You will rot to death in prison. What you have been doing is part of your reeducation. The more truthful you are in your confessions, the more you are deemed to be progressives and you will be released sooner. Those who oppose us will be killed."

Several men tried to escape and were shot to death. Their bodies lay beside the barbwire fences that separated the camps. Among the thousand of us at the camps, more than half came down with dysentery, edema, and other debilitating illnesses that immobilized our walking. After half a year of being without adequate food and medicine, almost all got sick. The Communists saw the danger and allowed us to write home for food and medicine. Had it not been for the goods sent to us by our families, we would surely have died.

Many did die, however, from starvation, sickness, and hard labor. Some openly resisted their oppression and were killed, confined, or beaten to death. There were many who were killed that way. In 1976, I was transferred to camp Long Giao in Long Khánh. I was there not long when I saw escapees get shot and killed. So many of these prisoners were men I knew who belonged to Division 18. Some lost hope, despaired, and killed themselves. A man hung himself with a phone cord and died. When a person has no hope left, death comes quickly.

Ironically, the seed of hope was planted by the Communists who released groups of prisoners at different times. By comforting and encouraging each other, prisoners defied their miserable condition and oppression. They kept each other alive by keeping hope alive. If we thought that we had no chance of living, then we would have shed blood. We die; they die, too. Hope was all we had because the conditions in the camps were like capital punishment to many of us who lived in citiesmost of our lives.

We were not used to cutting down trees, clearing land, building houses, and growing our own food. Yet, this was my work in these labor-intensive camps of Bù Gia MÆp in the Province of PhÜ§c Long, Minh HÜng near Bæm Bo, and in Gia Trung in Pleiku at the end of 1979. We ate two bowls of rice with a small piece of potato and a dash of salt the entire day. Many ate wild plants, bamboo, and wood—whatever they could find in the forest—to keep from starving. From the early hours in the morning into evening, we worked always accompanied by a chief and two guards with AK-47 rifles to inspect our work. Those too weak to work were struck with rifles or locked in cells with their feet chained. They were allowed out only to get their bowl of rice. As if the work were not enough, we were forced to study Communist dictums late into the evening. They got through with us at about 9 or 10 in the evening, and then we were allowed to sleep.

In Bù Gia MÆp, prisoners threw themselves into burning bushes because they could not tolerate the horrible conditions. I saw NguyÍn Væn Thông throw himself into the fire, and I watched him burn to death. No one could save him because the fire, used to clear the land, burned fiercely. Because Bù Gia MÆp's border was only six miles from the Cambodian border, prisoners tried to escape hoping to get to Thailand, but they

were caught and killed. These are the names of my friends who were killed: Captain Tài, Captain Sanh, and Captain ThiŒp. Some prisoners escaped to Saigon, having made arrangements with their families to be picked up by buses using fake I.D.s. These people got away.

People ask me how eight guards could control 400 to 500 inmates. Of course, we could have easily overpowered eight men. But after killing them, where would we run? All the concentration camps had stops that were thoroughly searched. In case of a breakout, they would send an army of thousands to slaughter us. Each and every one of us would surely die. We had no weapons to fight and no food to sustain us. If we went home, we would wreak havoc on our families. Before 1975, when we had our government and our army, we would break out of jail and kill the enemy if we were captured. After 1975, all roads were dead ends.

In 1978, when the Communists fought against Cambodia, I was transferred to the "New Economic Zone," Minh HÜng near Bù ñæng, to avoid the crossfire. I starved and suffered, and yet as a city person watching the local people work so hard for their food, I felt so sorry for them because they starved and suffered worse than I. These were people whom the Communists had imprisoned since 1954, people who did not escape to South ViŒt Nam. After rows and rows of rubber trees and wheat were planted, I was transferred to Pleiku to camp Gia Trung.

When we got there, the camp chief named HiŠn said to us, "Those who have not been through this camp, have not truly been reeducated."

The camp had a reputation for being among the most treacherous and most horrible camps along with northen camps like C°ng Tr©i. For every thousand prisoners,

only 50 or so people survived. I was assigned to a group called the "Green Plants." My daily work consisted of gathering cow, bull, and human manure to fertilize the plants. The work was hard, filthy, and disgusting, but there was no way to avoid it. I worked and starved at this most wretched camp for eighteen months before I was released to my family.

“Release” did not mean freedom. The certificate of release ordered me to report to the local security officer and be under his control for one year. Before being released, I signed a promissory note stating that I would report weekly to the officials and work according to their directives. They issued a set of clothing and $100 Vietnamese dollars for travel expenses. I was released on June 11, 1981, but I did not get home until five days later. It was late in the evening when I arrived because I waited for days for the train to Saigon.

My family, having been notified of my release one week before, waited anxiously for my return. My wife, parents, brothers, sisters, and neighbors greeted me with joy and love. It was beautiful to see how much they cared for me. My old father pedaled a rickshaw; my mother baked rice papers to sell; my skinny pale wife rode her bike to Long An to buy and sell rice to care for me and our two daughters. My daughters, who were four and an infant when I went to prison, were ten and six years old. They watched me from a distance; it took some time for them to get to know me as their father.

I rested for ten days and then worked to help my wife. My father told me to pedal the rickshaw. "Pedaling for a living was hard," he said, "but at least you are 'free.'" But I was not free. Life after prison was another struggle. I had to report to the local security each week with a notebook detailing my daily activities: what I did, where I went, whom

I talked to, what I talked about, and how much money I made. If I had no problems after one year, then my citizenship was restored. I would then be eligible for residential status. Several committees and chiefs were involved in deciding if they wanted to restore my rights.

I pedaled for over one year making very little money, then I got sick with pneumonia. I took a year off work to recover; all the while I had to present myself to a security chief weekly. These chiefs would say to me, "Brother SÙ, let's have dinner tonight." They knew I had no money because I pedaled a rickshaw and hung bamboo leaves, a job I got with the Post Exchange, to make a living. We ate lightly. If I had any money, I was expected to take them out to a restaurant.

One chief said to me, "Brother SÙ, I have to do nightly watch and I am out of batteries. Could you please give me four batteries?"

"How much does each battery cost?" I asked. "$500 dollars each," he said. I gave him $2000 HÒ Chí Minh dollars. They knew how much I suffered; yet they continued to harass me. There was so much of that going on. If you did not cooperate, they would make trouble for you. They wanted to make money, and you had to give them what they wanted.

My family was blessed because my younger brother, who was in the Navy, escaped to America in 1975. He sent medicine and money to help us, and I was restored back to health. He was the same brother who sponsored my father, mother, brothers, and sisters to America. My wife, children, and I were allowed to come under the Humanitarian Operation Program. My entire family, immediate and extended, flew out

of Vietnam to Oklahoma City on March 15, 1991. We have lived in Oklahoma City for thirteen years and three months, and I have no intention of ever returning to Vietnam.

My fear of returning to Vietnam is that the Communists can do anything they want to me no matter how wicked the acts are. They may take revenge against me because of what I have done in Oklahoma during the last thirteen years. I have continued my fight against Vietnamese Communist oppression, not with bullets, but with weapons called organization and a free press. Former prisoners do not have the ammunition to fight against Communism. Our weapon against oppression is our united stance with each other and with other organizations.

The Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners' Association of Oklahoma City was established in January 1991 with twenty members. We have grown to 240 members of men and women who were former political prisoners.[43] The Association's primary purpose is to support each other because many former prisoners today are physically, emotionally, and spiritually scarred. We share similar pasts, so we come together as a group to gain strength and support each other. Our agenda is first to make sure that we are safe where we live. If we did not organize in states and cities, then the Communists would organize and disrupt our functions. They might emerge with their red-yellow-star flag, the flag stained with our blood. It is our political organization that deters them from self-promoting. Our secondary objective is to continue our fight for freedom, democracy, and human rights for Vietnam.

[43] Mr. SÙ stated that there were a couple of women members who were sent to separate reeducation camps from the men. These were female officers in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. He knew Ms. HÒ Thi Ve who was a commander of the female army. She came to America in 1995.

For the last thirteen years, I have devoted myself to the Association. I have been entrusted with the office of President of the Association from 1996 to now (July 2004). I meet with the Executive Committee of twenty people once a month or as needed at H®p Kš Restaurant, which is my restaurant. I have met many comrades in arms and heard many happy and sad stories of the past as well as current stories at H®p Kš.

Special meetings are called to plan special activities or to support other domestic as well as international organizations in the fight for human rights and freedom. Right now, we, along with other Vietnamese social organizations are calling for the release of Father Nguyễn Van Lš, Monk ThÙc Quäng Liêm, Monk Thông NhÃt, and Monk Lê Quang Liêm. We have written letters and petitioned the President of the United States, the United Nations, and the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. When Colin Powell visited Vietnam, we sent him a letter calling for him to make the release of political prisoners, human rights, and freedom part of his agenda.

As president of the Association, I have written letters, articles, and petitions to protest the abuse of human rights and freedom. I have sent letters and notices to the people in Oklahoma and in other states. I have written about violations of human rights and religious freedom committed by the Vietnamese Communists. I have declared publicly how I feel about what the Communists have done. I have written about the history of the Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners' Association to mark our tenth year anniversary with a special edition book which includes how our Association got started and how it has grown over the last decade. I am sure my activism has not gone unnoticed by the Communists, whose lackeys live here in Oklahoma to spy and report on us.

The Association used to publish a monthly bulletin about our activities and the latest news about struggles for human rights in Communist Vietnam. Because of our limited funds, which come from our members' annual fees, we publish only on special occasions such as our Memorial Day on April 30, Veterans' Day on June 19, and Ancestral Day. For the New Year, we put out a special bulletin, which highlights our activities for that year. Our bulletins consist of literary, scientific, and political writings, as well as news and annual activities. Besides our bulletin, there is a local newspaper called the *Oklahoma ViŒt Báo*. If there is important news that needs to be dispersed, we submit the information to the *Oklahoma ViŒt Báo*. We submit monthly news of our activities and updates on our struggles with the Communists to voice our concerns.

Former prisoners have made a significant difference in America in the fight against Communism. From the time that the former political prisoners of South Vietnam came to America, which was mostly in the early 1990s, a movement to resist Communism and demand freedom has flourished. In the first years after 1975, the spirit to fight against the Communists was weakened because people were so depressed about losing their country. The strength of the movement comes from the 40,000 to 50,000 ex-political prisoners who now live in America. If you count family members, there are about 200,000 people connected to the prison experience. That is a lot of people who share a common political agenda. Strength in numbers and the steadfast conviction to continue the fight have enabled the Republican Flag of South Vietnam to hang in different parts of America.

A nation's soul is exhibited in the national flag. Though South Vietnam is lost, its flag lives in the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people, especially those who

fought the Communists. Wherever we see a Vietnamese Communist flag hanging, the Executive Committee of the Prisoners' Association asks those who raise the flag to take it down and put in its place the flag of the Republic of Vietnam, the yellow flag with three red stripes. We have taken down the five Communist flags here in Oklahoma City. About three years ago, people who shopped at the Buy-4-Less saw the Vietnamese Communist flag hanging in the entrance on the left side along with other flags. They informed me about what they had seen. I met with the brothers, and afterwards went to meet with the manager of Buy-4-Less. I told him, "This is the Communist flag of Vietnam. This very flag is the reason we have had to leave our homeland. This very flag buried the bodies of 58,000 American soldiers in South Vietnam. We, the Vietnamese people of the Republic, do not accept this flag. We request that you take down the flag and raise the people's flag of Vietnam." The manager asked me, "What does this flag of yours look like?" We brought our flag and gave it to him to hang. He was very pleased. If you shop at that Buy-4-Less, you will see the flag of the Republic of Vietnam hanging along with the other flags.

Vietnamese who shopped at the local flea market saw the Communist flag and told me what they had seen. I spoke with the owner of the stand. He was happy to replace the Communist flag with the Republican flag. The same situation occurred at two Baptist churches. We spoke to the pastor and the persons in charge at those churches. They happily complied. They apologized for not knowing that it was the Communist flag. They wanted to welcome the many Vietnamese who attend their churches by raising the national flag. Although we were successful in deposing the Communist flag at C.M.I. Company, many Vietnamese mistake the Moroccan flag that still hangs there—

which is also a red flag with a green star, but it has a black border—for the Vietnamese Communist flag. They called me to tell me, and I assured them that the flag was Moroccan, not Vietnamese. The University of Oklahoma raised the Communist flag after America normalized diplomatic relations with Vietnam and a group of students from Vietnam came there to study. They raised the Communist flag along with other flags during graduation and did away with Vietnam's Republican flag. Through the activism of the Vietnamese community here and the students at the University of Oklahoma, the University has allowed for both flags to stand during graduation. Perhaps in the future, with strong student involvement, the students will be able to prevent the Communist flag from ever flying on campus.

Let us be very clear about students who are born in Vietnam and come to the U.S. to study. They are sons and daughters of high-ranking Communists who have oppressed and stolen from the South Vietnamese. Either that or their families must be extremely wealthy in order to send their children here. Vietnamese former political prisoners want to meet with the students to talk with them about what we believe. Their knowledge of the South Vietnamese people and our former nation is like a blank sheet of paper. They know nothing about us, nothing about our government or the people of the South. We bear no grudge or hatred against these students. Absolutely none. We want to share with them our experiences as refugees. We want to meet them, but they tend not to socialize with us. Their host parents do not want the students to interact with us. When we heard about the first nine students from Vietnam attending the University of Oklahoma, many of the Vietnamese in the community met with the residential Vietnamese student leaders at the University. We told them they should treat students from Vietnam with the utmost

sincerity and honesty. If they get a chance to talk to them, they should speak honestly about their experiences in South Vietnam and in America. If the opportunity allows, they should invite these students to their homes so that they can see how freedom works in America. After spending three or four years in America, these students will return to Vietnam. They will tell people closest to them about what life was like in America. Who are those closest to these students but their mothers, fathers, and other families? Who are their parents but rich Communist officials? The conversation about American life would have to include a discussion about freedom in America. They would surely compare the system of democracy in America versus the Communist system in Vietnam. The Communists see that their children do not lie to them. However, will the parents be bold enough to speak openly about what their sons and daughters have told them to anyone else? I am sure not. They do not dare because the Communist system keenly monitors and inspects them. I hope these students become leaders of Vietnam, and then perhaps the situation may change. Right now, those in power are the old and bitter Communists who despise us, and we, likewise, despise them. There is no avoiding that.

In my seven years at the 23rd Division of the Army Engineers 18th Infantry of South Vietnam, I fought many battles in Ban Mê Thu¶t, ñÙc LÆp, Quäng ñÙc, Pleiku in the red fiery summers from 1972-1973 to keep Communist troops from invading Kontum. I lost a dozen or more of my friends. I served to the best of my ability and was decorated with two Crosses of Gallantry, the Kontum Bravery Award, and other certificates of recognition for outstanding performances. I served with valor and conviction believing that I was protecting South Vietnam against Communist aggression.

Vietnam has had peace for the last twenty-nine years. Yet, under Communist dictatorship, why are people so wretchedly poor? Why are young Vietnamese girls being sold as prostitutes to foreign lands because of their impoverished condition? Why does an average Vietnamese person eat only a potato a day despite the fact that over three million dollars each year are sent to Vietnam from people abroad? The answer is that the Communists are not interested in building the country. They want to steal the peoples' resources for themselves. Who started this awful human tragedy? The answer is emphatically HÒ Chí Minh, whose name is synonymous with wickedness and evil, and all his followers associated with the Communist Party.

Today, I am not a soldier but a businessman who works at H®p Kš Restaurant to make a living and to protect South Vietnam against Communist aggression. I hang the Republican flag of South Vietnam in front of H®p Kš because I believe freedom, democracy, and human rights are still worth fighting for. I believe that the South Vietnamese have lost the war, but we will win the peace.

CHAPTER 7

CAPTAIN BÁO V¾: THE HOME OF MY RETURN

"They drove her out of her mind," Mr. Báo Võ told me. "She was a beautiful math teacher when I married her. We had a daughter. When I was in prison, my daughter died because she did not get proper medical attention. My wife kept this sad news from me, fearing that I could not go on. She also kept from me that she had been admitted to the mental hospital. It had not always been this way for us." When I met them over three years ago, Mrs. Võ has had another episode and was admitted to a mental hospital in Oklahoma City. The doctor told her she could never work again and that she would be on medication for the rest of her life. She heard voices, noises, and bangs from those days long ago when Communist cadres banged at her door in the middle of the night. She was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. She swore to me that she was once smart and pretty woman. Mr. and Mrs. Võ have one son who has graduated from high school and now works and lives with them. His main goal in life is to take care of his mother.

I was an officer in the Quân L¿c ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hoa (The Army of the Republic of Viet Nam—ARVN) serving as a captain in charge of the army engineers for the battalion of the 18th Infantry. Our mission was to eliminate the Communists in the provinces of Long Khánh, Biên Hòa, and Tây Ninh.

I was taking part in the fighting to protect the province of Binh Long, An Loc in the burning hot summer of 1972. After that our military operation moved to Kampuchia

to support the Division attacking the R unit belonging to the National Liberation Front, which was created by the Vietnamese Communists.

My family consisted of my wife and a newborn daughter. My wife was a teacher in Saigon. She was a humane, kind, and diligent person; therefore, our lives were very harmonious.

In the latter days of April 1975, the Communists invaded and occupied the central provinces. The situation of the South was unstable because masses of refugees fled south. The ARVN had to withdraw and rushed to defend and to protect the Third Region tactical air base. Involved in this mission was the 18th Infantry, to which I belonged. At that time, the U.S. embassy, the Vietnamese President, and a number of the commanders fled the country leaving it without leaders to guide it, like a snake with no head. This worsened the already chaotic and confused condition.

As an officer of the ARVN in charge of the more than one hundred soldiers, I was not able to think clearly. My mind was confused. I thought that I could not leave when my country is in a critical state of war. I could not the men who fought with you and protected you. Leaving them was like deserting your duty. To run and hide was the most cowardly, shameful, disgraceful thing to do. It was better, I thought, to stay and share a common fate with your brothers and sisters. Moreover, my wife refused to leave her home, and she comforted me, saying: "One swallow alone cannot create spring. Let it be. Let us accept our destiny. Courageously live with honor and fulfill our duties that God has entrusted us no matter what circumstances may come our way. The more one struggles through life's most painful challenges, the more valuable is one's knowledge.

Our lives will be more meaningful and only then can we be proud and worthy of our tradition as a people."

Then on June 24, 1975, the Communists ordered all officers of the ARVN to gather and attend reeducation classes. In reality, these were actually prisons.

After they gathered all the former officers of the ARVN, the Communists forced all of us to confess our background then divided us: some got on boats heading north, some went deep into the jungle, and the ones who stayed went to a deserted island far away from society where it would be easier for the Communists to kill them. There they terrorized our bodies and spirits.

The Communists brought a number of young soldiers, young enough to be our children, to control the camps. The young "teachers of life" insulted us, humiliated us, and treated us worst than beasts.

We ate and drank worse than the pigs the Communists raised. The rice they gave us was full of termites. When you poured the water out, the termites floated on top of the water. When they ran out of rice, they gave us sorghum, yellow corn grains, or manioc. One meal consisted of only one bowl of cooked grain seasoned with salt water. We jokingly called the seasoning ocean water. Once in a while, they would give us few pieces of white tofu which we jokingly called elephant meat. Sometimes we would even get dry salted fish. When there was a big celebration, we were given small bits of pork, the size of your pinky finger. These were the kinds of food that the Communists provided.

When it was raining, then we bathed, washed, and drank—all from the rain. When it was hot, we dug a well for water. We were allowed one can of water for

bathing. Once a week we washed clothes which amounted to dipping our clothes in water and hanging them to dry. When we came across a lake or a river on our way to work, we bathed and washed there.

At night hundreds of us were locked up in a house no bigger than 100m² without bedding or covers. Only a piece of nylon used as a raincoat was spread on the floor. My brothers gathered all the scrap fabrics and linens and made blankets that covered two or three persons to one blanket. The closer we lay together, the warmer we became.

That was our system of eating, drinking, and sleeping. We were forced to do hard labor, and still the Communists frequently broadcasted that "Labor is glory." We plowed the land, grew manioc, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. We went into the forest to cut trees and carried the wood back to the camp to be used for cooking. We wove bamboo baskets. We worked eight hard hours, and usually walked to fields far away about two kilometers.

Many of my brothers could not survive the meager diet, horrible sleeping situation, hard labor, and the depressing surrounding, so they came down with sick with edema, inflamed liver (hepatitis B), inflamed intestine, diarrhea, tuberculosis, malnutrition, and food poisoning. Many ate the wrong food because they were starving. There was no sufficient medicine and timely treatment for those who were sick, therefore many of the brothers passed away in the camp. There was no coffin or covering to bury them. We just wrapped them in a mat and buried them.

In the harsh conditions of the prisons, my brothers and I were determined to endure the hardship. We struggled with the guards to take our brothers who were ill to the doctors and nurses. We helped establish a medical place to cure illnesses for those

who were sick. The ones who were sick did not have to do hard labor. We raised vegetables and animals to improve our meals. Before us was nothing but despair because we did not know if we would ever get to go home. The hopeless situation and our suffering brought us closer together. We loved, protected, and shared with one another whatever we had: few grains of salt, a stalk of vegetables, a cube of sugar, a slice of cake etc. One cigarette smoked by a bunch of us warmed our souls. On the day when we did not have to work, we drank tea and talked about our country and the world in general. We reassured each other and cheered each other on in our daily struggles.

But with their games, treachery, tricks, deceit, and lies, the Communists would never leave us alone. Every three months they would mix us up by moving us to different camps and back again.

After one year of imprisonment, the outside world condemned the camps and family members of prisoners protested because hunger, cold, and disease caused so many of our brothers to pass away. Therefore, the Communists allowed family members to visit and care for the prisoners. The guards lured a number of weak gullible brothers into becoming informants against their own prison mates. They allowed these weaklings to spend nights with their wives and children in exchange for information on their brothers. A number of people wrongfully suffered at the hands of these informants and comrades. Some had their feet chained until they died, and some were just taken to the execution ground and shot.

After six years of being in prison and not knowing if I would ever get to go home, I became so hateful of the Communists. I felt sorrow for the Vietnamese people and

wondered when we would be rid of the Communists' cruelties. We have paid such a high price for losing the war.

Each time my wife came to visit, she tried to inspired and comforted us by saying: "Be happy, brothers; accept suffering. You must be hopeful and have faith in God. Tomorrow the sun will shine again. In 1975, the Communists did not kill you, then they dare not do so now. The whole world knows about this tragedy, about their savage inhumanity, their deception, their greedy selfishness. There is no one in this world who does not know about them. Your years of suffering in prison have much meaning."

In November 1980, I was released home to my family. My happiness was not yet spent to before sorrow was felt. I found out that my young daughter had not gotten medical treatment and died, and my home and property were confiscated 13 days after I was imprisoned. Only after my release did I know clearly what went on while I had been gone. My wife kept the details from me and carried these sorrows in her soul. She became mentally ill and was admitted into the psychiatric ward several times. She had lost her mind and part of her memory. It was a permanent condition.

In the year after I was released and placed under the control of the local authority, I worked as a carpenter in order to live day to day. In 1982, the Communists arrested me because my file application for the Orderly Departure Program (ODP) which I had sent to Thailand was intercepted. Upon my arrest, my wife's mental state worsened. She screamed and hollered, and finally they released me.

In 1990, I applied for the Humanitarian Operation (H.O.) program. In September 1995, my family came to America, leaving our homeland to become refugees in a foreign land.

After our arrival in America, my family settled in Oklahoma. We witnessed first hand the kind ways in which the U.S. government treated the former political prisoners. Though we were of different skin color, spoke a different language, and came from a different culture, they were so dedicated in helping us. They created opportunities for my family to adapt to a new way of life and to rebuild our lives.

That was why we tried to stabilize our new life as quickly as possible so that we could join in the social functions in Oklahoma City. We did not want to take advantage of the kindness bestowed on us by the U.S. government and the people of the United States.

My family will always remember the kind deeds bestowed on us by the U.S. government and the American people. It is only so unfortunate that my wife's mental illness will never be cured.

Now I only wish for the following: that my wife will be cured from her illness and regain her senses just like before; that the Vietnamese people will gain control of the government and defeat the cruel and inhumane Communists; that Vietnam and the Vietnamese people will have wealth, freedom, clothes, food, and peace; that all the former political prisoners will unite to fight and win over the Communists.

My family and I will always stand side by side with the Former Political Prisoners of Oklahoma. I leave the readers with a message from one of the high-ranking leaders of Vietnam: "Do not listen to what the Communists say, but only look at what the Communists do."

CHAPTER 8

MR. NGUYỄN PHÚC: THE FAMILY I LOST

Phúc means blessing and peace. Blessing and peace are what I hope for this man whom I interviewed who does not wish to reveal his real identity because he fears retribution by the Communists. His son, grandson, father, brothers, and sisters are still living in Vietnam. Mr. Phúc wants to visit them without any problems from the authorities. He still has nightmares and wakes up shaking with fear from his prison experiences. I have known Mr. Phúc and his family here for over three years. In this taped interview, Mr. Phúc reveals the state of his family. After being imprisoned for eight years, Mr. Phúc returned to find his wife and two children living in a one-room house that leaked up to their knees when it rained. His children at ten and twelve did not know basic math and reading. They quit school because they were treated like second-class student, being forced to sit in the back and were humiliated in other ways. His children did not get past the seventh grade. Yet more tragic than all this was that his son was not allowed to come to America. Mr. Phúc did not say why. His son's absence in America has been a source of great suffering for everyone in the family. His son has three children who do not know their grandparents, aunt, or cousin in America.

Life before the Fall of 1975

I was born in 1945 in a small village called Trà Vinh in South Vietnam at the time that Vietnam and France were fighting for control. The ViŒt Minh, not yet called the VŒ t C¶ng, were fighting against French occupation in Vietnam. War was everywhere in our land. When I was ten years old, my parents relocated to Saigon to find work in order to live in 1955. The war made it impossible for them make a living in the village where they worked in the rice fields.

In Saigon, I attended a state elementary school near my home. Afterwards, I attended the Patrist TŸÜÖ ng Vinh Kš high school. When I graduated from high school, I had to enlist three years in the military because the Vietnamese government issued a draft calling for young men of age to fight. I knew that sooner or later I would have to go, so I followed the order and enlisted. Had it not been for the war, I would have gone on to college.

At that time, I knew nothing of politics. I lived in the South my whole life since I was ten years old. I did not know what the Communists were like. I felt no hatred towards them because I was not affected by them. Had I lived in the village and seen killings or destruction caused by them, I would bear grudges against them. But I lived in the city from the time I was a child, therefore I did not know who the Communists were and what they wanted. I joined the army out of duty; I did what I was supposed to do. I followed orders. If they told me to shoot, then I shot. Up to the time that I lost my country, I was still not clear who the Communists were and what they represented.

When I joined the army, I was trained in Thº ñÙc for one year. In that year, the commanders recognized that I had a special aptitude for math based on my test scores;

therefore, they transferred me to an artillery school in Nha Trang. After six months there, I graduated as a third lieutenant in 1968 when NguyÍn Van ThiŒu was president of the Republic of Vietnam. I was assigned to the 3rd Army Corps of the 35th Artillery Battalion stationed in Biên Hòa. I was with an operation which teamed up with the rangers. We supported the troops by firing artillery when the troops came into contact with the Communists. I was in charge of the 105 mm. cannons supporting all the operations in Tây Ninh, HÆu Nghïa, and Bình DÜÖng. When the infantry would go into the jungle, they would call into headquarters for support. That was when I fired however many cannons and at what range. I was responsible for calculating the exact location to fire taking into consideration the wind and other factors of resistance.

As soon as I graduated from officer training, I was immediately involved in the T‰t Offensive of 1968. I was part of a joint operation with the Vietnam Air Force based in Ch® L§n. The operation had two parts, Saigon and Ch® L§n. The Viet Cong troops had infiltrated the city but because they did not know their way around the city, they got lost in blind alleys. They tried to take over all the homes in Ch® L§n, but we went there to fight them and drove them out of the city. They planned to conquer the entire South, but they failed. We took total control of all the areas outside of Huế , Central, and South Vietnam. The Communists lost in 1968.

After our victory in the T‰t Offensive, I was promoted from third lieutenant to second lieutenant. My job assignment also changed. I did not have to go out in the field with the operations like before. I oversaw a military post which aided and supported the operations. I commanded the artillery from the headquarters. I did not see any ViŒt C¶ng because I was always with officers who usually directed the offensives from behind

their soldiers. I only saw a couple of VŒ t C¶ng who were still alive when they were captured and brought back to the headquarters. Many of the VŒ t C¶ng' I saw were dead ones.

Three or four months after the T‰t Offense, when things were more settled, I was transferred to PhÜ§c Long where I was stationed. I commanded a platoon made up of two artillery squads. PhÜ§c Long was a small village; you could walk around the entire village. I met my wife who was working as a secretary for an American office. I married her in 1969, and in that same year our son was born. In 1971 my daughter was born.

It was also in PhÜ§c Long that I got to work with the Americans who were stationed next to us. I had to ask themfor help and in re turn I tried to help them. The Americans aided South Vietnam from the top-level on down. I was considered among the lower level; therefore I did not work as closely with the Americans as other officers did. The artillery unit was a battalion, and there was a commander of a battalion who had an American advisor. The American advisor's purpose was to aid us in every way, such as calling in helicopters or supplying us with more ammunition. Whatever we needed, we asked him. He would call in and speed up the orders. Once in a while he and the commander of the battalion would visit all the units to see what troubles we were having so they could help us. At that time, they were our allies meaning they were our friends. If they could, they would provide us with technical supportor just about an ything we needed. This relationship did not last.

In the years 1971, 1972, and 1973, the fighting grew fierce. South Vietnamese troops had to go to the borders of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in order to fight because those were the routes the enemy used to infiltrate. The battlefields in 1972 were reaching

a boiling point. That was the time that the ViŒt C¶ngs quickly transported many of their troops into the south. They went through mountain ranges of Central Vietnam to reach the south where they established many of their army corps. That was what was reported in the newspapers. South Vietnamese troops were ordered to block the enemy at all the borders of Cambodia, Laos, and across the borders of Vietnam. I was promoted to first lieutenant. I followed the artillery regiment as a field artillery observer in Cambodia. I did not see actual fighting because I was part of the command units; I was inside the fort protected by the surrounding troops. Even so, I saw many deaths day after day. Every day there were deaths.

In 1972, the battles were very violent. When I was in Cambodia, the enemy surrounded us and cut our lines of communication. Our ammunition, food, and medical supplies had to be flown in by helicopters from Tây Ninh. I was there for several months before reinforcements came and built blockades. When that was done, we withdrew in to Tây Ninh, a province next to Cambodia.

In 1973, the Americans began to withdraw their troops, and then their advisers left. I knew that they lost lots of money, poured blood into South Vietnam, and fought for so long but could not beat the Communists. They got tired and left. Those of us in the lower echelon knew nothing about politics. I only knew that orders were issued telling us that we were short of ammunition, so we had to restrict our fires to ten or fifteen cannons each day, according to orders. We were short on artillery, medicine, and food. We were not being supported by the Americans like before when they provided us with clothes, ammunition, medical supplies, and food. Our support was cut by 80 to 90 percent. In all of my years in the service, this was the worst time.

There were no supplies coming in. We had no means; it got to the point where there was no gas for our vehicles. Usually those in command were issued a Jeep to get around. From 1973 onward, there was no gas for any transportation. Even if you had a vehicle, you could not go anywhere. That was one of the main reasons why it was such an awful time for us. We were deprived of every means necessary to fight a war. At the same time, the ViŒt C¶ngs received enough supplies enough to attack us. We were completely on the defensive, meaning that we sat in our posts and waited for the enemies to attack. Then we fired back.

In those years, so many of our troops died, especially young officers who went out in the battlefield. They walked out in the jungles, fought, and died. They died en masse. They did not have enough ammunition. It was devastating to be there.

From 1971 to 1975, I was constantly away on military duty. I was so consumed in fighting the war I hardly came home to visit my family. When I was away fighting, my wife and children lived with her family in Saigon. Each year I was allowed a seven-day leave. My wife traveled many difficult roads to visit me. Wherever I was posted, I contacted her and she and the children would come to see me about once a month. When they came, they stayed in the dug up cellars with sand bags around them.

In 1973, I served under the 25th Division Infantry stationed at Củ Chi. I was Captain of the 253rd Artillery Battalion under the command of the 25th Division. I commanded six 105 mm. cannon squads supporting the surrounding operations in Tây Ninh, HÆu Nghïa, and Bình DÜÖng.

From 1973 to 1975, there was constant fighting and shooting every day. I was mad because I could not support my friends because we did not have sufficient

ammunition. Out there in the battlefield, they called in telling us they had come into contact with the enemy. They reported that many of our men were down and asked us to fire cannons to stop the influx of enemy. We did not have enough to fire so we fired sparingly. If our soldiers asked us to fire ten missiles to shield them, we fired one.

There were many deserters in 1973; soldiers who were afraid to die went home for good. It was no different in my battalion. I would let them go home on leave, and they left for good. I was an officer. I did not think of leaving because I was afraid of being interned. If you were caught deserting, you were forced to go to the same battlefields as the soldiers but you could not bear arms or weapons to protect yourself. You were also forced to dig tunnels and do whatever work the units wanted you to do. At night, they locked you up in a different place like prisoners. I did not dare desert.

By the end of 1974 to the beginning of 1975, the South army was completely on the defensive; we stayed in our posts, and the ViŒt C¶ngs attacked us day after day. Today they attacked this post and tomorrow the next post. They attacked us nonstop. It was very frightening. We had no idea where they were hiding. Only when we came under fire did we know we had come into contact with them, and then we fought.

From the beginning of 1975 to April of that year, conditions worsened. All roads were cut off. Family members were not allowed to visit. I did not dare leave my post to visit my family. Those were some of the most violent days of the war. We had no bullets to shoot. We fired whatever few the division supplied us, but mostly we were the ones being shot at. The dead and the injured were many.

Days before the collapse of Saigon, I was stationed in the district of Träng Bäng, which belonged to the province of Tây Ninh. The radio announced that south provinces

were being lost to the enemy; one post after another. I had to stay at my post. By then the enemy had joined forces and blocked all the roads. Roads to and from districts and towns to Saigon were cut off. Cars could not get through, especially cars with Southern soldiers in them. The ViÈt C¶ngs allowed citizens to go through, but they shot at and blew up cars carrying soldiers. I saw everyone abandoning their posts on April 27th and 28th. It was utter chaos and confusion. On the 28th of April, I saw many of my colleagues stationed next to me withdraw into the jungle. I had no intention of deserting my responsibility as a commander when hundreds of my men depended on me. I could never abandon them and evade my responsibility. I thought that after this battle was over, I would still be in charge of them. If I deserted them, what would they think of me? How could I have any authority over them afterwards? They would see me as a nothing.

Being in the battlefield, I did not know that President ThiŒu had left the country and that Americans had evacuated. I still could not believe that the South Vietnamese army could lose so easily to the Communists. That was why I was captured in the middle of the battlefield in Cû Chi along with the other officers of the 25th Division. Had I known what the real situation was, I would have left my battalion and returned home. Under those circumstances, how could I have done differently?

In those last days, I contacted my commander to ask him what I should do. He said that the decisions were left up to individual officers to make according to their discretions. He said he did not know what orders to issue. No one issued orders. The soldiers were too scared to leave, fearing that they would come into contact with the enemy. They did not leave their posts. They stayed and waited for my command. I told them that everyone had left, and so we, too, must go. Before we abandoned our post, I

ordered the men to destroy all the artillery. We threw grenades and bullets into a fire and watched them explode. Military decree stated that in the final hour when before withdrawing, you must destroy weapons or else the enemy would seize them and use them against you. The ammunitions were too heavy to man carry so we put them all in the Jeep and blew them up. We could not drive the Jeep anyway because if we did, would get shot at. We walked leaving everything behind, even our personal bags so we lighten our load.

I led my troops into the jungle. We ran and hid, not knowing how many days or nights we would be out. We went into a village with the purpose of finding roads to Saigon, which were twenty-some miles away. In the jungle, I saw many of my friends from the units trying to find their way to Saigon. None of us knew what the situation was concerning the ViŒt C¶ngs. We saw lots of people heading to Saigon, so we followed. All of the troops were heading to Saigon with no one knowing why we were going there.

From Träng Bäng to Cû Chi all the roads were blocked. The ViŒt C¶ng blocked them with tanks and gun carriages in the jungles. They got on a loudspeaker and told us to surrender, put down our guns so we could go home to our families. When the soldiers heard that, all of us dropped our guns and surrendered. We walked out. Small guns, big guns—we gave them all to the ViŒt C¶ngs hoping we could go home. But they kept all the officers.

I was among the officers who were captured on April 29, 1975 at Cû Chi along with other officers of the 25th Division. From that day on, I was imprisoned until my release in July 1982.

Life in Captivity: April 29, 1975 to July 1982

The first time I knew what the ViŒt C¶ngs were like was when I was captured by them. They took us to a tunnel in Cû Chi which had been used as a protection site against air raids. I was already injured. When I was hiding out, an enemy bullet ripped through my neck in one side and out the other. It did not pierce my bone. Blessed Mary had mercy on me because my injury did not permanently harm me though I was not treated for the wound. My capturers did not give us bandages or medicine. I asked a friend to pour salt water and rub the salt water into the open wound to kill the germs. The wound miraculously healed. There was no medical treatment for any of us in the months that we were held.

The ViŒt C¶ngs guarded the post and later moved us to outhouses. We were only allowed to stay in a small guarded area. They guarded us with guns and warned us that if we went outside the area, they would shoot us. Each day they gave us bags of rice and left the cooking up to us. I was interned like that for two months.

After April 30, many of South Vietnamese troops came home to their families. When my wife did not see me, she thought that I was dead. She still went looking for me in the area where I was last stationed and in the jungle. She asked people in the area if they knew which route the Southern troops took on their way to Saigon. One person told her this; the next person told her that. She went back and forth looking for me, but she could not find me. For one week, she went over looking for me. Sometimes she would see a corpse and turn the body over to see if it was me. Several weeks later, she found me captive in Cû Chi.

After two months of internment, radios and newspapers announced that all officers of the former regime had to go to reeducation training.

The announcement stated, “Bring enough food for ten days.”

Everyone who heard the announcement thought that it meant that reeducation would last for ten days. Then we would go home. I thought the same as everyone else, that the decree stating for us to bring provisions for ten days meant thatwe would go home after ten days. Our punishment was losing the war, so why would they retain us for longer than ten days, I thought. I never thought that I would be imprisoned in such a terrifying way. I never thought I would go to prison camps for seven years and three months.

I was transferred to Saigon where they gathered former officers in a high school. When I got there, people were already registering at the high school. They presented themselves as ordered by the Saigon Commissioner. They kept coming and coming. We stayed at the school for several days. The ViŒt C¶ngs ordered food from the local restaurants to be delivered by cars to feed us. They loosely examined our belongings, but at that time, it was not strict, not intense, just normal searches. I did not think we were in prison. My family came to see me. My wife and children stood outside the fence and waved at me, but they could not visit me. We stayed at the high school for several days and then were transported to Biên Hòa. It was not until 1979, three years later, that I would see my family again.

Everything the ViŒt C¶ngs did, they did in secrecy. We never knew what to expect. In the middle of the night at about eleven o’clock or midnight, they blew the horn for everyone to go outside. They gathered us outside where military vehicles waited

to take us. We always traveled from midnight to morning, never by day. Everything they did was done in these hours. That was why everything was so secretive. They were afraid that if they transported us in the day, family members would block the roads and make it difficult for them. I did not think about it at the time, but now I believe that they were used to turning nights into days. That was how they operated when during the war. They slept in the day and worked from midnight on. They were used to working that way; therefore, when they came in and supposedly "liberated" Saigon, they continued that routine. It was very unexpected; no one could predict anything they did. At night they guarded us with guns. Each vehicle had two armed guards in the front and two armed guards in the back. The vehicles were from the Southern army issued by the Americans.

We were taken to our old military camp in Biên Hòa. The guards inspected our belongings. They issued blue prisoner uniforms, and a pair of rubber thongs made from rubber tires, the very same kind that the comrades wore. They gathered us together, passed out blank sheets of paper, and forced us to write our personal confessions. Several days each month, instead of making us work outside, we were forced to stay in and write about our armed units, the period we served during the war, and what our duties were in the military. They told us thatwe had to declare what our extra -curricular activities were in the military. We had to confess what we did and admit that our actions were sinful. They told us that if we confessed truthfully, we would get to go home early.

Each time we wrote, they read our statements out loud. I was so truthful in my statements about what I did in the artillery units. The warden called me up to the front.

In front of everyone he claimed, “An ordinary soldier shoots a gun. With his single bullet, he kills one person. But you alone, when you fire a missile, you kill tens of people because your bullet is big. Therefore, in the ten years you were in the army, you fired thousands of missiles killing thousands of people.”

He told me that my wicked sins were that I had commanded an artillery unit. I thought his accusations were laughable, since up to now, I had never seen a Việt Cộng. I did not know if I killed any of them. He asked me what I thought.

I answered, “I was just doing what I was ordered to do. If my commander said to fire, I fired. I didn’t know anything different.”

He said, “You don’t know, but we know. Each time you fired one bullet, tens of thousand people died. One of your missiles killed many people. In ten years, you fired countless rounds;therefore you killed countless number of people.”

Month after month, this one talked, and then the other one talked. They kept saying the same thing over and over, and at times I got so angry. I thought to myself, say whatever you want—so what if I killed lots of people. I did not dare speak these thoughts to them. If you say something against them, they beat you. They did not beat people in front of a crowd. They waited until everyone returned to their areas. Then a guard called the person who had openly protested against them.

They would say, “I invite you to work.” Behind closed doors, when no one was there, the guard would beat the prisoners. Though I never saw anyone get killed that way, I only heard rumors of this practice.

People died because they tried to escape. They climbed fences and were shot dead, or if they made it past the fences to outside areas, they were informed by the local

people. In South Vietnam in those first years, lots of people tried to escape. In the first couple of years in the Southern camps, many prisoners were so emotionally shaken up that they attempted to escape. In the first few months, several people died. The comrades gathered to inform us of the names of those who died trying to escape. It was their way of warning us. They told us about the execution, but we did not see it because we were sectioned off. Each section had thirty to fifty prisoners separated by a fence. You could not speak to prisoners in other sections. After several months, they selected and sorted out the prisoners.

Officers who committed "wicked sins," those who commanded units, were lumped together in one batch. It was also midnight when they gathered us, called us out by name, and divided us into groups. They drove us to unknown places. I saw that we were heading toward Saigon. On the outskirts of Saigon was a port where we were dropped off. There many vehicles carrying many prisoners. They loaded us onto a ship. They did not let us stay on board the deck; instead, they forced us into the bowels of the ship used to store equipment. I could not see clearly because it was dark. It was crowded, hot, and disgusting. They threw food tied to strings down for us to divide among ourselves. We had no idea where we were going. Some predicted we were going to the Công Son Island, a prison camp for the worst offenders. Vietnamese has a saying that the worst criminals go to the islands. We stayed down in the basement of the ship for three days and three nights before the ship arrived on land.

It was again midnight when we stepped on strange land. I could not make out where we were. Everything looked odd. It was only after I heard the natives speak in their northern dialect that I knew we had been taken to Häi Phóng at the foot of Hà N¶i.

Captains, majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels—the higher echelon ended up north. There were only a few captains. I was unlucky because I got stuck with the group captured on the battlefield; otherwise captains who presented themselves for reeducation were usually sent to the camps in the south. They lumped me in with the big guys.

They brought vehicles in and drove us to the train station. When political prisoners of the south boarded the trains at Häi Phóng through SÖn La to the mountain ranges that bordered China and whenever our trains stopped, the northern people threw rocks at us. Because of the propaganda instigated by the North Communists in the first days after April 30, 1975 and the organized campaigns against the political prisoners from the South thereafter, people on both sides of the street threw rocks at us from where we got off the boat, to the train stop at Häi Phóng, to the mountain ranges of SÖn La.

The train cargo cars were shut tight like the basement of the ship. They locked us in empty boxcars for several days until we reached Y‰n Bái province bordering China, way up in the summit. One man died on the way. From the trains, we boarded a ferry on the Sông HÒng Hà River. A worker who manned the ferry told us that he had carried many people to these places in the last twenty years. Those dropped off did not return. We were sick to our stomachs already. Everyone was depressed and quiet.

From the ferry, they drove us for the first time in daylight. In the north, they transported us in the day. People who worked out in the fields would walk along the streets; their mean of transportation was walking. There were no bikes or cars. When they saw us, they threw rocks.

The guards drove us through mountain ranges. There was nothing but mountains upon mountains. There were hardly any homes. Few of the homes were sparse out. It would be a long time before you saw a home; homes were spaced out like an open jungle.

There were carloads of prisoners, rows and rows of cars carrying us. They dropped us off at different camps. We stopped at a place where there was an empty brick structure with nothing in it. It was a long, large, and roofless rectangular structure with only four surrounding walls. The floor was old and dirty, covered with mossy grass. The guards left us more than one hundred of us there.

Camp SÖn Lai Bái

There is not enough ink to describe in full how hard prison life was. A person who has never experienced prison life could not imagine it. Its conditions could only be compared to hell on earth. In the seven years and three months that I was imprisoned, the hardest days for me were those days in that first camp in SÖn Lai. I thought I was going to die because I was hungry, without medicine, had no proper clothing for the winter, and had to work so hard.

We had to do everything ourselves. We had to clear the jungle to grow corn, grain, and potatoes. Because the camp had only a four-walled structure without a roof, we had to construct a camp with its own fence, a separate house for the comrades, a separate house for us, several watchtowers so they could keep an eye on us day and night, a kitchen, and bathrooms. We built on to this structure and eventually we constructed a full camp with its own fence. The main chief told us that if we stepped outside the fence, they would kill us. No one tried to escape. They put you where you didn’t know the area and you were surrounded by jungles and mountains.

Hell on earth went something like this: We climbed tall mountains to cut down trees and carry them back to build shelters. We crossed mountains upon mountains to look for tree trunks that were straight for building. We chopped down the trees. The trees that we could not carry were launched down first. They tumbled down. We slid down he mountainside grabbing onto trees or whatever else was there to help us get down. We looked for the cut trees at the foot of the mountain and carried them back to the camp. Everyone walked barefoot because you could not wear thongs climbing mountains. Thorns pierced our feet and legs, and we bled. We were cold and hungry, and the trees were so heavy.

The winters in the north were freezing cold. November and December months there were like the winters here in Oklahoma City. Waters froze to ice. There was no snow, but it was very cold. We wore two or three shirts, but they were not enough to keep warm. Regardless of the freezing cold, torrential rain, or burning hot weather, we had to work extremely hard. Imagine wading in a rice field at 0º Celsius. They did not torture us outright but the hard work and the hunger weakened us.

Hunger was the worst form of torture. When I was starving in prison, I saw clearly the wickedness and cruelties of the Communists. They were wicked and cruel in a clever way. They did not need to beat or torture us. They starved us. They knotted our intestines so that we did everything they wanted us to do. Each day they gave us only two small manioc potatoes or one bowl of cooked corn to eat. Not enough food and yet the work was extremely hard. Those things killed.

They said, “The state is facing a food shortage; therefore, we have to grow our own food. If we grow a lot, we will be full. If we grow little, it was your problem.”

Each month, we received our food rations consisting of one hundred gram per person. Four or five people were assigned to cook. There were people who could not endure the starvation exacerbated by the work day after day. So when they went into the jungle, looked for wild plants or wild animals hissing in the mountains, and ate whatever they could find or catch. Some prisoners did not know that the food was poisonous, and some died. One man ate poisonous mushrooms and died. One lieutenant-colonel caught a frog, ate it, and died.

In my camp five people died. The causes of death included being sick without getting medical treatment. Doctors in the camps were people interned like us, so they had no medicine to treat their prison mates. We wrapped him in a mat made into a hammock. Two people carried him to the foot of the mountain where we dug a hole and buried him. After a while trees and grasses grew all over, and we could not find the place of burial. They had disappeared. That was what a dead person got: a mat and a sloppy burial at the foot of the mountain. We buried five people that way.

When a person is so hungry, he has no energy left to resist or oppose. If we were good, we were fed a minimum barely enough to get by the day. Many comrades could not stand the hunger, and they became the comrades' right-hand man. They got to eat more. The ViŒt C¶ng were very clever. They saw prisoners who crazed food and drinks and would do anything even sell their friends for such items. So they tempted them. They told them that if they informed on prisoners who were troublemakers, they would be fed more and would have to work less. There were those who were weak-hearted and hid among us, secretly informing on us. We did not know who they were. There were many like that.

After a short time, there were revolts that exposed the informants. We saw how they got two bowls of rice while we got one. That was how we knew who they were. During the revolts, prisoners threw blankets over the informants and beat them. I did not do anything to get informed on except once when I left my work area to go relieve myself. When I returned, a guard called me over and accused me of trying to escape. He was going to beat me. I spoke carefully and told him that I had no such intent. I had to go real bad, so I went outside the area. I knew someone told on me. The guard did not do anything to me.

I do not know how I survived those days except by the grace of God. I was thirty-something so I was still young and had energy. The suffering was so great. I came back from a long day's work and thought that I would surely die and be buried here. I did not know.

In prison, I nourished the hope that someday the political situation would change and that I would one day reunite with my family. That was what kept me fighting for my life. It kept me alive so that I worked hard and suffered in silence day after day after day. Patience and endurance—there was no other way to survive except those. I kept hearing rumors that in three years we could go home.

My wife knew that I was held in the north and that I was alive. They allowed us to write home, but we could not disclose where we were. They told us we could write but whether or not they sent the letters no one knew. Three years later, my family visited me. After being in SÖn Lai for two or three years, the northern natives began sneaking food for us when we were working out in the jungle. They were very poor, so they had to go in the jungle to cut down trees for wood to use or to sell. Usually in the north, people

worked in the jungle from morning to evening. They packed rice in bags for lunch. At midday, they ate rice. We worked in the jungle with them, and they came to love us. Whenever they saw us, they asked if we were hungry and if we wanted some rice. They gave us some. Perhaps in those two years they saw that we worked hard in the jungle as prisoners. When we saw them we asked how they were doing. Perhaps they also listened to the radio and read newspapers about northern people who went south and reported back about making a good living in the south. What they thought, I did not know. I only know that after two years, we became very close to them. When the comrades were not around, they sneaked us packed rice.

Camp Hà Næm Ninh

At the end of 1979, they allowed family members to visit. My wife and two children visited me in 1979. It had been three years since I had seen them. My son was ten years old, and my daughter was nine or ten years old. They did not recognize me because I was so skinny. It had been so long since I had seen them; we didn't say much to each other because it was so emotional. I asked my wife why she didn't leave the country with our two children. Why did she stay? She said she could not leave without me. She could have left because her American supervisor told her to leave. But she could not get a hold of me in the chaos of the war. She couldn't get me on the phone or come to see me. We lost touch. I didn't know if I would have advised her to leave at that time. Only in prison did I think that my family would be better off leaving. I'm afraid I might have been selfish and wanted her to stay because I did not know what would happen to them.

Travels in the north were fraught with difficulties and dangers. My family had to travel by foot through the mountains and jungles because there were no cars. When they got to the province, they had to walk and ask for directions. Many people did not know exactly where we were.

When they allowed our families to visit, I was in an actual police camp. At the end of 1979, China crossed the borders and fought [the ViŒt C¶ng] at one of the bordering camps and captured some of the prisoners. After that, the Communists did not let their military army run the camps; instead, they turned the camps over to the police. They transferred prisoners to camps near the Chinese border to camps inside north Vietnam, further away from the border. I was transferred from SÖn Lai to Hà Næm Ninh.

Camp Hà Næm Ninh was an actual prison run by the police. It used to be an actual prison. The other camp was run by the comrades who mostly kept us inside the confines of the fences. We were allowed to move around as long as we did not go pass the fences. We made each person his own bed from bamboo trees. At night we could walk around outside. They never locked us up at night. The police, however, applied their system of control.

We worked in the day, and at night they locked us up. The prison was built with cement. In a room was a walkway with two rows of cement blocks raised slightly above ground on each side of the aisle. The bathroom was built in the room where you slept. We threw our mats on the cement beds and slept piled on top of each other. Each person had about three feet of space to sleep. Each room held forty or fifty people.

In the evening after the meal and roll call, they locked us in at about 6:00 p.m. We told stories of their past, prayed, played cards or guitars. When it was time for bed, they blew the horn and all the lights were turned off. We could not talkor move ar ound except to use the bathroom. They watched us from outside the steel bars. The winds from the windows made the room less stinky. In the morning, they blew the horn and unlocked the door for us to work out to the field.

When families were allowed to visit and bring food and medicine, no one died after that. Everyone who came brought medicine for cold and diarrhea. Everyone had medicine. Those who did not have family members visit them were given medicine. Everyone gained weight. We were no longer skin and bones and unrecognizable.

Whenever I think about the months and years in the north, I still shiver. Sometimes in my sleep, I have nightmares about those prisons. I was at Hà Næm Ninh camp from 1979 to 1981. I did not know about the negotiations between ViŒt C¶ngs and the Americans. But in 1981, I was transferred from Hà Næm Ninh to Long Khánh which was a province of Biên Hòa.

Camp Long Khánh in Biên Hòa

I must admit that the day I boarded the train heading south was a joyful day despite the fact that we were handcuffed in pairs on the trains! At every train stop from north to south, people rushed up to bid us farewell. They gave us food and asked about our health. There was nothing more moving than seeing that after so many years since the so-called "liberation of South Vietnam," the northern people understood the lies behind the Communist propaganda. South Vietnamese soldiers were nice and decent people, not the kind who "drank human blood and ate human flesh," as the ViŒt C¶ng

propagandized. It was nothing like the train rides into the north in 1976 where crowds of people threw rocks at us.

At every train stop, people threw food for us to eat. Poor people selling baskets of rice, bananas, potatoes stopped what they were doing and gave us whatever little they had. They threw food across the windows for us. I did not know if they had given all they had, how they were going to have enough to live on. There was such joy in that! Finally security guards stood on both sides of the train and kept people from coming near the train.

The camp in BiŒn Hòa was also run by the police. In this regard it was the similar to the camp in the north. In the nouth, however, the facility was much nicer. It had a higher ceiling and a roof. The floors were tiled, and the walls were painted. Everything was already in place. There were about one thousand prisoners.

The Communists tried to break us down by forcing us to write personal statements. Every several months, they passed out papers for you to declare your sins. It was so sickening. I prepared a ready copy so that when they passed out papers, I copied verbatim what I had written and gave it to them. All my declarations were the same. Everyone did that for speed because it was so tiring to think about those things over and over. Sometimes they read it out loud; sometimes they made you read it out loud in front of everyone. We whispered to each other, “I don’t care whatever sins I’ve committed.”

In the north and south camps, the Communists punished those who broke the rules by confining them to cells where they would lie on a bed with both their hands and feet chained either by steel or by wood. The person was restricted to sitting or lying down without being able to turn around. These were people who opposed, resisted, sang

“yellow” south Vietnamese songs written before 1975, or hid forbidden things like a knife or a pincer. Any violation of their rules was punished this way.

From 1979 onward, when they allowed families to visit at the second camp onward, I did not see anyone die. Camp life, which consisted of five hundred to six hundred people, became easier to bear. Families visited regularly. Every day there was a family visiting, so we were much happier than in the north.

Release: July 1982

In July 1982, after negotiations between the U.S. and the ViŒt C¶ngs, many of the prisoners, including me, were released. Each month, they read a roster, and one day my name was called. It was a joyous and emotional day. I could not sleep that night. I could not sleep the whole week because I anxiously waited for the release papers. One week before my release, I stayed in a “free zone” where I could walk freely around the area. I did not have to work at all. In that week, they processed our paperwork and returned confiscated items and money that were withheld. But nobody got their stuff back. They returned only a few things, and then they said that they had lost other items and told us to wait. We were so excited to go home that when they passed out the release papers, we didn’t care about waiting for our things. We took our papers and said good-bye right away.

When I left the camp, I took a bus to Saigon. I became delirious. It was hard to describe. I was happy to see the people I loved the most in my life and sad because I did not know what I would do when I got to Saigon. What work could I do to support my family? I stepped into an empty house, and when I saw my wife and two children, I knew right away that the new life was fraught with difficulties. I had to struggle so hard

to adapt to the new society. I saw clearly that the new society discriminated against those who had been imprisoned. I went to apply for jobs, but no one hired me. Each week, I had to present myself to the security post. I still had to report what I was doing and where I was living.

I came home to a family with no money and my two children doing poorly in school. Early in the morning, my wife sat at the marketplace with a spread of small bags of beans hoping to sell those bags. I was filled with grief at seeing this, so I rented a rickshaw and hired myself out. I helped my wife set up her table, and then I pedaled for fees until evening. When I came home, I checked my children's schoolwork. That was one of my first projects.

My son was thirteen, and my daughter was ten. I thought that at their age and grade level, they would know quite a bit. But they did not. When I asked them basic questions about math and literature, they did not know the answers. They couldn't even do simple adding and subtracting, and yet they were old enough. They understood nothing from their textbooks. They were so ignorant. I sat down with them at night and tried to teach them. But in the morning, they were on their own and nobody knew if they went to school or played hooky. I was busy working from morning to night. They told us that they were treated differently at school because they were children of a "puppet officer." They were discouraged and did not want to go to school. I felt so hopeless because they did so poorly in school. Several months after my return, my son's teacher sent a note home informing me that my son had not been in school. I had to stop work to go in and talk to the teacher. I asked her how we could help him. But he was sick of school because it had discriminated against him. The teacher made him sit in the back of

the classroom. He did not do well, so he lost interest in his studies. I was so sad and angry. I took a switch and whipped him, but he kept ditching school. In the end, I gave up, too. About two years after I was released from prison, my son left school for good. So did my daughter. They did badly and felt badly about school. I was so depressed. My wife and I had to work to take care of them. They left school at such a young age. That was the thing that hurt me most.

I said to myself that had I not been in prison, then I could have taught them and surely they would not be so badly off. Not to the point where they gave up completely and did not even finish 12th grade. I got to high school and would have gone on to college had it not been for the war. My son finished seventh grade, and my daughter finished fifth grade.

Eight years! In those eight years I was gone no one had taught my children anything. Those were the years that they needed their mother and father to guide them and teach them each day. They needed us to attend to their studies. In those eight years, my children were completely let loose upon society. Their mother was consumed with work to support her children and husband. Their father was in prison. Their grandparents had so many grandchildren; they could not take care of them. They were on their own. How could they think for themselves? It was up to them to go to school or not. They were left on their own to decide.

After I was imprisoned, my wife saved up enough money to buy a one-room home, the size of my living room now. Every time it rained, we had to bail water out. I could not find work. Companies and firms in Vietnam did not hire former "puppet officers." At the marketplace where I sat to sell, the guards said, "Former puppet officer,

now selling things." They threatened to put former prisoners in jail for any offense. If I charged too much according to their standard, I could be arrested. They were very wicked. For example, if I purchased an item for $100 and sold it for $101, they claimed it was too high. They would fine me. They forced me to sell it for $90. How could you earn a living? If you raised concerns about it, the authorities let you know real quickly in a sentence or two what they could do to you.

They said, "Is the puppet officer opposing us?"

That was why it was so difficult to make a living. They raised our taxes in the same way, whenever they felt like it. There was no other way for us to live in Vietnam. We had to leave in order to survive.

It was not until 1993 that I received paperwork to interview with the U.S. delegation under the H.O. program.[44] I left my son's name out of the application entirely. I applied for my wife and daughter. I thought that once I came to America, I could sponsor him.

I am currently sponsoring my son. He has been called for an interview, but I do not know the final decision. I hope he comes here and works hard so he can appreciate the value of money and spends it wisely. He is getting older, and I hope more thoughtful. He is so ignorant and never studies. His life will not amount to much of anything. My son is so far away. I talk to him once a month for several minutes. I do not know what is going on with him. He keeps hanging out with his friends and gets into lots of trouble. He has a son, my first grandson, born in 1999. My son sent me pictures of the baby. Just last year in December 2001, I visited my grandson when he was two years old.

[44] This was the Humanitarian Operation's Program under the Orderly Departure Program.

America 1996 to present

I came to America under the H.O. program. I thought that in America I could live without hardship. My friends who lived in America told me that people in America were well off.

When the U.S. delegation asked us if we had any relatives in America who could sponsor us, we told them that we did not know anyone there. We told them that they could choose a place for us. They entrusted Catholic Charities in Oklahoma City to sponsor us. Catholic Charity workers met us at the airport and gave us a warm reception. They rented a home for us on N.W. 28th street. I felt so happy and relaxed the first few days as though my sufferings from Vietnam had vanished. For the first time since Vietnam, I thought that perhaps our lives would be more joyful.

I do not feel the same way now. One month later, I realized that the new life in America was not easy because of the language barrier and the different culture. I had to get use to a different kind of weather, customs, food, and language. Suddenly, the new life changed me into an illiterate person because I knew no English, a deaf person because I could not understand others, and a mute person because I could not answer questions that people asked me. I tried to learn English, but I am getting old and my memory wanes. I have not been able to study much.

Here in America, there are so many things that bind me. Whatever money we make goes to paying all the bills: home mortgage, car payments, utilities bills, etc. There is hardly any money left. At times, I would be very sick, but I did not get off work out of fear. The regulations at my company add points against your record when you take off work. With enough points, they docked your pay, or fired you. Those are the things that

weigh on me. Even when my body aches in the morning, I still got up to go to work. The work is so hard, but I have to do the best I can. I get so exhausted only after six hours of work. When the eight-hour shift is over, and the bell rings, I can barely walk. If I were younger, I would like it here more because I would be healthy and not so tired. Perhaps the hardest thing about American life is my failing health and the hard work that I have to do. If I were healthy, then I have no fear of work because I am used to hardship already. However, the work demand exceeds my strength. Rather than work light jobs suitable for people my age, I have to carry heavy loads. I have to do it no matter what! I'm older, fifty-seven years old. I have ten more years before I retire. In the end, I see that life [in America] is not so comfortable after all.

Day in and day out, the door is shut tight around me. I work, go home, turn on the T.V., and then go to bed. The next morning, I do the same thing over day in and day out. In Vietnam, I suffer, but I have joy. When I was sad, I went to my friend's house to talk. We would go to the coffee joints and talk more. It relieved my spirit. Here I do not have to worry about eating, drinking, and clothing, only the bills, my health, and my spirit.

Two days ago, my air conditioner broke. It was burning hot. I did not know English well enough to call someone to come fix it. I had to wait one night and one day. It was eighty-some degrees. My English is not good. There is no one to really help you. America is very straightforward in that once you are here, you are left on your own to work and pay taxes. I currently work at Unit Parts. Whatever I make, I spend. I have lived in Oklahoma City for almost five years; our lives are just now beginning to become more stable.

My daughter has more opportunities available to her in America, but she does not have a mind to study. She is lured into the money mire. She does not make enough money. She makes cakes to sell to the different stores. The work is very hard. There is little joy in her work. If only she came here when she was younger and was diligent in her studies, then she would have a future. As it is, she is not much better off than I am. I'm afraid she is worse off than I.

Even if I knew beforehand all the problems I would face in America beforehand, I would still leave Vietnam. We came to America largely because of the economy. There was no other way to live in Vietnam. America was our only hope of just and equitable treatment. In America there is freedom with no discrimination against former officers. No one calls me a "puppet officer" in America. Owing to my working in America, I am able to send money to my father in Vietnam to support him. My father was recently sick and had to go to the hospital. I sent money home to buy his medicine. Had I not come to America, there would be no such money.

Because the Communists conquered south Vietnam, they completely destroyed my family. Had it not been for them, my life would not be so bad. I lived a better life in Vietnam before 1975. The work was easier, and so was the living. I have had to struggle so hard so that my family can have a stable life. I suffer from stress and shock. I try to find enjoyment by reading news about Vietnam's economy and politics on the internet. It is very enjoyable.

South Vietnam is completely destroyed. The older people, the armies, and the leaders are slowly dying. As for me, my life has been a torment, and I have only so many years left. I can do nothing for my country. In my old age, I have no energy to do

anything other than work and enjoy my grandchildren. I want a peaceful loving life for my family. I want to retire and die in my country Vietnam.

I do not think Communism will collapse. It has been twenty-some years. They are more oppressive and are getting wealthier each day. When I was young, I knew nothing about them. Now in my old age, I have no energy left to think about Communism. Even if the current system collapses, it would not affect my life.

The saddest thing I saw when I visited Vietnam last year [December 2001] was the staggering number of heroin users. They were higher than after 1975. In 1996, there were many users that I heard about, but it never got to the point where you could see people shoot up as you walk down the streets.

It was absolutely terrifying when I crossed the streets and saw used needles thrown all over the streets of Saigon. No one picked them up. I am afraid that my son might have gotten mixed up in that business because so many Vietnamese youths are heroin addicts, especially the ones from poor families. In their great suffering, they try to escape. Drinking is one way, and narcotic is another. At night along the streets near bars, young men sat outside and shot up. Security was powerless to stop them because they were rampant. It was never like that before. Before people did it in secret; they did not throw needles all over the place. It was never that pervasive and out in the open. In certain places along the streets, I was afraid that a needle might pierce my leg.

Comrades' children have many means to advance; therefore, they are successful. They study abroad. They study in big schools. They try to improve in their studies daily. Those who are 18, 19, 20 years old are excellent internet users. They have the means to buy computers and get on the internet. They have chances to study and excel. But the

children of the former South Vietnamese government have no chance at education, so they fall behind. They have no chance to come to the U.S. to study. Students who study in America, 80 to 90% of them are comrades' children. I guarantee this 100%. I hope that those who come here to study look back to Vietnam and compare it to other countries and choose the right path for the people and the country of Vietnam.

CHAPTER 9

THE BEAUTIFUL LIES IN MRS. LÝ H NH'S LIFE

When I met Mr. Phúc, Mrs. Lš Hånh, and her daughter, Thäo, for the first time in 2001, I believed that the family survived the Vietnamese reeducation camps. Mrs. Lš Hånh and Thäo came to Andrew Greene's office to inquire about a divorce for Thäo. Ms. Hånh, was fifty-three when I first met her, but she looked frazzled, worn down, and beaten. The top part of her hair was white with patches of black at the ends where she clasped her hair back. The skin around her eyes was puffy and her face was blotched with brown spots. She worked two jobs, getting up at 4 a.m. Monday through Friday to work at Unit Parts and at Burger King on the weekends. Thäo's long black hair was also tied to the back. She wore sweat pants, a man's flannel shirt, and cheap rubber thongs. She was not yet thirty, and yet she too looked incredibly old and tired. They sat past the regular appointed time. They asked questions but did not want to fill out any paperwork.

"We came to ask if Andrew would accept the case," Ms. Hånh said meekly and smiled. When I explained that Thäo had to be ready to fill out divorce papers in order for Andrew to accept the case, the women did not want to go ahead with the proceedings. Ms. Hånh said that since she arrived in America in 1996, she has never had any dealings with the law. When she said 1996, I knew right away that the family must have come under the H.O. Program. It all made sense to me. Their slow and cautious manners, their fears and anxiety of the law reminded me of Mr. ThiŒt's reluctance to go to Linh's boyfriend's commander, their aloneness in America, and their plain demeanor are

suggestive of newcomers in America. I questioned them about their family situation and learned that a baby girl named Betty was the reason for Ms. Hånh's involvement in the couple's life. Betty was staying with her grandparents, Ms. Hånh and Mr. Phúc, off and on until her parents settled their separation. When I met Mr. Phúc at their home, I asked him how long he was imprisoned.

I have known four Vietnamese families whose father was imprisoned, and I noticed that Mr. ThiŒt and Mr. Phúc had one daughter living with them, and Mr. Báo Võ had one son living with him. None of them had relatives living close by whom they could turn to for help. They seemed eager to talk to me and build a close relationship with me, unlike many Vietnamese families who have been here since 1975. They seemed fresh with pain from Vietnam. Weighed with work and worries, leisure and enjoyment were not part of their daily existence. It was more than enough just to get by and survive the day. Unlike Mr. SÙ, who was a natural leader, Mr. ThiŒt, Mr. Võ, and Mr. Phúc and their families lived in seclusion and isolation from the Vietnamese community and the general American mainstream society. They kept to themselves, usually not participating in church social events, gatherings such as the April 30th Commemoration, or the annual Former Political Prisoners' dinner. They attended church and went home. Like Mr. ThiŒt, Mr. Phúc attended the Prisoners' Association once and never came back. Their family problems overwhelmed them, leaving no room for communal and social involvement. They struggled to stay together under difficult circumstances. My interview with Mr. SÙ and his brothers showed me that the voices of family members were an essential part the larger story of political prisoners. After knowing Ms. Hånh, Mr. Phúc,

and Thäo for over a year, I asked them to participate in the dissertation project, and they agreed.

Ms. Hånh chose the Golden Moon Restaurant to meet for the interview. "I know the owner," Ms. Hånh told me, "she used to work with me at Unit Parts Company until she saved enough money to open the Golden Moon Restaurant." Ms. Hånh continued, "$110,000 was how much it cost to take over the Restaurant. That did not include monthly lease and utility bills," Ms. Hånh said boastfully of her friend.

The owner greeted us with many questions. To Ms. Hånh, she asked, "When is your son coming to America? Who is your granddaughter living with? Is Thäo still baking goods for the stores? I saw her the other day leaving packages of goods at Chinatown. How is your husband?"

Ms. Hånh asked her friend, "Has it been two or three years since you opened this restaurant? Does it have a buffet? Do you have Vietnamese dishes at the buffet yet?"

Their inquiries were a competition, a match to outdo each other by the goods in their lives. In this game, Ms. Hånh was clearing losing because the questions directed at her were so deeply connected to what she lacked. Her son was left in Vietnam; her daughter was in a troubled marriage; and her granddaughter was shifted back and forth from one house to another. Her daughter was still unemployed and doing odd jobs. Her husband's health was deteriorating. Ms. Hånh answered with a smile and then a light laugh to convey that her family was fine. When her friend got up to get our drinks, Ms. Hånh said, "Her daughter has a nail shop on N.W. 23rd." I did not know what to say, so I remained silent. Ms. Hånh continued, "I told Thäo to go into nails because so many people do well in it, but she does not want to do that. She wants to bake goods and sell

them at the market." She waited for a reply, but I did not answer. "People who got here early in 1975 had more chances to make it. There's nothing left for those of us who came later to open something new," Ms. Hånh said. "It is so hard to make it!" she said as she looked at me. "I came late. We did not get here until 1996," she explained.

Ms. Hånh wanted me to know why she thought her family was as well off like her friend. "Comparison is suicide," I wrote after the interview. We all compare ourselves to others when we feel our life is a wreck. Comparison is despair which works its way into our rhetoric, the things we say about ourselves. Ms. Hånh feels she has been cheated out of a good life. Ms. Hånh's narrative gives an insight into why she feels that way. The following narrative is a compilation of an interview with Ms. Hånh and her written essay.

Ms. Hånh's Story

I had a chance to board the plane and leave Vietnam one week before April 30, 1975. I was a secretary for USAID and the Defense Attaché for ten years. I was given priority by my American supervisor who told me, "Hånh, you let me know when you want to leave. I'll get your family on the plane." Then, the American supervisor left, but before leaving, he told my Vietnamese supervisor to make sure my family and I got a seat on the plane should I decide to leave. My colleague called me into his office days before he was departing. He said, "The situation is out of control. What do you plan to do?"

"What can I do? I can't get a hold of my husband. I called and called and called, but I can't get through. I cannot leave without him!" I said. My colleague's wife, children, and he boarded the plane to America days before April 30, 1975.

I watched hundreds of boats and ships leave, and I panicked. I called my husband whose unit was fighting in Cû Chi to tell him to come home so we could all leave: my two children, my husband, and I. His commander told me he was in Tä ng Bän. So I called there. I heard my husband say, "Hello. Hello? Hello!" I heard him, but he could not hear me. I called again and again. I kept calling. I heard him say over and over again, "Hello. Hello. Hello," but he did not hear me. Then, the line was cut off. I had to stay. There was no way that I would leave without him, though I had two young children, a boy and a girl.

Rich and poor, I saw them leave their homes, lands, gold, money, but I could not go. So then I reasoned that one system of government was just as good as another. Born in Saigon on October 16, 1947, I had no idea what Vietnamese Communists were like. I had a friend whose family migrated from north Vietnam in 1954. Sheswore to me that

no matter what she would never live under Communism. She left before April 30. The only other information I had was a film that I had seen when I was younger called "We Want to Live." The film depicted landowners being dragged out of their homes, accused of crimes against the state by their children, buried alive, and beheaded.

It was too late to leave once Communist troops overran and bombed Saigon. We knew we did not stand a chance, so no one dared oppose them. After President Minh announced a surrender, their troops appeared everywhere in the streets of Saigon. They shot at army jeeps with their B40s until the jeeps exploded. Corpse of army men and ordinary people were scattered everywhere. Disfigured and unrecognizable, they were left to rot for days before they were buried.

I panicked when my husband did not come home after April 30, 1975. Other South Vietnamese soldiers like my two brothers made it home, but there was no sign of my husband even after May 1, 1975. I waited for one week, and when he did not return I thought that he had died. One of his men from the army unit came to my home to tell me that Captain Phúc was last seen in Träng Bän. I rode my Honda motorcycle there. When I got there, I asked the local people if they had seen Republican troops being taken. They told me that they saw a Molotova carry high-ranking prisoners to B© L©i, a place where many of the Vietnamese Communist troops were stationed. I drove to B©i L©i where a young woman in black pajamas stood in front of a small house outside the base. She was probably a ViŒt C¶ng or a sympathizer since she wore pajamas.[45] I asked about my husband, so she handed me a big stack of pictured military IDs. I went through them,

[45] According to Mrs.Hånh, ViŒt C¶ng sympathizers are people who live in the South but work for the Vietnamese Communists. They were easier to deal with than those who were from the North. Sympathizers were called *du kích* which means "one in hiding," and they usually wear black pajamas.

but I did not see my husband. She told me that the prisoners might be held in Kontum. I drove to Kontum which bordered Cambodia and saw prisoners but not my husband. I saw many women like me searching for our husbands. I saw this one woman turn over corpse thinking that any one of them could be her husband. When I could not find my husband, I became disheartened and came home.

The next day, a Communist sympathizer handed me several letters from my husband. He was writing from Cû Chi where the 25th Division was stationed. He was captured and held as a prisoner there. He also informed me that his friend was with him. So I went to the friend's wife and asked her to come with me to Cû Chi.

When we got there, hundreds of women like us wanted to see our husbands. The guards told us, "We are not holding prisoners here. You women go home." They shooed us away, and many women left and went home. A group of about five or six women stayed and waited until evening. We were walking to the bus stop and a Communist sympathizer asked us what the matter was. We told him the situation, and he promised to help us get in. He led us toward the back entrance, through woods and fields, until we got inside. The sympathizer asked permission from the head cadre for us to see our husbands, and we were granted permission. We walked by rows and rows of prisoners. Then, they called out my husband's name, and he came forward.

His head was bandaged from the neck up. A piece of shrapnel went through his neck but did not pierce his throat. He stayed back, ordered his men to destroy weapons and tanks, and got caught in the crossfire. They would not treat his wound; he rubbed salt and water to keep the infection from spreading. It was only by grace that he did not

suffer permanent damages. We saw each other for ten minutes. I asked him how he was, and he asked me about our family. He comforted me, and I comforted him. When I left, prisoners handed letters to me to give to their families. From that moment on, I would not see my husband again for another five years.

On June 1, 1975, the Communists broadcast that officers had to report for reeducation camps and bring enough food for one month. My husband sent a letter home telling me that he was held at the Don Bosco High School. He wanted me to send food and clothing to last for one month. I went to the school, but I did not see him. His sisters, my friends, and I believed that all the prisoners would return home after one month. But it was not like that at all. I found out later that those who presented themselves for reeducation like my brothers were categorized according to their rank and position in the military. They were evaluated according to their "wickedness," according to how many people they had supposedly murdered and cannibalized. Prisoners were sent to different camps where communications to the outside world were cut off.

More than a month later, I asked the security guard in my neighborhood, "My husband has been in reeducation for one month and has not returned. Why?"

He said, "We told him to bring enough food for one month. We never said he would be released after one month." How they twist words and logic to suit them!

I asked him, "So where is my husband now?"

"I don't know. You'll hear from him. He'll write you," he answered.

My brothers who went to the camps in the south wrote within three months. I lost contact with my husband for five years. In those five years, I continued to work for an export company ran by the cadres. They kept me employed after they took over the

exporting business. My boss was an eighteen or nineteen-year-old kid. Above him was a Mrs. Bông, whose husband was a ViŒt C¶ng officer. Because I was an officer's wife, she treated me with disdain. I was excluded from every social event, and I was forbidden to join the union because my husband was a former officer. I was paid almost nothing, and I was never consulted or asked to do work of any substance though I was the head secretary. I did not get raises as the others, so I had to earn money by trading goods at the market after work. My former colleague, a man from Central Vietnam who was in his forties, was the only person from the old regime besides me who stayed with the company. He missed his chance at leaving, though he had traveled twice to America. He said to me, "How could they let such an idiot take charge of us ? They insult us." We would look at each other in amazement that a stupid fool could be in charge. We had to sit and listen to the insults thrown at us at work and after work. From 3:30 to 6:00 p.m., we had to attend reeducation sessions. Only on Sunday, when we did not work, was I free from their indoctrination.

We listened to insults and lies. One guy said, "South Vietnam was like an American doll. She gets tossed up and down, left and right. Anyway the Americans want." Another said, "The entire world looks up to us because we are a small country who defeated a big powerful country like America." In another session, "In north Vietnam, we do not have flat one-story homes like the south. All our homes are two-story. We are, all of us, very wealthy in the north." That was not what I saw when I went north to visit my husband.

In January 1980, I received a letter from my husband. He told me that he was being held in camp HAZ25 in north Vietnam. He said that he was fine and to do my best

for the children until he got home. In 1980, I traveled with my two children for the first time to Hanoi and then to the camp in Han Tam. After years of the military police rejecting my plea to visit my husband, the regular police in charge of the camp prisoners allowed me to visit him. This was due to the fact that China attacked Vietnam's borders in 1979, and the prisoners were transferred to camps away from the borders. My husband told me later that the regular cadres were less brutal than the military police.

We crossed the 17th Parallel, and I saw the stark contrast between Vietnamese Communism and the Vietnamese Republic. North of the 17th Parallel were small homes made out straw that was glued together. The foundation of these homes was mud not cement like the cadres boasted. Homes and temples destroyed by American bombs were left as they were: molded, rusted, and shattered. From 1954 to 1980, nothing had been rebuilt. The train we took to Hà N¶i had broken windows taped over; the seats had holes. The bus was the same. Only one bus ran from 7:00 in the morning to 12:00 noon taking us to the foot of Tâm Hà Mountain. I crossed a bridge that was called the Dragon Bridge; it turned out to be a small rickety monkey bridge. South Vietnam, with the American occupation, had built one and two-story homes, streets, and buildings.

When we got off the train after being on board for two days and one night, a man who pedaled a rickshaw approached us. He knew we were visitors and had money to spend, so he offered us his service. When we got up the hill, he could not pedal anymore. I had to get out and push the rickshaw up the hill which carried my two children and the load of things. We were so tired; we had to rest along the way. I brought a carrying stick for us to load on both sides of the shoulders: my children on one end, I on the other, and the heavy goods tied in the middle. We walked and the goods dipped and dipped until

the stick broke. We tied the bag to the middle of the pole, and each of my children placed the load on their shoulder.

My oldest Hi‰u was so clever. He went ahead of his sister Thäo. He was older and taller, and she was younger and shorter. He walked ahead and she walked behind. All the weight of the bag fell on her. She stood crying, “Brother Hi‰u you go too fast.” She cried, “My legs hurt.” Hi‰u would not stop; he kept marching up the hill.

Some local people came out of their homes. They saw what was happening, so they sent their young daughter to help us. A girl no bigger than Hi‰u carried all our bags. We loaded our bags on her back, and she carried them up the hill like they were nothing. My two children and I were still at the bottom struggling to make it up, and we had no bags to carry. Many of us were not used to this kind of labor, so we straggled behind. I have to admit, the northerners were something else. I paid the little girl, and we spent the night in a one-room house built for prison visitors since it was too late for visitation.

The house was crowded with women and children visiting their husbands and fathers. The women were preparing their dishes for their visits tomorrow. So my Hi‰u and Thäo, bless them, went to the bottom of the hill to fetch water for cooking. It was the same commotion with my son ahead. When they got done, they were tired and slept soundly. But I could not sleep because it was so uncomfortable.

I sorted out the goods, throwing out the rotted bananas and fruit from the days of travel. A pile of rotted food formed outside the house. My son got up early in the morning and saw a group of prisoners working out in the field. He scooted over to them. They whispered for him to come over. They asked him, “Do you have anything to eat?”

Hi‰u said, “No, there’s nothing.” The prisoners pointed to the pile of food that we had thrown out and asked my son to bring them that pile. They ate everything. Then they gave him a bundle of letters and told him to give them to me.

My son told me these things, and I have never forgotten the pile of trash that the prisoners ate. Each wife brought goods only for her husband. We could not give to other prisoners who starved too.

I did not recognize my husband, and he did not recognize his children. That first time we visited, he cried. We sat across from one another separated by a wooden table. We were allowed 30 minutes. I brought him food and clothing. I packed mostly dry food so they would last.

Many wives did not recognize their husbands and were terrified at how they looked. They were sacks of bones, thin and sickly. I saw men who could hardly walk who had to hang onto sticks to hold themselves up. People were starved to death, and yet the Communists can claim this beautiful lie that they never slaughtered a mass of people. That was their legacy. Indeed, they were more wicked than anybody because they killed people slowly and ominously.

When I came home from visiting my husband that first time, I quit my job. I could not stand the blatant hatred and discrimination any longer. I decided to go into buying and selling because this was the only work a person with my family background could do without challenging the current political system. I went to the market and bought 20 pounds of sugar. Then I would divide the sugar into smaller portions, and sell them to different vendors to make a profit. I traveled by boat to Nha Trang to buy 20 pounds of coffee beans which I ground and sold to the Saigon vendors. At times, I would

get on my Honda and travel to HÓ Nai to buy soybeans, mung beans, peanuts, vermicelli, eggplants, and goods indigenous to the area. I stashed them in small bags and hid them in my person. If I were caught, my goods were confiscated or I would have to pay a fine and lose my profit. It was illegal to buy goods and take them outside of their local precinct. It was not an easy way to make money because Icould not collect the money right away. I had to go to the different vendors first to ask what they needed. I came home and divided the goods according to the order. Then, I delivered the goods and got paid. I have had my goods confiscated and been shooed away from the place where I sold my goods. I was fined and lost profit along the way, but I continued to work because it was the only way I could support my children and husband.

Many women and families were not so lucky. They were fouled up to the point where they had to sell their homes and go to the New Economic Zone. The Communists made it so that you would mess up so they could take your house. You could not work for them, and when you tried to work for yourself, they fined you and confiscated your goods. Some people had to sell their homes so they could have enough money to go to the New Economic Zone. I did not lose my home because I had rented different places, depending on where my husband was stationed. I bought a home from a woman who had to sell it for a meager leaf of gold. She and others had to go to the Zone. Those who could not sell their homes extracted the tin from the roof and wood paneling to take with them to the Zone. They had to leave their home in the city to go to a barren land far away.

Women my age who did not know how to earn money had to depend on others to survive. Some became prostitutes; some married; and some became second wives to

their husbands' enemies. I knew six or seven women who became second wives. Very few stayed true to their husbands.

People have condemned these women saying, "While their husbands were in prison, they were at home messing around." In reality, it was not like that at all. These women did not want things to happen the way they did. They were responding to the demands of society. Not everyone could work and earn money in that society. If you had not traded for profit before, could you all of a sudden do it? These people had no other way to care for themselves and their children. One should not judge them harshly. They did the best they could to survive in a system which hated and discriminated against them because of their family background. The prisoners suffered inside the camps, but we suffered outside too.

I endured the loneliness and the hardship because I had the ability to earn money. Work kept me faithful to my family. Like so many other single mothers with husbands in prison, I was a young woman of twenty-eight with two young children when my husband went to prison. Buying and selling was illegal, and I was constantly harassed, inspected, and forced to leave when I traded. But I did not lose heart. Six months after my first visit, I saved up enough money to visit my husband the second time.

I took my children with me every time I visited my husband. The second time I went, my father told me he wanted to go visit my husband and see his old village in the north. My father and mother were northerners. He migrated with a group of rubber workers from north Vietnam to Thailand, Cambodia, and finally to south Vietnam where he met my mother in 1945.

My husband looked much better than the first time I had seen him because of the food I brought six months before. He told me that I should have left and taken the children when I had the chance. But there was no way I could ever leave him.

I remember a month before the fall of Saigon when my husband came home. He was thinking about deserting. He said, "I am not going back. Things are out of control. I am staying home." I did not say anything. He thought more about desertion and what it would mean to us if the South Vietnamese army gained control of the situation. It would mean imprisonment, loss of rank, and loss of wages. He thought about it and went back to fight. Had he stayed home, we would have escaped to America before April 30, 1975. He looked so strong and handsome in his uniform.

When we left the prison, my father, children and I walked twenty miles to my father's village. My father, who recently died at the age of 86 in January 2001, was in his 70's when he walked with my children and me to his home village. He had not been back to his native home for fifty years. My father said that after fifty years, not much has changed. There was no indoor plumbing, so my children went to the river to bathe. When they got out, leeches sucked their flesh and bled them. We stayed for one week. When we got home, my children's heads oozed with pus from insect bites and lack of proper hygiene. The poor north, and yet they boasted that they were much better off than the south. How my children suffered!

My children went to school. At school, they were excluded from all extra-curricular activities. They were branded as *ngøy* children meaning sons and daughters of "puppet soldiers." My son ditched school, never finishing, and his sister followed in his footsteps. They would never have gotten far in school anyway because universities were

closed to them. I knew that, so I did not encourage them to finish. What was the point? When I traveled to buy goods, they stayed with their grandparents. My son Hi‰u hung out with the wrong crowd and went astray. He got into so much trouble.

I visited my husband for the third and last time in north Vietnam before he was transferred to the southern camp in 1981. Then, I visited him every three months. His sister accompanied me on my third visit. Before the third visit, we buried his mother who was only 57 years old when she died of liver complications. Her stomach bloated. She went to the hospital to get treatment. Her family had to sell everything in the house including their sewing machine to pay for her treatment. She died anyway. She loved Phúc and kept asking for him. She was not well enough to visit him. We hid the news of her death from my husband because his father told us to not tell him, fearing that the news would sadden him. He found out about his mother's death from a friend in prison whose relative informed him. He wrote home asking us why we hid his mother's death from him. He was heartbroken all the way around!

In Vietnam if you did not have money to pay for treatment, you were left to die. It was that simple. It is not like here where you receive treatment regardless of your inability to pay. If you go to the emergency room in Vietn am and do not have money to pay upfront, they let you die. You have to have money for everything. I was blessed in that none of my children suffered from terrible diseases requiring them to be hospitalized. My husband's family was left with an empty house by the time his mother died.

My husband was released from prison in 1983. He wanted to work right away to help me. I bought a rickshaw for him to pedal for money. By that time, I had a small table of goods set up at the Thì Nghè market. I sat in the early morning to the afternoon

selling goods. Traders from other markets about 30 to 40 miles away would come to Thì Nghè to buy the goods and vice versa. My husband seized the opportunity to pedal these traders to the bus stop, so he profited from my business. The traders brought pork and vegetables to sell, and they in turn bought other goods. Eventually, my business grew and the table expanded to include more food items. My husband sold the rickshaw and helped me sell at the market.

Our business had its ups and downs, fluctuating with the changing tides. When it was good, we were asked to sell our goods at a bigger stand. We had to pay a monthly fee to the shop committee who controlled the market. Then, our business went down, and we did not have enough money to pay our monthly tax dues. We had to borrow money, and the interest ate up our profits. If I borrowed $100, then I would have to pay $4 in interest each day. We sold our house thinking we would get to leave for America for good.

My husband and I went to Hanoi in 1991 to submit our application to emigrate to America under the H.O. Program. We had to send our application to the American embassy in Thailand because there was not one in Vietnam. We were called to interview in 1993, and we thought that we were set to go. So we sold our home, paid our debts, closed our business, and said farewell to our families and friends. Then, we got rejected because there was complication with my son's application.

We started from scratch again. People mocked us. Women whom I thought were my friends said awful things to me. Worse than all of these was what happened to my children.

My daughter, Thäo, went to school to learn English, thinking that she was going to come to America. She met this boy TuÃn who was also preparing for his departure soon. He was already interviewed and ready to go when BANG! TuÃn's father changed his mind and scrapped the file. The father had remarried a woman in Houston, Texas and did not want TuÃn and his mother to complicate his life, so he decided nullify the application to sponsor his first wife and two sons. When TuÃn knew that Thäo was leaving for America, he became intimate with her. Then BANG! We could not go either. They dated off and on from 1992 to 1996. If he truly loved my daughter, he would have married her. But his family saw that our file was rejected, we lost our home and business, and therefore there was nothing in it for them. They rejected Thäo.

My husband appealed to the embassy in Thailand and pleaded for a second chance. In 1996, we were called for an interview. My son, who had a strained relationship with his father, had been kicked out of the house by my husband at the young age of sixteen or so. They have never gotten along: my son was unruly and my husband was strict. Yet my son said, "I don't want to mess your chance of going this time. Scratch my name from the file. I'll stay in Vietnam. You, Mom, and Sister Thäo go." I did not want to leave my son, but there was no chance for me to make it in that Vietnamese society. When TuÃn's family heard that we were leaving for America, they quickly made wedding plans. Had we not gotten to go, they would never have agreed to the engagement dinner. I told my husband, "Let us make it a simple feast because they are young. If they should change their minds, there would be less heartache." He got angry and said, "You let me handle this for my daughter." My husband prepared eleven tables for his daughter's engagement dinner. He took the rejected file from TuÃn's

mother to Oklahoma City. When he got here, he contacted Catholic Charities to ask for help. They wrote a letter to the embassy in Thailand to inquire about the file. The embassy told them that TuÃn's father was the only person who could sponsor the family. My husband called TuÃn's father and pleaded with him to sponsor his sons and wife to America. The man did, but he was very calculating about it.

TuÃn's father called my daughter and told her to work for him at the restaurant he just opened in Houston. We had just moved to Oklahoma City with our only daughter, and he wanted her to leave us to go to Houston to work for him. He also made TuÃn sign a promissory note vowing that he would have to work for him for five years to pay for the expense of sponsoring him. Thäo told him no, thatshe did not want to go work for him. So the man became angry with her and sent his second wife's oldest daughter to Vietnam to marry TuÃn. When Thäo asked TuÃn about it, he denied everything. My daughter was so depressed. She was heartbroken. My husband saw how sad she was, so he told me to call TuÃn's mother, who arrived earlier than her son.

I asked her, "Your sons will be here next month, what are you planning to do about TuÃn?"

She said, "I think I'll let my sons stay with their father in Houston so he can care for them." She kept her sons with her in Houston. When she was in Vietnam, she wrote me cards telling me that she wishes TuÃn and Thäo would soon be united. Lies. Lies. All lies.

We helped people, and they betrayed us. If only we did not have that engagement party, then Thäo might not have been so bad off. When she met this loser at work in Oklahoma City, she married him on the rebound. We did not attend her wedding. None

of her family was there; we knew that it would not last. And my son still lives in Vietnam waiting to come to America. I only hope he can change when he gets here.

CHAPTER 10

THE UGLY AND THE DAMNED: THE STORY OF NGUY•N THÎ TH O

Thäo came up to the reference desk at the Belle Isle Library where I work. I looked closely at her and saw a transformation. Her beautiful thick black hair was dyed a blondish brown. She wore a black skirt and black sweater with brown strapless shoes. Thäo leaned over and said, "We've got to go to the Great Fire Mountain Restaurant this evening after you get off!"

I was stunned at her new look. The light color hair offset her soft ivory skin against her black eyebrows which had still the natural color I had known for four years.

"Okay. Gosh," I teased, overtly glancing at her from top to bottom, "I will surely be underdressed." We laughed and giggled, both of us conscious of her new and different self.

Thäo walked away to the Children's Room where her daughter, Betty, grabbed a video from the shelf. I saw Thäo's skirt sway rhythmically with her long blond hair swerving from side to side. Her walk reminded me of the side-to-side swings in young girls ponytails. Thäo swung side to side; her body hummed to new and different rhythm, and I would soon find out what she was humming to.

Great Fire Mountain Restaurant was set one block closer to Interstate 40 than Ross Dress for Less, Hobby Lobby, Wal-Mart, Office Depot, and the other conglomerates that busied the once open fields. Trucks, RVs, vans, SUVs filled the parking lots of these conglomerates. In front of me was a family of sixteen whose seating needs held up the line, which snaked outside the doors. Steaks, sausage links, chicken

breasts, and pork chops seared on the grill. Rows of pizzas, hamburgers, hotdogs, spaghetti, and other main courses lined the walkways.

I jokingly asked the hostess for a booth with a view. She walked me to a crammed corner booth, but I pointed to a clean one by the window. The hostess picked up the plates and left. I waited until another waitress cleaned the booth and sat down.

I tried to write while I waited for Thäo and Betty, but I was distracted by waitresses and customers busily passing by me. I went to the snake line to see if Thäo and Betty had arrived. I waved them in and told the hostess that I had already paid for the meals.

"This is an excellent place. I came here with my mother once before," Thäo said beaming. Betty, who was only four, went to the line to get her food. Thäo opened with a happy smile, "So how are you these days, ChÎ (Sister) Thúy?"

"Not as well as you I'm sure," I said, continuing to tease her.

Betty came back with a plate of jello, corn, and beans.

Thäo and I laughed. "Who is he?" I asked. "Someone at work?" I teased.

"ChÎ Thúy you are so funny, I met someone," she repeated what I said but did not deny the content.

I persisted, more sure than before, "Who is he?"

"Nam," Betty answered laughing.

"Quiet, girl," she giggled and pinched Betty's cheek, "she's so ornery."

"So that's what's behind your new look," I said smiling. "Tell me. Tell me everything: where you met him, how, how long, what's he like. Everything!"

“I’ve known him for a long time, since Vietnam. Then we got together when I returned to visit last year. We’ve kept in contact by phone and email. Betty talked to him over the phone. Didn’t you Betty?” she said to Betty, who nodded and giggled.

“He’s still in Vietnam?” I asked.

“He works in Thailand as an engineer, but he lives in Vietnam,” she said.

“How old is he?” I asked, afraid of what she would say.

“About your age, thirty-something, a little older than I,” she continued but with a deflated voice. “I knew him and his wife from way back when. They are divorced with one daughter.”

I finished my plate and joined the multitudes in the line for more meat and other food items. I saw Betty on tiptoes reaching to scoop food on her plate. I went to the other line fearing that Betty would cause an accident. Thäo walked to Betty. I saw them together and thought how much they have changed over the years.

I met Thäo four years ago when she came to Andrew’s law office with her mother to file for a divorce. Betty was only three months old. After Mr. ThiŒt left, I interpreted for Andrew.

Thäo wore sweatpants, men’s flannels, and thongs in those days. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail which widened her large face. She was short and chubby and looked worn out and tired. She averaged four to six months of work at her jobs, which changed regularly.

At that time, Thäo was married to KiŒt, a man whose name means miserly and deprived. He had a square face with sharp jawbones. KiŒt came to the office with Thäo. Leaning with his arms folded, he said, “Can’t you see what my mother-in-law is

doing? She's trying to separate us. She has never accepted me. They didn't even come to their own daughter's wedding," he persisted.

"You did threaten her though didn't you?" I said.

"I wasn't going to do it. I was just mad because she grabbed my own daughter from me," he shifted his weight to the other side. It took a long time before Thäo finally divorce her husband. She visited me but would not file. Months went by and we heard nothing from her. KiŒt moved out and then moved back. She held onto him even though he threatened to shoot her parents in their own home.

Ms. Hånh called me and asked me to come over immediately right after that incident. They lived south of Oklahoma City, far away from the original Vietnamese markets. Their house was quiet and simple. When I walked in, an altar of family pictures, candles, fruit, incense, the crucifix, and a small statue of Mary covered the entire side of the wall.

Ms. Hånh and Mr. Phúc were both short and stocky. Mr. Phúc had gone bald on top and had strings of hair hanging from the sides of his ears; Ms. Hånh's hair was mostly white with some black on the ends.

Mr. Phúcsat far back against the loveseat sofa while Ms. Hånh leaned forward. She spoke, "They drop off Betty whenever they want, day or night. Often without notice. We don't mind because we love her. But KiŒt frightens her. He dangles her in the air and drops her. He dangles her like this, swinging her. So I couldn't take it any more. I used to say politely, 'please give her to me.' But the baby screamed that day. We just got home from work. I asked him to leave my house. He said he was going to his truck to get his gun. My husband called the police."

Then, she slumped back in the sofa. They shook their heads in disbelief.

"At times, he would not let us give the baby her medicine. 'My daughter doesn't need it,' he says and pushes my hand away. He's like that. Then, my daughter doesn't tell us everything. She hides things from us, but we know he beats her," Ms. Hånh said.

"We ask you to help her. Counsel her to get away from him. Come home and live with us if she needs to," Ms. Hånh pleaded. Her voice broke and the tears rushed down her cheeks. "We came here with our only daughter," she blurted.

It was unusual for a Vietnamese couple to tell a stranger about their family situation. Usually, they will go to distant relatives for help rather confide in a stranger. It was also unusual that Thäo was their only daughter because Vietnamese families are usually bigger in size.

"Where are your families?" I asked.

"We came alone, just the three of us. The two of us and our daughter." Mr. Phúc said.

I asked him, "How long were you in prison?"

"Seven, eight years," he said and sat silently. He shook his head, "It is the past. There is nothing more to say."

Mr. Phúcgot up, and I thought he was going to leave. I thought that I had overstepped my boundaries and offended him. Instead, he reached up to the wall and pulled down a picture.

"I want to show you my grandchildren. Here's Betty and here's ViŒt at exactly the same age. That's my son's oldest boy, and this is Thäo's daughter," he said excitedly. It was the first time I had seen him smile.

I saw a color picture of Betty crawling and smiling behind in front of a wall of blue next to a black and white picture of her skinnier male cousin crawling on the floor and staring into the camera. He was not smiling.

"I am trying to sponsor that boy and my son who are still left in Vietnam," he shared.

Catholic Charities sponsored Mr. Phúc's family. It was Mr. ThiŒt, Andrew, and the other staff members who came to greet the three of them at Will Rogers Airport. All three went to work at Unit Parts. Hundreds of newly-arrived Vietnamese work there. Mr. ThiŒt told me that the Vietnamese director recommends people to work almost immediately after their arrival.

At Unit Parts, Thäo met KiŒt on the rebound of her failed attempt to marry her first love after being engaged to him on September 1995, six months before she came to America. Her fiancé was dating a woman his father had sent to Vietnam to wed because the father did not want Thäo.

I knew about the Battered Women's Syndrome because my mother and Chi‰n helped me to understand the cycles that women go through before they finally leave their abusers if they leave at all. I had also studied the syndrome in my formal training as a counselor.

"It will not be four months, six months, or one year. It will take years before she can leave him," I explained. "She may file divorce papers. But she'll be right back with him. She'll be back and forth, over and over and over. She will have to hit bottom. There will be more fighting, more hurt, more pain. It is a life-long process of helping her," I said sadly but surely.

“Thäo will need your unconditional support. She’ll tell you one day she’s through, then she’ll go back. You just have to accept that and try not to be mad at her,” I said confidently. “Do not be judgmental or condemning,” I said. They asked me to befriend her and guide her like a younger sister.

I was no longer hesitant or afraid. I wished someone would have spoken to my parents this way when Chi‰n was in trouble. They might not have given up on her. “If only” are two sad words in the English language, and they are words that I often say about my sister. With this family, I felt there was hope.

I called Thäo and invited her out to eat, but she said she was busy. I knew she was still with him. A couple of months went by after the gun threat and still nothing happened. Then one day, I got a phone call from Ms. Hånh. Betty had been taken to the hospital. She had suffered a severe head injury from Shaken Baby Syndrome under KŒt’s care. Oklahoma Child Welfare immediately removed Betty from her parents and placed her in foster care. Ms. Hånh wanted me to help her get custody of her granddaughter. Betty was placed with her grandparents. I spoke to the state social worker. I told him about the gun threat and gave him a copy of the police report.

“This was a classic case of Shaken Baby Syndrome,” the worker explained. “Father is home alone with a baby. He is tired. Baby cries. He gets mad. He holds the baby up and shakes the baby so hard the baby’s eyeballs roll back. He starts to panic because he can’t see the color in his baby’s eyes. He rushes her to the hospital and says, ‘I don’t know why she’s like that.’”

The state social worker recommended termination of KiŒt’s rights. The court handed Thäo an ultimatum. She could live with her husband, but lose her daughter or

leave her husband and gain her daughter. Thäo filed for a divorce. KiŒt was forced out of the apartment. If the social worker found him near Betty, Thäo would lose custody of her daughter permanently. I interpreted this to Thäo at the courthouse.

Outside the courthouse, I explained to her what brain injury does to a person. I wanted her to know that it was not just her who was affected, but everyone involved was hurting because of her bad choice. I felt like I was preaching to my sister. I wanted to scream at her, but I left.

The court proceedings were long, complicated, and fraught with red tape, but in the end the divorce papers were finalized. After living with her grandparents for over a year, Betty was returned to Thäo when she was about two years old. I kept in touch with Thäo and tried to help her get through her loneliness. I invited her out to eat at LeSam Restaurant a couple of months after the final court hearing. She was quiet and did not share much. She hardly made eye contact with me, so I knew that KiŒt was still in her life. Betty said Daddy throughout dinner. When I went to my car, I saw that the glass on my car window was smashed. I had a hunch that KiŒt knew that she was there with me. I asked Thäo about KiŒt, but she denied it.

When she called me to invite me to eat, I knew that there were problems with KiŒt. But we talked about her pain in a very indirect way.

"Everything in life happens as a matter of karma, a debt, a fortune. My mother had a chance to get us out before April 30, 1975, but she didn't. We would have gone by plane, not by boat. Had it not been for my father, I could have come at a young age and gone to school here. I could have had a good education like you, then my life would not

be so difficult," she ranted at time and circumstance. Many Vietnamese people are fatalists. They believe fate determines much of a person goes through in life.

Thäo interpreted the suffering in her life as a debt she owed from her previous lives. Suffering was a pay to pay off your debt. I viewed suffering as the consequence of lots of bad choices made in haste rather than through self-examination.

"You can still go to school now," I said hoping to engage her in something she could do each day.

"I don't have the focus to study, the time, or the money to go to school. The only thing I can hope to do is pay off my debt one month at a time like my car," she said.

I helped her get government housing in the London Square apartments where Mr. ThiŒt used to live. I knew that KiŒt had keys to the apartment. Ms. Hånh told me that Betty kept talking about her Daddy playing with her. Betty was starting to talk and say Daddy and KiŒt while her mother tried to hush her. Then I did not hear much talk about KŒt. Ms. Hånh talked about finding a husband for her daughter when she went back to Vietnam, but nothing became of it. The storm seemed as though it subsided. I was brought back to the present.

When I got back from the buffet lines, I smiled at Thäo. She did not look like the same woman who had come to the office years ago pondering about a divorce. I wanted to celebrate her progress, but I was also worried about this new relationship.

"I'm glad you got over KiŒt!" I said, sincerely happy for how far they had come.

"He did such a bad turn on me. I had to get rid of him. He took my credit card, bought a computer and printer and sold them for cash. Then, when I was working at Kim ñô Restaurant, he brought women there. The owner called me to the front when I was

washing dishes and pointed them out. He got me in a $10,000 mess with the credit card company. His brother-in-law is suing him for a debt. He's being served a warrant now."

I was worried Thäo's finances because she was making $1 above the minimum wage. Once she told me, "What you make working part-time as a librarian, I make working three jobs as a dishwasher and a laborer."

I thought about Betty and Thäo and how far they have come along. But I also thought about the roads ahead. I tried to temper my enthusiasm for Thäo's strength in overcoming KiŒt with my concern that she might be opening herself for another fall. The night was young still; there was much food to eat; and much to talk about. I doubled the waitress's tips so she would not lose out because of our long stay.

"What happened to Nam's marriage?" I asked.

"His wife's a gambler. She's lost the family fortune. He cannot handle it anymore," she said.

"What will he do with his daughter if he does come here? Abandon her?"

"She stays with her mother," she said.

Betty's plates piled up with unwanted food. I picked up the meat scraps from the plates for my dogs. Betty got bored and got more.

Thäo sensed my disapproval of this man and protested, "I can't live like this forever. Men I meet don't come unattached." She explained, "They are roughish. They're not the educated ones like where you work. The people who have an education don't want someone like me. I can't live like this forever," she repeated.

I understood the loneliness and desperation in her voice. I divorced my husband in 1997. Thäo, like so many women, wants security, family, and love. It did not matter

what it would take, nor did it matter who the man was. It didn't matter that perhaps he was her friend's husband or that by having him, she was depriving a young girl about her daughter's age of her daddy. Thäo was going to have love and security at whatever cost to others. She lost security and comfort with a man when she was four years old, about Betty's age, when her father went to prison.

The father-daughter relationship sets a precedent for what a young woman looks for in her intimate relationship with a man. A daughter's relationship with her father becomes the blueprint for what she will put up with from other men. Thäo's male model was her brother who, by all accounts, was a thief, a womanizer, and a druggie. KiŒt was not that different. He stole from her, beat her, and injured their daughter.

Thäo knew her father when she was ten years old. "He was dark, old, and ugly when he came home. He looked like a man in his sixties or seventies rather than a man who was forty-something years old," she told me. "He looked worse then than he does now. He wasn't so much violent or lost his temper as he was just set in his own ways. He was very formal. Everything had to be done according to regulated time. There was a time for getting up, eating, and sleeping. When I lived with him even as an adult, the latest I could stay up was nine. He told stories of how his friends starved. How they ate grasshoppers and locusts and died," she said. "It sounded very horrible."

I imagined her father, like my father, traumatized and silent. Two men in two totally different circumstances, and yet the effect of their absences were very similar. My father was absent for many events in my life: eighth grade graduation, high school graduation, B.A. graduation, M.A. graduation, M.H.R. graduation, wedding, my oldest daughter's high school graduation, and probably my Ph.D. graduation. Thäo's father and

mother did not come to her wedding, but at least they were involved in her daughter's life. I watched Mr. Phúc play with Betty, feed her, hold her, and teach her. He was getting to be the father to Betty that he was not able to be for Thäo because he was imprisoned.

Thäo, my sisters, and I have different circumstances but we share the common fate of not being the most important person in our fathers' lives. Thus we have longed to be the most important person in some man's life all our lives. Fathers and husbands, how our identities as women are so enmeshed with theirs? I have searched all my life for a man whom I thought would make me feel as though I were the most important person in his life. I have been searching for the security of my father in my intimate relationships with men. I empathized with Thäo. Parents, children, money, friendship, and personal safety COULD NOT move her to make that break with KiŒt. It was the hope of another man's love that enabled Thäo to get over KiŒt.

"Will you cosign for me if I decide to sponsor him?" Thäo asked playfully but forthrightly.

I smiled at her, knowing that we were sisters of a common fate: the damned unimportant daughters who had grown up without our fathers and are now desperate for another man's love. "I have to see what this guy's all about before I do," I said gently and smilingly.

"Okay. Maybe you can meet him when you visit Vietnam. I want to go there with you as soon as I pass my U.S. citizenship exam. I finally applied," she said boastfully.

"Excellent! I'm so proud of you," I said laughingly as I was thinking of how hard her parents had tried to convince her for months to apply for her citizenship and failed. We ate too much, and it was time to leave.

Thäo and Betty's necklaces and earnings sparkled in the window; a sign of new life. We ate more, and the plates piled up. I forked the meat from Betty's plates onto a napkin to save for my dogs. I thought about her cousin in Vietnam and how these buffet lines would serve entire towns there. I thought about Betty's trauma as a baby and her progress as a little girl and I was happy for her. Then, I thought also about her entitlement as an American in contrast to her Vietnamese cousin. I saw all the food that Thäo and Betty did not eat that was left on the plates on our table and the tables around. I thought about where I was: in an outlet of America's fast, big, consuming, and wasteful empire called Great Fire Mountain Restaurant surrounded by other institutions—big expansive chain stories. As I walked out, more fresh animal carcasses were burning on the grill to serve Americans' insatiable appetites. I wanted to break down and cry, but I did not. Instead, I gave Thäo and Betty a hug and told them that I was happy for them. What else could I have done?

CHAPTER 11

NGUY•N THÎ TH O: AMERICA DEFERRED

Shortly after I interviewed Ms. Hånh, I met Thäo at the Grand House Restaurant for an interview. Thäo did not talk much about her past. She asked me questions about what I thought of the nail business. I recommended that she go to school to learn

English, but she told me it was too late for her. The following passages are from the interview.

I was four years old when Saigon fell and my father went to prison. I did not see my father until I was about ten. My mother, brother, and I moved into live my mother's parents in Saigon. My mother worked morning to night. We hardly saw her. She left for work before we got up and was not there when we slept. We had enough to eat at my grandparents, but no cared for us. We were left on our own. This was when my brother hung around with the wrong crowd. He ditched school and got in trouble with the law before he reached thirteen. By the time my father was released from the reeducation camps, my brother had gotten into a lot of trouble already. He did drugs, messed around with girls, and is still a lost soul.

When my father got out of prison, he was dark, old, and ugly. He looks better today at sixty-something than he did when he first came home from prison. He looked like a man in his sixties or seventies, not someone who was in his early forties. He talked to me about what prison was like: how he starved, the work he did, and about the other men. He said they were hungry all the time. His friends ate grasshoppers and locusts and died.

My father was not temperamental or violent, but he was very serious and formal. Waking, eating, and sleeping had to be done at a certain time just like in prison. He was strict about it. When I lived even as an adult, the latest I could stay up was 9 o'clock. When Betty came from my parents' house to live with me, she lost her sleeping routine that her grandfather set for her when he took care of her. I got yelled at for not getting

her to bed in time. I stay up as late as 11 and sometimes later. My daughter stays up late too.

I did not know that my husband was horrible until I married him and lived with him. I believe that it was my karma, a debt I owed from my previous life. I was not meant to marry the man that I was engaged to in Vietnam. My engagement was set in September 1995, and I came to America in March 1996. I stopped loving him; I do not know why. Had I married him, my life would not be as difficult as it is now. We were not meant to be together. I was meant to marry KiŒt.

Just like I was not meant to come to America in April 1975, though my mother had a chance to board the planes and take my brother and me. But because she could not locate my father, she did not want to leave him behind. I could have finished college and had a career by now had I come to America when I was young. Now, I do not have the mind to study anything. I am swamped with bills to pay. I make $6.50 an hour working three jobs to support my daughter. All I see are the corners of dishwashing stations and the assembly lines that run through the belts. I missed so many chances of coming to America sooner than when I did. My mother, brother, and I attempted four times to escape Vietnam, but we failed each time.[46] Each time we tried, we were caught or the operation failed because of security reasons. It was dangerous and expensive. My mother had to pay so much money to buy our way out. One dark night, we rode a bus packed with people all trying to flee the country. We were robbed by men carrying guns and dynamite who threatened to blow us up if we did not give them money. We gave them everything only to learn later that their weapons were fake guns. We got caught

one time and were thrown in the reeducation jail. They separated the men and boys in one place and women and girls in another. When they saw that my brother was young, they sent all three of us to the back of the camp. When we saw that they were not guarding us, we stripped off all our belongings, ran to the street, and caught the bus back to Saigon. That was the last time my mother tried to escape Viet Nam.

My brother and I missed a lot of school because we went with our mother to try and escape. We could never catch up, so we were held back from classes. My brother quit school, and so did I. I only completed 8th grade.[47] I worked as a seamstress at various places.

Then we missed coming to America in 1993. That was the worst time of all. My father filed paperwork to come to America under the H.O. Program because he was a former political prisoner. We were interviewed, so we thought we would surely say farewell to Vietnam . We sold our home and moved in with my grandparents. My father, mother, and I quit our work to get ready to go. Then, we were denied. My grandparents kicked us out of their home. We had to rent a home, which was not easy in Vietnam. We had to live inside the home with another family. It was crowded and uncomfortable.

Then, my father resubmitted his file. We had to leave my brother's name off the application and not claim him as a family member. It was just as well. He was too far gone; there is no hope for him. Then our file was cleared, and we came to Oklahoma City.

[46] There is a contradiction between Ms. Hånh's narrative and Thäo's. Ms. Hånh implied that she never tried to leave Vietnam while her husband was in prison.

[47] Ms. Hånh stated that Thäo completed 5th grade, but Thäo stated 8th grade.

I met KiŒt at Unit Parts where I worked. I knew my parents did not like him, but I married him anyway. I should have listened to them, but I rebelled against them to my detriment. Now I suffer, and my life is unstable. Yet, with all life's troubles, my daughter Betty makes life worth living. Without her, I do not know that I want to go on.

CHAPTER 12

LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF THE VIETNAMESE POLITICAL PRISONERS

Stories told by survivors of the Vietnamese reeducation camps horrify and chill me. For the last five years, I have been listening and reading the chronicles of their prison experiences. They describe a world where wading in freezing cold water without shoes or proper clothing, carrying trees cut down by hand tools, building shelters from nothing, and eating 500 grams of rice each day were the norms of their existence. Their world consisted of starvation, disease, and death. Listening to these men tell their story has deepened my reading of the ten written narratives of the South Vietnamese political prisoners that have been translated into English. This total of ten accounts that have emerged for the English speaking audience from a pool of a conservatively estimated 300,000 prisoners illustrates a wide disparity between a tragic historical experience and the lack of written historical narratives.[48] No English stories have been written at all by female political prisoners. Therefore, I will refer to all these prisoner narratives discussed as he.

The prison stories that I have documented and the stories that have been published carry common themes and structures. A clearer image of their experiences emerges in these prison narratives. All prisoner narrators merged their personal fate with the fate of their nation fusing the historical and political with the personal. Their stories begin with *ngày mÃt nÜ§c*, the day of national loss, April 30, 1975, then move to imprisonment, release, and exile. All prison narrators reveal who they were on the day of mourning: the

positions they held, their family life, their state of mind, and what they saw. The identity of the narrator connects him to the reader and sets up a plot in which the narrator/hero is a condemned enemy of the new state. April 30, 1975 signifies the beginning of the end of an entire way of life; the setting of the fall of the nation mirrors the narrators' own diminished political, social, and economic situation.

Vietnamese prison narrators employ various literary modes in bringing the remote into the world of the familiar. As agents of history, they assume multiple roles: storyteller, historian, reporter, victim, survivor, actor, and protagonist. The "I" embodies all these roles simultaneously. Voices of survivors of historical events carry the authority of experience both as actors and as eyewitnesses. The elements of a story are encoded in each of the narratives. April 30, 1975 is a historical referent. However, in prison narratives the secondary referent which connects readers to the experience is the plot structure. The plot reflects the order of events set by the new state: beguilement, captivity, release and exile.

All prison narrators depict the details of the day they heard the announcement to register for reeducation. The first and foremost experience of Vietnam under Communism was being deceived by the false promise made by the Communists. Their journey of captivity begins with a false promise of clemency. In retrospect, the day would prove to be another day of mourning—when people turned themselves into prisoners. For some, it would be the last day they would see their families. Colonel Trần Van Phúc entitled the account of that day as "Turning Myself In."[49] He would serve for

[48] Ginetta Sagan and Stephen Denney, 21; Pike, 72.

[49] TrÀn Van Phuc in *Reeducation in Postwar Vietnam: Personal Postscript to Peace*, ed. Edward P. Metzner (College Station: Texas A&M UP), 7.

13 years from that day in camps and in prisons. For those who survived, that day marked the beginning of a discovery and an unveiling of the vengeful and destructive intent of the Vietnamese Communists.

On another level narratives of former political prisoners of South Vietnam uncover the blueprint of the Communist Party's strategies and devices for incarceration and detainment. Le Hu'u Tri's *Prisoner of the Word: A Memoir of the Vietnamese Reeducation Camps*, detailed accounts of multiple schemes that enabled the Communists to control prisoners. *Prisoner of the Word* is one of two narratives written by the prisoners in English. Le organizes his memoir in periods. Each period pronounces at least one repressive tactic in action. For example, a chapter entitled "January 1976" is a narration of a prisoner in Le's company who was sent to observe the execution of a prisoner named Mr. Nghia. The report was a tactic used to discourage others from escaping which succeeded through words. Le brings the execution to life by quoting the reporter's words. A narrative within a narrative, Le combines the imaginative with the historical to convey how information was transmitted in the camps and the impact information has on prisoners. The Communists succeeded in deterring others from escape: "Political Officer Luan explained Mr. Nghia's case. My friends and I all agreed that it was too dangerous to escape now. We felt it was better to wait until the Communists released us."[50] Other forms of control detailed by Le include divide and conquer tactics that were detrimental to prisoners. This strategy created moles who reported on their fellow co-prisoners in exchange for lighter work duties or shorter

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[50] Le, 41.

sentences. Such tactics succeeded because they preyed on the hopes of prisoners in despair. Hope, in Le's memoir as in all the narratives, was a double-edged sword. Hope compelled prisoners to live when they would rather die; but, hope was exploited by the Communists to repress prisoners. Le writes in the preface, "It was usually the hope of being released and the fear of getting punished that kept me from escaping from these low-security camps."[51] Le's memoir is a study into the Communist's masterful strategies of control, brilliant in its design and yet diabolical in its implementation.

Like Le Hu'u Tri, Lu Van Thanh also wrote his memoir in English. *The Inviting Call of Wandering Souls* expresses despair, cruelties, and deaths by illustration and narrative. Like other narratives, the journey of captivity begins with a false promise: "As prisoners we were in a hopeless situation, but we were still innocent enough to believe what they said. My personal experience has been that communists do not carry out what they promise. To them, a promise means only that it is a promise and there is no obligation to fulfill it."[52] The day of registration is described by Lu Van Thanh in *The Inviting Call of Wandering Souls*:

> Official news by the local authorities also stated that anyone who obeyed this order [to report to the local authorities] would receive an act of clemency from the Communist party and the government. Those who tried to show stubbornness or who deliberately disobeyed the order would have to accept full responsibility for their actions before the party and the people.
>
> Every face was beaming with joy at the news. Wives packed up everything for their husbands days before the due date; parents encouraged their beloved sons to report on time; and sisters were busy with preparing food, rice, cookies, candies along with some medicine for their brothers.[53]

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[51] Le, 12.

[52] Thanh, 78.

[53] Lu Van Thanh, *The Inviting Call of Wandering Souls: Memoir of an ARVN Liaison Officer to United States Forces in Vietnam* (North Carolina: McFarlin & Company, 1997) 48.

These two passages are painfully revealing of how vulnerable a defeated people are. Fear of retribution made clemency a cause for celebration. The image of families being joyfully compliant and the reality of what awaited Lu and his family suggest the trust among the people and how that trust would soon be violated. Lu would not be freed until April 30, 1982, seven years later, when 59 people, six of whom are his family members, escaped on a small boat and were rescued by a U.S. ship. His four years in the reeducation camp along with the three years after release were depicted as a journey into death and salvation. Like other prison narrators, the plot naturally moves toward experiences of death.

In Lu's memoir, twenty-two starkly black and white ink images of men subjected to excessive brutality immediately draw readers into the hellish experiences of the reeducation camps. Drawings of deaths are interspersed throughout the book: men hung dead on poles, man shot through the barbed wire, men killed in minefields, a man hung upside down in a dark cell, men chopping trees without shirts or shoes, men carrying tree trunks on their backs, men crossing rivers with tree trunks on their backs. Through these images, Lu depicts the different ways in which the Communists killed South Vietnam. He uses the metaphor of water buffaloes as an analogy of what human lives are worth in the new state. Underneath one of the illustrations, Lu writes: "Under the communist regime, human life is worthless. Political prisoners forcibly cleared a minefield by hands and sticks to protect the buffaloes."[54] The texts elaborate and detail the particularities of deaths captured in the images.

[54] Lu, 81.

Lu records the suicide of Lieutenant Colonel Hoa and the deadly escape of Loi as a testimony of Communist "victory amongst their prisoners after their 1975 onslaught."[55] Naming the dead honors them at the same time it condemns their killers. The execution of Captain Than by the firing squad is commemorated by an ink drawing of men tied to poles with their heads hung down in a bamboo field and by characterization:

> Lieutenant Commander Than, who was one of the most dangerous opponents in the regime according to the communists, went before a firing squad after his escape from camp did not succeed (illustration 8.3). He had stopped to help another escapee whose leg wound became seriously infected after a couple of days in the deep jungle. As a result, he was recaptured by the guards.
>
> Commander Than was an unyielding officer in camp. His cool and contemptuous manner toward the enemy drew our admiration. Many times he daringly asked Major Hanh to shoot him in front of the central hall. Than overtly criticized the arbitrary policy of the camp, the misuse of the prisoners' manpower, and the mistreatment from the cadres and guards, as well as the different forms of corruption.[56]

A portrait of a hero is drawn textually and pictorially. Captain Than's life and death embodies what prisoners most admired and most feared: the courage to resist oppression and the ultimate consequence of courage which is death.

In Trần Tri Vu 381-page *Lost Years: My 1,632 Days in Vietnamese Reeducation Camps* death has no heroes, no purpose and is senseless and meaningless. *Lost Years* is the longest narrative out of all the ten prison narratives. Written in Vietnamese, it was translated into English. Trần Tri Vu extraordinarily expounds on facets of prison life ranging from ghastly death experiences to humorous music performances that served as entertainment for the New Year. Trần treats occurrences as subject matters, providing readers with vivid details and insight. Underneath the stories is a strong moral message

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[55] Lu, 103.

[56] Lu, 97.

expressing Trần's outrage. An explosion that brought death and destruction in the camps is told with precision and clarity with a specific date in a specific social milieu. The following passage exemplifies Trần's skill as a storyteller:

> During my whole period of reeducation, many events occurred that I can never forget; they are intensely alive in my memory; they still haunt me and maybe will forever. One of these events happened on the eve of election day, the first election of its kind to be held nationwide since the Northern armies swarmed the South. It was April 24, 1976. That day, loudspeakers installed on cars and vans were constantly urging the citizens of Xuan Loc to go to vote the next day. . . . I was sitting near the fence, facing the area where the *bodoi* were quartered, and I watched them idly as they joyfully distributed some sugar among themselves. Perhaps the imminent election had called for celebration. A *bodoi* called out, 'Please, comrades in the cell assemble for the distribution of sugar! And mind you, this is Cuban sugar!'[57]

The celebration of election day turned deadly when the *bodois* (cadres or guard) threw phosphorous into the air and set fire to the ammunition dump. The explosions are described vividly:

> Our cries were drowned out by deafening explosions, and suddenly there was chaos all around. Those who had been taking a midday nap roused from sleep and dashed back and forth in search of shelter. I ran from the fire and took refuge behind the raised concrete floor of a building that we had just repaired. . . .
>
> I heard the frightening shriek of rockets added to the boom of artillery shells, then the deep, hollow sound of explosions coming from afar. Clearly, the fire had reached the rocket dump. The shrieking noise filled our hearts with terror.[58]

The explosion was the result of foul play of the *bodois*, but what was most repulsive to Trần was how the death and injury of seventeen were treated. Trần expresses his incredulous indignation in the following passage:

> The next day we were allowed to prepare our mate Duong for proper burial. In contrast to previous occasions at Trang Lon camp, where our dead companions had

[57] Trần Tri Vu, *Lost Years: My 1632 Days in Reeducation Camps*, trans. NguyÍn Phuc (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 85.

[58] Trần, 86.

> been wrapped carelessly in ponchos, Duong was placed in a real coffin purchased from the undertaker in town. This was the first and only time I ever witnessed a reeducation camp inmate being buried in a coffin as if he were an ordinary citizen. On occasions that followed, corpses were wrapped in sleeping mats or placed in rough coffins we made ourselves.
>
> Although it was obvious that the explosions had occurred because the young *bodoi* had been playing their silly game, loudspeaker vans went around the town that night announcing the culprits had been caught![59]

The story of the explosion exposes a system where ignorance, senseless death, and oppression converge with deadly consequences. Trần's moral outrage is directed at the senseless death and the lies propagated in the cause of death.

Debunking Communist lies with evidence from their personal lives is one of the most prominent themes in all the prison narratives. Statements like Reverend Peter Dinh Ngoc Que's *Memoirs of a Priest in the Communist Reeducation Camp* are found in all the prison narratives: "Living with the communists for 13 years, I come to know that nothing is true in what they say. To them, truth does not exist. Back home, after my release in 1988, one of my friends asked me: 'What have you learned from the communists?' 'Only one thing,' I answered, 'That is how to lie.' I was serious about what I was saying. But my friend could not help bursting into laughter."[60] Que's tone is sarcastic and bitter. The evidence of the lie is in Que's thirteen years confinement. Colonel Huynh Van Chinh entitled the chapter in which he registered for reeducation program, "The Lie of 'Thirty Days'"[61] because 30 days became 13 years. What narrators explicitly state by detailing the false promise of clemency is that they were

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[59] Trần, 88.

[60] Peter Ngoc Father Que Dinh, Reverend, *Memoirs of a Priest in the Communist Reeducation Camp (1975-1988)*, trans. Trần Van Dien (n.p.: privately printed, 2000) 81.

[61] Huynh Van Chinh, "Colonel Huynh Van Chinh's Story," in Reeducation in Postwar Vietnam: Personal Postscript to Peace, ed. Edward P. Metzner (College Station: Texas A&M UP), 55.

condemned men from the onset of Communist victory. Narrators make a strong case that this was preplanned in the reconstruction of the South. The annihilation of Vietnam's most capable men had always been in the works of Communist victory. They set the date and time of when they heard the announcement to register, only a few days after April 30, 1975. The date of registration is a critical date in the plot structure of imprisonment. In written and oral narratives, this date changed their lives forever. The date serves as proof to the prisoners that the reeducation camps and prisons were pre-designed to punish the South Vietnamese after victory.

Reverend Peter Dinh Ngoc Que's *Memoirs of a Priest in the Communist Reeducation Camp (1975-1988)* and Archbishop F.X. NguyÍn Van Thuan's *The Road of Hope* not only expose Communist lies but also the misperception that reeducation camps were reserved only for military and official civilian personnel. Religious leaders were categorized as part of the higher-ranking officials, professionals, and intellectuals who were persecuted and incarcerated for longer periods than lower-ranking military and civilian personnel. They were mostly sent to the north after 1975. Historically, the northern camps, situated in Hanoi, were reserved for senior military and intelligence officers because conditions in the north were harsher.[62] Father Que and Archbishop Thuan's memoirs testify to the religious persecution that is often not associated with the Communist's penal systems. Father Que and Archbishop Thuan spent 13 years in the Communist reeducation camps; Archbishop Thuan spent the last 9 years in isolation and

[62] Young, 525.

Father Que was sent to the north camps from 1976 up until the time of his release. Father Que notes that religious people were regarded as criminals against the state:

> Camp Nam Ha with a big gate, high walls and a very large yard looked so peaceful admist romantic natural surroundings. It was ironic that it turned out to be a prison. That was one of the camps run by public security service notorious for severity. Of three divisions A, B and C totaling 15,000 political prisoners of the South, Division A was the largest with the presence of virtual all the representatives of the entire former government of the South, I might say, Prime Ministers, Congressmen, City-Mayors, District-Chiefs, religious leaders, members of political parties, high-ranking officers of the army, military police, security and intelligence agents, not to mention Fulro members and fighters for the recovery of national independence who came late.[63]

Religious leaders, according to the above passage, pose as much a national security threat as high-ranking politicians, and military officers. The passage indicates that in a totalitarian society, those who practice religion were disdained and regarded as enemies of the state. He records the solitary confinement of 39 priests and one seminarist, most of whom were former chaplains from the South. One priest who was imprisoned before the fall of Saigon spent 20 years in confinement because of his religious conviction.[64] *The Road* and *Memoirs of a Priest* are two most widely read books among the Vietnamese communities overseas especially among Vietnamese Catholics. Both were translated into English and promoted by Archbishop Bernard Cardinal Law who wrote the Preface.

Those who write about the journey to north Vietnam represent the physical journey to the prison camps as part of a death sentence. For Que, the gruesome journey was telling of what lies ahead:

> We were ordered to go down and get in line to climb aboard [a ship], one after the other. A shaky ladder hung steep against the side of the ship served as the only

[63] Que, 167.

[64] Que, 256-57.

> entrance. My hair stood on end when I watched people risk their lives, trying to climb up the ladder under the pressure of Communist cadres who kept urging them to go fast. I personally saw a person miss a step and fall down to the river. The cadres, however, did not care to rescue him. He must be drowned in the dark, cold water. I could do nothing but pray for him, thinking to myself how cheap human life is to the Communists.[65]

The common sentiment expressed by prisoners is the devaluation of human lives as reiterated by Que in his assessment of "how cheap human life is to the Communists." The image of a man drowned in the dark cold water, the ship in the night, a hanging ladder, the Communist cadres confirm Que's belief. The devaluation of human lives descends further as the ship sails north:

> At the corner of the hold were placed two barrels covered with two large mats for toilet. Each person was provided with two nylon bags for urination. Yes, we were given means of relieving ourselves. But how to use them was quite a problem. Can you imagine the situation when so many people go toilet in a narrow hold of the ship, right where they eat and sleep? Adding to the misery was the strong bad smelling of body's waste matter which filled the air throughout a long voyage. Due to a great number of people, two barrels were soon filled. Time and again, we had to carry them up deck in order to dump the putrid waste into the ocean. While moving, the barrels dropped the waste everywhere in the ship, smearing even those sitting and lying around. In addition, the washing and cleaning were very limited for shortage of water which made the situation even more unbearable.[66]

The state of human misery is profound in the above passage. Four hundred people were pushed to the bottom of the ship. People were reduced to eating and sleeping next to their own wastes. Father Que exposes the filth that prisoners experienced. The misery of the trip was responsible for the death of one man who "not being able to stand the misery during the voyage . . . poisoned himself that night and died.[67] His body was dumped in

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[65] Que, 111.

[66] Que, 112.

[67] Que, 113.

the ocean. The train rides were not that much different because the carriages were packed "filled to capacity, the back entrance . . . shut down, letting no air in."[68] Someone died from suffocation and exhaustion, Father Que notes. What awaited Father Que and thousands of prisoners were the northern cold, the hostile northern people, their isolated agrarian culture, the barrenness of their existence, the long separation for families, and the hard labor imposed on them.

All narrators distinguish their narratives of experiences in the South camps from their years in the camps north of Hanoi. The narratives of Peter Dinh Ngoc Que, Colonel Trần Van Phúc, Colonel Huynh Van Chinh, the unnamed Colonel (Narrator 12), and NguyÍn Ngoc Ngan depict the severe cold northern terrain as hostile, foreign, and unsuitable for living. In this remote terrain, prisoners were hidden from the international scrutiny. While the unnamed Colonel spent five years and NguyÍn Ngoc Ngan who spent one year in the northern camps, the other three spent 13 years in prison, mostly in the north. Northerners lacked technological advances in farming and were still using human wastes as fertilizer. Labor was done by hands without the aid of machines. The misery of the northern camps was further exacerbated by the fact that prisoners were locked up in actual prisons cells run by the police rather than by the local *bodois*. Rather than the open space in which one big fence enclosed the entire campus such as the camps in the south, these northern camps were compartments of barracks and cells. Trần Van Phúc

[68] Que, 114.

was handcuffed in barracks where "ninety or a hundred . . . inmates lie down side by side like sardines."[69] The death journey is pronounced in witnessing the deaths of others.

Trần Van Phúc records deaths that he saw and heard about in his years in the North: "The final and irrevocable release by death continued to come to many. Professor X died of a stomach ulcer and inmate L. died of leukemia. General N. passed away from prostrate cancer, Colonel Ph.Nh.H. from tuberculosis, and Colonel H. and General Q. from strokes. These were the only deaths that I witnessed, but there were many more which I did not see."[70] The cause of death is not execution but extreme starvation combined with hard labor. Chapters "Winter Weather" and "Slow Starvation" tell why prisoners die over time:

> Our minimum daily need for rice alone was six hundred grams, additional food not considered. Many times we had to eat rotten rice, spoiled by worms and years in storage. Now and then, the rice was replaced by some manioc, potatoes, corn, *bo bo*, which was a kind of cereal normally fed to cattle or pigs, or boiled rolls of wheat flour. Exhausted by daylong hard labor and plagued by constant hunger and thirst, we resorted to eating rare, unlucky grasshoppers caught and roasted over small fires. Those who worked in the fields were fortunate to have the opportunity to catch and eat frogs, earthworms, and crickets, in addition to some edible wild weeds. Those who worked the rice paddies occasionally found small shrimp and tiny crabs, which were quickly consumed raw before the guards discovered them. It was a sad, uncivilized spectacle of frail, deteriorating bodies seeking any way to survive.[71]

"Deteriorating bodies seeking any way to survive" is suggestive of killing through deprivation of the basic necessities of life. Men were left to eat whatever they could find. Deaths by food poisoning, dysentery, and lack of nutrition were the result of such

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[69] Trần, 17.

[70] Trần, 26.

[71] Trần, 19.

deprivation. An eight-hour workday ranged from blacksmithing, carpentry, gardening, and farming. Hunger is described by all the narrators as one of the most effective means of control. Hunger, along with extreme hard labor, culminated in death and destruction.

Colonel Huynh Van Chinh represents his death-like experience by displaying two sets of photos: two taken in 1973 and two taken in 1988, after he had spent thirteen years in prison. The image of a young man in his military outfit standing proudly, his wide face with full cheeks smiling, contrasts with a picture of an old man whose face is skeletal with sunken eyes. This photographic juxtaposition functions as testimony of his "deteriorating body." Similarly to other prison narratives, Chinh describes the executions of those who attempted to escape as further proof to the horror of the camp. Chinh describes their punishment:

> The Communists had us dig four holes up in the mountain. The holes were just deep enough and wide enough for a man to stand in. We laid planks across the top and covered these with dirt, as though burying the men alive. The escapees were shacked in these holes night and day, and were let out only to relieve themselves. They were not given blankets or nets to keep off insects or to protect them against the daytime heat and nighttime cold and dampness of the ground. After a short time, the three prisoners who were not battle trained could no longer stand the punishment. They confessed everything and were released to hard labor. As for the leader, he was found hanged, although we thought the Communists had beaten and strangled him, since we knew he had not been allowed to have anything on him with which he might hang himself. For burial, the Communists simply placed him on a mat deep in the jungle.[72]

Chinh mentions another South Vietnamese resister who was tortured and executed. His burial is characteristic of how in life as in death the value of South Vietnamese prisoners amounted to nothing.

[72] Huynh, 76-77.

The burial of these men is characteristic of the value of South Vietnamese prisoners. Unlike Father Que's memoir, Archbishop Thuan's *The Road of Hope* is not a detailed account of his 13 years in the camps. Thuan's narrative is unlike any other prison narratives in that the 13 years experiences in prison is condensed to a brief statement of fact of when he was detained and the exact date of his release. Details or accounts about his life in confinement are not recorded. The fact of his 13 years of imprisonment functions primarily as an example of Thuan's endurance through suffering. The details of those 13 years are not the focus of Thuan's book. They serve as an example of what is possible through faith his faith in God. Thuan's message to his readers is that there is hope even in the most trying circumstances. Hope is a theme implied in all prison narratives, but it is a theme made most explicitly in Thuan's spiritual biography. His book is a guide on how to overcome hardship and live a holy life. Each chapter reflects on spiritual components toward a holy life. By not making his prison experiences the primary focus of his book, Thuan reaches out to people who might not have experienced prison but who suffer in other ways. Thuan's life is the embodiment of great suffering, but more importantly, it is his transcendence that he chooses to record. Isolation did not strip him of his moral or spiritual beliefs. In fact, the incarceration strengthened his faith. His message of hope is unequivocal: hope is possible in all circumstances. Hope is a gift which the Communists could not strip from him. *The Road* shares one common theme which underscores all prison narratives: the Communists failed to completely strip men of their humanity; they failed to break a men's faith; and they failed to destroy souls. Political prisoners narrate their stories to testify not only to the horror of the camps, but they write to celebrate their strengths of surviving the horror.

This is one of the reasons that prisoners who do not want to write their stories record their experiences orally.

Prison narrators who did not write their own books relied on non-Vietnamese oral historians, ethnographers, researchers, and translators to record their stories. Once the prisoners knew that I was going to have their stories published as a dissertation, they agreed to have their stories recorded, translated, and made public. They wanted their truths made known to the public. They wanted people to know what they lived through.

Five former officers of the Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) have had stories documented through oral interviews. An unnamed Colonel (Narrator 12) and Captain Hùng are two narrators are part of a collection of fourteen Vietnamese-american voices compiled by James Freeman in *Hearts of Sorrow*: *Vietnamese American Lives*. Thus far, the only known anthology devoted entirely to Vietnamese political prisoners in the reeducation camps is *Reeducation in Postwar Vietnam: Personal Postcripts to Peace* compiled by Edward Metzner. This work consists of narratives of two prisoners: Colonel Trần Van Phúc and Colonel Huynh Van Chinh. Metzner narrates aspects of General Le Minh Dao that Metzner knew and what became of Dao who "rotted in North Vietnamese jails for seventeen years."[73] Because Dao did not narrate his own story, the discussion will not include him.

A total of five out of ten prison narratives obtained through the collaborative process of an interviewer demonstrates the importance of the role of researchers and translators. As American editors, Freeman and Metzner, add a different dimension to prison narratives. They discuss their relationship with the men whom they interviewed,

[73] Metzner, 122.

how they came to know these men, what they saw that was particularly interesting, the interview process, and the general motive which underscores the narratives. Because Freeman and Metzner are Americans, former Vietnamese prisoners knew that they are speaking directly to their American interviewers with the possibility of reaching a larger American audience. As observers, they could give a broader view of their subjects. Metzner states thatthe main conviction behind the collection of prison narratives was to set the record straight: "Each of my former comrades who has contributed to this book has chosen to tell his story so history and moral record might be set straight and that accurate presentation of fact will illuminate and distinguish truth from the blatant fabrication and fiction spewed from Hanoi."[74] As a long-time friend of the prisoners and a Vietnam veteran, Metzner sympathetically reasserts the narrators' motivation behind their willingness to talk about their past. Metzner becomes an agent by which Vietnamese prisoners' truths are voiced in the American discourse.

Freeman enabled 14 Vietnamese refugees to tell their stories. Unlike Metzner,who knew the men whom he interviewed, Freeman began his research project knowing very little about Vietnamese-Americans. After talking to some 40 Vietnamese exiles over the course of six years, Freeman gained insight into what divided their nation, why North and South Vietnam exists. His interview with Captain Hùnga former political prisoner, shed some insight into the deep division that exists among Vietnamese. Freeman explains: "I wanted to understand why he [Captain Hùng], like so many other Vietnamese-Americans spoke of Communism with such vehemence. That his father, a wealthy contractor, had been killed by the Communists, came as no surprise,

[74] Metzner, xiii.

nor did his personal reaction. But as I listened to his story, I came to see in it not the individual sufferings of one man, but the despair of a people who witnessed the fall of their nation, the destruction of their way of life."[75] Freeman not only gained insight into the sentiments shared by Vietnamese-Americans but also insight into their historical relationship with the Communist Party. Captain Hùng's father was one of thousands of landowners who were slaughtered by the Communists during the land reform program. In 1954, the Geneva Accord allowed for open migration of North and South Vietnamese across the 17th Parallel. One million North Vietnamese left their ancestral land and migrated south; they chose to live in a non-communist state because they had experienced the violent annihilation of a class of people. Captain Hùng recalls, "When I was six years old, the Communists came to our house in Hanoi, killed my father, and took away our property. My mother died of grief years later. I never forgot that, so in 1954, when the opportunity came, I left for the South; I was fifteen years old."[76] Captain Hùng provides the historical context out of which his hatred for Communism stems. He shares this view with other South Vietnamese, non-prisoners and prisoners, who were unified in their purpose to have their works made available in English: they want to expose and testify to the inhumane practices of torture, abuse, and oppression committed by the Vietnamese Communist Party as experienced in their own lives.

Captain Hùng, more than any other prisoner, expressed outrage at the Americans and at Vietnamese Communism for the fate of Vietnamese prisoners. "I want people to

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[75] Hùng 256.

[76] Ibid.

know what happened to us when America abandoned us to the Communists,"[77] he remonstrates. He is seemingly less hesitant than other Vietnamese in caring about sounding as though he is ungrateful to the Americans for their intervention in his exile. He holds Americans partly responsible for the imprisonment of former allies. He lashes out at South Vietnamese leader Nguyễn Van Thiệ u and high-ranking officers who "ran away and left us to our fate."[78] Captain Hùng's "blunt uncompromising manner"[79] as assessed by Freeman pervades in his narrative.

Shorter than other prison narratives, Captain Hùng's 13-page account of his three-year in the reeducation camps consists of near death experiences similar to those recorded by other prisoners. Execution, death, starvation, and hard work are told in an uncompromising style. Grotesque images of deteriorated bodies arise from Captain Hùng's matter-of-fact mode of speaking to Freeman. Here is an example of Captain Hùng telling Freeman about the causes of death in the camps:

> In my group of 30, two men died; some groups had more and some had less who died. The causes were first that we were forced to do very heavy work while receiving little food. We quickly became exhausted; we deteriorated fast. Second, many people had dysentery. Third, because of diet deficiencies, particularly meat and milk, many people developed rheumatism and other crippling and paralyzing diseases that looked like polio. Finally, although we had doctors, we had no medicines and no surgery room. The amputation of limbs was done with a handsaw, without anesthesia. I know of six prisoners in our battalion who had their limbs taken off in this way. Several of them died from infections.
>
> The reason they lost their limbs in the first place was infection. While working in the jungle, they would get a slight injury. Because we had no medicines, infections developed: pustules grew, the infection spread until the arm or leg was full of

[77] Ibid.

[78] Hùng258.

[79] Hùng260.

> gangrenous pus. Then the limb had to go. The prisoner was put in sick bay. Inside a mosquito net they cut off his limb, applying the only medicine they had, hot water. The patients cried loudly because there was nothing to stop their enormous pain. Everyone in the camp heard their terrible screams. Then their stumps became infected, and they died.[80]

The horror of the camps is revealed in these two paragraphs. The image of the handsaw cutting flesh, hot water, no anesthesia, and the terrible screams is perhaps one of the most terrifying images of deteriorating bodies. This bleak picture invokes the reality of the Nazi internment camps where people were also operated on without proper modern medical apparatus. The magnitude of crimes committed against humanity by the Vietnamese Communists is described in these passages. They underscore the brutality and inhumane practices of the Communists in slowly slaughtering their enemies. Freeman's interview with an unnamed Colonel (Narrator 12) shows mental afflictions that prisoners endured.

Freeman was able to interview the Colonel within three weeks after his arrival in America which may explain his passion, anger, and vivid details. Freeman knew of the Colonel by a Vietnamese man who had been a life-long friend of the Colonel. Freeman spent 28 hours with the Colonel and observed this: "During his year as a prisoner, the colonel's body weight dropped by almost one-half, from 75 to about 40 kilograms. The ravages of his experience showed in his gaunt face, deep sunken eyes, prematurely gray hair, and in his slow speech and weary movements. Despite the pain it brought, he insisted on recalling his experiences in detail so that Americans will know of the ordeal of the reeducation camps' prisoners."[81] This detail is compelling because it shows the the

[80] Hùng261.
[81] Freeman, 203.

Colonel's conviction and his purpose in talking to Freeman. Freeman's description of the Colonel is significant because it revealed the toll prison life had on the Colonel.

The Colonel's narrative is startlingly vivid in images and expansive in his subject matter. Like Que, the Colonel spent five of his six years in the northern camps. What is strikingly different about the Colonel's narrative is his willingness to reveal his own mental collapse which led to attempts at self-annihilation. A chapter entitled "Attempts At Suicide" recounts the unbearable conditions that led the Colonel to attempt to take his own life. Suicide is a reality in the reeducation camps as recorded in other prison narratives such as the suicide of Lieutenant Colonel Hoa in Lu Van Thanh's *The Wandering*. In narrating his own attempt at suicide, the Colonel sheds light on the unbearable circumstances led him to that point. He was criticized and later ostracized by fellow prisoners because he did not finish his work on time and kept others behind. Compounded with the extreme conditions of hunger, exhaustion, and an untreated ulcer, the Colonel's emotional state descends into total despair. Suicide was an alternative except that his chloroquinine was confiscated. Prisoners took their frustrations out on each other and inflicted pain onto one another by socially alienating them from the group. The Colonel's narration of his second suicide reveals his alienation from his prison mates and from his immediate family.

Colonel's second attempt at his own life was made shortly after his wife's surprise visit. She informed him that his two sons were held in the Cong Son prison, a remote island which held criminal and political detainees, for trying to flee the country. The Colonel's wife blamed him for not leaving Vietnam earlier when the family had the chance. As reflected in the narratives, prisoners were confronted with terrible choices to

leave their homeland or stay and persevere under the new state. The Colonel says: "My wife was very angry with me. She reminded me that in 1975 she had implored me by telephone to let her and the children escape in advance of me, but I had preferred that we escape together. My plan of escape had failed."[82] Thousands of South Vietnamese families faced similar miseries, regrets, and post-1975 depression because of their decision to stay together as a family. The Colonel's narrative stresses the fact that part of the misery was knowing that families were mistreated and deprived. One of the major themes in prison narratives is the suffering endured by family members because of their relationship to the prisoner. This theme is accentuated especially among prisoners who were married with children at the time of their imprisonment.

Like other prisoner narratives, Colonel Trần Van Phúc and Colonel Huynh Van Chinh invoke the struggle of their families as a source of suffering. Phúc writes, "That absence of twelve years, eight months and four days is clearly burned into my memory because of the great and constant pain endured during the separation from the family.[83]" The loss of 13 years spent away from families can never be replaced. Chinh describes his family's life when he was released and saw what they had lived through: "The family enjoyed the blessing of being together for the lunar New Year celebration even though the house was in terrible condition. The roof was half thatch and half tin and leaked badly when it rained. Posts were propped up in many places to keep the roof from collapsing. It grieved me to realize that my wife and children had been living like this for

[82] Colonel, 252.

[83] Trần Van Phúc, 10.

thirteen years."[84] In the post-prison narrative, prisoners share the unjust and oppressive experiences with family members. Release from prison did not mean freedom. Prisoners represent their post-prison life as one of poverty, discrimination, alienation, "big brother" interference, "jungle law," and second-class status. Branded as ex-prisoners, they confronted a society which had degenerated into lawlessness, corruption, and treachery. Prisoners went from one state of imprisonment to another. Chinh describes his post-prison life as an entering another mode of imprisonment: "Under the Communists, every place was like a prison, but at least now I was with my family and not trapped inside four walls, waking each morning to the clanging of a gong."[85]

South Vietnamese political prisoners set up the post-prison context as a depraved and dead-end kind of existence to convey that exile was the only means for the family to survive. They represent their feelings of despair, ineptitude, alienation, and emasculation by portraying the victimization of their family members. Prisoners saw their children being disqualified from attending universities because of their father's prison status. Most likely, their children received an education inferior to their fathers' because they were discriminated against in schools. Their wives worked long hours in menial jobs to support the entire family. Family properties were confiscated, forcing them to live in impoverished conditions. They had to report to the hamlet chiefs who had the power to certify their citizenship rights or send them to prisons. They could be arrested at anytime for whatever charges and be thrown back into the camps. Family businesses and profits

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[84] Huynh, 95.

[85] Ibid.

were forced to pay taxes and debts that exceeded their capability. Furniture and goods were confiscated to pay for debts owed to the government. The fear of being sent to the New Economic Zone loomed over them. These facets of post prison life are represented as a continuance of Communist revenge and hatred against their former enemies. Exile was the only means to achieve freedom and equal opportunity for the prisoner and his family to thrive socially, economically, and politically. Lu more than any other narrator elaborated on the oppressive state of the post-prison experience.

Lu devotes fifty pages of his 180-page memoir to the post-prison condition. He recounts his two desperate attempts to illegally escape the country as a testimony of the unbearable weight of the iron clad regime. He builds his narrative towards a dramatic escape at the end when 59 on a small rickety boat were rescued by an American naval ship. The chapter entitled "Freedom at Last" depicts the dangerous journey to escape out of Vietnam, a "land seething with hatred and revenge."[86]

All Vietnamese prison narratives, reconstruct post-prison life as a continual experience of Communist revenge and hatred which extends to all members of their families. In a similar conclusion, Le Huu Tri's *Prison of the Word* recounts his dangerous escape with his wife and other family members as the onlymeans to a better life. Living in an assigned hamlet for five years after his release from prison, he sumsup the misery and despair in this way:

> The government had conducted its 'agricultural revolution' in my hamlet for two and one half years now. I had farmed and worked hard every day, but I was not able to earn enough rice for my family to eat. If my mother had not helped me, the Communist would have taken the tin roof off of my house. I wanted to move my family back to Ho Chi Minh City, but I could not. Because I had been an officer for the Old Government, the Communists would refuse my application for permanent

[86] Lu, 10.

residence in this or any other city. I decided to escape.[87]

This passage reveals government's interference in fundamental aspects of life. The unbearable condition led 52 people to risk their for freedom. In *Hearts of Sorrow*, the Colonel's life after his release consisted of a series of hellish experiences, including six escape attempts, imprisonment in the Biên Hòa with his two sons, and brutality in the Thailand refugee camp before his exile to America. Captain Hùng also escaped by boat after his release from prison.

Not all escapes out of Vietnam ended in safety. NguyÍn Ngoc Ngan's *The Will of Heaven: A Story of One Vietnamese and the End of His World* ends with the shock and horror which one associate more with the reeducation camps rather than toward the journey to America. *The Will of Heaven* is different from other prisoner narratives because it is NguÝ n Ngoc Ngan's autobiography. While the contents of the prison journey bear similar death-like experiences to other prisoner narratives, they alone do not comprise the entire book. Deaths, in NguyÍn's story, become his wife, Tuyet-Lan, and their son Tran. The Malaysian police fired at the boat which sank. NguyÍn never found his wife's body, and the Malaysians buried his son's body without allowing NguyÍn to be there. At the end of the book, NguyÍn sats silently alone looking at the sea became a tomb. NguyÍn autobiography honors his wife and his son. His chronicle of their deaths underscores the dangers and risks that prisoners and their families take for the sake of living in a free society. Their deaths represent the thousands of nameless Vietnamese who die in their search for freedom. Their deaths make up the casualties of war. On American soil, Vietnamese casualties inflicted by the Vietnam War have no resting place.

[87] Le, 269.

Vietnam, the country, becomes synonymous with the repressive regime rather than the prisoners' homeland. America is synonymous with freedom and equal opportunities. The success stories exemplify in the employment, children's education, and the families' overall well being indicate that the experiences of atrocities and traumas are those of a remote past. America is represented as a physical, political, social, and psychological safe haven in contrast to Vietnam. The final aspects of these stories echo other successful American immigrant stories of hope realized in the face of great adversity.

The prison stories that I have collected are a continuation of the adversities that confront them.

CHAPTER 13

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIVING AND SURVIVING: A JOURNEY BACK TO VIETNAM WITH MS. H NH

I have wanted to come back to Vietnam since 1991, when I was twenty-four years old. At the time, I had applied for a $1000 grant at the University of Oklahoma and received the money to travel to Vietnam and write about my experience. I did not go through with the trip because my parents adamantly opposed my travel home. They were frightened for my safety and told me it was a country everyone was trying to flee from, so why would I want to return? Yet, I wanted to see who I was before I came to America, how we lived, and how I grew up. I wanted to know what my life could have been had I stayed back in Vietnam. Living in America as a Vietnamese, I often felt like an outsider. I longed to find a path to the land where I was born so that I could settle an existential problem once and for all. Was I better off in America or in Vietnam? What would I have been had our family stayed behind? Who could I have been? Because I have no recollection of my childhood, Vietnam was a mystery to me.

In 2004, at age 37, I decided that I was going to Vietnam no matter what my mother says. When I told her of my decision, she reiterated the same fears and observation, thatVietnam was a place of esc ape, not a place of travel. Her mother and brother died in Vietnam, but she never went back to bury them. What was important to her was that I remained alive here in America no matter how confused I felt as a person.

“Remember, we left that country, not once but twice. You are traveling to Hanoi, the nesting ground of the Communists. They will kill you. You have two children who

depend on you. What if you die? What if they kept you there? Don't say I didn't warn you," she yelled on the phone.

Any talk about traveling overseas to work or live was out of the question for her. When I was 24, I still cared what my mother had to say, so I stayed.

Thirteen years later, I had a mission to go to Vietnam. I had to complete a writing a family's story. I had to get H‰u's story. Hi ‰u, Mr. Phúc and Hånh's son, was left in Vietnam when his parents and sister went to America. Mr. Phúc, Ms. Hånh, and Thäo spoke to me about their stories, but none came right out and told me what had happened to Hi‰u. I wanted to know why he was left behind and how he was living.

When I told my mother that I would like to visit the Tân Mai, Biên Hòa, the village where I was born and grew up, she became indignant.

"Don't call on your cousins to pick you up. If you have no money to give them, they will secretly curse at you. They are very poor. You being there will cost them more to host you. You do not have money to pay them," she warned. I did not want to hurt her, so I did not contact my cousins. I was determined to go partly because Professor Nora Taylor had invited me to stay at her home in Hanoi.

I had planned the trip with Ms. Hånh in the Spring of 2003, but she cancelled at the last minute because she did not have enough money. When Ms. Hånh told me again in the fall of 2004 that she had no money to go to Vietnam, I booked my own ticket traveling to Hanoi and departing from HÒ Chí Minh (HCM) City. I was hoping that she would arrange for me to meet her son once I was in HCM. After Ms. Hånh learned that I had booked a ticket to Vietnam, she asked me if I would please charge her ticket on my credit card. She said that she would pay me back later. I hesitated for a couple of days

before I called her back. I did not want to get into a situation where I would have to ask Ms. Hånh for the money back. Besides that, I was hardly making ends meet for my own family. But for the sake of the getting a story, I put both our tickets on my credit card. A part of me feared traveling alone to Vietnam. I did not know how they would treat me. For the last five years, I have been hearing stories of horror and persecution told to me by political prisoners and Ms. Hånh. Vietnam seemed like an oppressive and dangerous place. I had pictured in my mind comrades armed with guns walking the streets directing people where to go. I imagined guards going through my bags searching for suspicious items. My travels, I thought, would be confined to just the addresses that I had put down. I even had to politely refuse to bring this dissertation to one of my committee members who was then residing in Hanoi. I thought that I could be arrested at anytime for any reason and denied due process. In short, the Vietnam of my imagination was the Vietnam of the political prisoners.

However, Ms. Hånh, my father, my older sister, her husband and children have traveled to Vietnam and have come back safely. Ms. Hånh had been back to Vietnam three times: the first time was in 2000, the second time was in 2001, and the third time was in 2003. Fear is not based on reason but on emotions.

Not only did Ms. Hånh borrow money from me to go to Vietnam, she wanted me to change my itinerary. I was set to travel to Hanoi first, then to HCM City, and back to the States. Ms. Hånh told me that she had heavy baggage to take to her family, so she could not go with me directly to Hanoi. “I have no heavy baggage,” I told her. “Still, you don’t want to carry your luggage around in Hanoi?” I told her that I could meet her in HCM City later, but she insisted that I go step by step with her. “Don’t you want to

travel together with me?" she persisted. The way I was traveling was wasteful, according to Ms. Hånh. She could show me the whole country. I trusted her because she had lived in Vietnam up until she was 47 years old. She had traveled to north Vietnam to visit her husband when he was incarcerated. Though I thought she was pushy and unreasonable, I agreed to let her book the flights and charge the tickets to my credit card.

I traveled blindly, allowing Ms. Hånh to show me Vietnam. I resisted my friend's idea that I should get a tour book and get information about different tours. "No, I'm going with Ms. Hånh. She knows that country inside and out. She's lived there most of her life," I told my friend who was deeply worried about me. He insisted that I get a hotel room and not stay with Ms. Hånh's son. I told him that I would think about it. I wanted to travel as a Vietnamese not as an American. There was something authentic about traveling with Ms. Hånh.

The flight left at 9:55 a.m., but Ms. Hånh said I would have to be at Will Rogers Airport by 5:30 a.m. to check in baggage. I told her that was too early, but she said her daughter would come pick me up. At the airport, I immediately understood why Ms. Hånh insisted that I travel step-by-step with her. Each person was allowed two 70-pound pieces of luggage. Ms. Hånh checked in two bags in my name and told me to carry my own bag on the plane. She was taking 280 pounds of goods to Vietnam. These bags bulged out at the seam as if they would soon bust open. This was main reason for the alteration of my flight. These 280 pounds weighed me down the entire trip.

Ms. Hånh was not the only who traveled with heavy luggage to Vietnam and heavy luggage back to America. At the Los Angeles airport, hundreds of Vietnamese going back to their country loaded big boxes and suitcases of goods to give to their

families. Ms. Hånh told me that sending a box like that to Vietnam would cost her about $125 dollars each box.

We arrived at Los Angeles at 11:00 a.m., and I was shocked to know that my flight would not leave until 1:15 in the morning, a delay of fourteen hours. This did not include the 20 hours airtime to Vietnam. The travel time, which should have only taken one day, was now extended to two days. Ms. Hånh said that we were going to her nephew's apartment. He arranged a man to pick us up at the airport and drive us to the apartment. It was a Saturday, and the nephew and his wife worked until 7:00 at night. We walked their apartment, and I felt like an intruder. After a few hours of waiting, I could not stand it anymore in the apartment. I suggested that we walk around the neighborhood. I wanted to buy some mosquito repellent, so we stopped at the dollar store. Ms. Hånh bought $40 worth of bar soaps and stuffed themin my luggage. She said the soaps were for Hi‰u and his wife to sell.

"I'm not going to give them money from now on. I'm going to give them things they can sell. It will make them happy to earn their own living. They can start a business," she said.

I felt cornered. How did I let myself get involved? From 11:00 a.m. on Saturday morning to 1:15 a.m. Sunday, we lingered in Los Angeles. It was her nephew's apartment; but I was walking into a stranger's house. I could have accepted the delay better if I felt that it was a good opportunity for her to see her sister. But this was not the case. Ms. Hånh's sister did not get off work early to see her. Instead, she worked the whole day and got to her son's house, which was three hours away, at 7:30 that evening. They did not speak much to each other. Ms. Hånh asked her sister to pay for two boxes

of green menthol that she bought for her mother. A gift from Ms. Hånh to her mother cost her sister, Hàng $100.

I was beginning to feel like an idiot. I felt used and stupid for allowing another person to dictate my travel. At her nephew's house, Ms. Hånh was outrageously tactless. She pointed to her nephew and said, "Do you know who his father is? His father is a VŒ t C¶ng from the north who came to the south after liberation. He told Hàng that he did not have a family. When she got pregnant, he left her and returned north to his wife and children. He came one time to visit the boy. I was selling goods on the street when he asked me to take him to his son. I didn't know what to do. I felt sorry for him, so I took him to visit his son. When my sister found out, she rushed to find him immediately and forbade him to see his father. She was afraid that his father would kidnap him." Hàng remarried a man who was a political prisoner and came to America with him under the H.O. Program. They have one daughter together.

When we landed in Tân SÖn NhÃt, the airport in HÒ Chí Minh City (HCM), people on the plane pushed their way down the stairs. Ms. Hånh said that we must hurry down because people have been known to have their goods stolen. We hurried through to register with the Vietnamese Customs. The first time I saw men in olive green uniforms, I was terrified. I thought about the comrades that the prisoners talked about. I remembered the man's face who processed our custom paper. He had a broad face with sideburns. Ms. Hånh told me to put $2 in my passport so I could be processed without any problems. I did, and it worked. An American who did not do so was sent to a longer line. Ms. Hånh rushed down the stairs.

"Stay put," she yelled, "I'll go get our stuff." She ran down the passageway to gather four large suitcases. I watched as people pushed carts piled with oversized boxes and heavy bags. People screamed and yelled around the baggage pick up, out to the security gates, and around the airport. People carted huge boxes to the gates. I saw a six-foot Toshiba freezer box and other boxes wrapped with duct tapes being pushed through.

A security guard told us to open two of the bags. "You are bringing quite a lot into the country," the guard said. "If these items are new, you will have to pay taxes." Ms. Hånh yelled for me to come over, "Give him a couple of dollars," she ordered. Ms. Hånh paced around pretending to look for the keys. I handed him a couple of dollars, but it did not work. The guard shook his head, smiled, and said, "You don't need to do that. I just want to see what's inside these big bags." One bag was a long oblong shaped like a coffin. Ms. Hånh finally unzipped the bag and a bunch of colorful plastic watches fell out. "These are for my grandchildren. I got them at work for them," Ms. Hånh smiled, and so did the guard. The bags that Ms. Hånh opened were stuffed with individual plastic bags that were knotted. Inside them were old clothes. The guard looked at them and saw no price tags on them. He told us to open the other luggage and saw the same things, so he let us go.

Walking out of the airport was like walking into an auditorium. Hundreds of people gathered outside waiting for their families. Their faces beamed with smiles. They brought flowers, held up signs, clapped, and whistled as they searched out the faces of their loved ones. The Vietnamese say, "There are more greeters than there are travelers." For every one person coming home, seven people or more came out to meet them. It was like watching these travelers walk into the arms of adoring fans after a great performance.

Indeed they have performed greatly! They performed the duties of carrying goods and money for their families and saving them from poverty.

I pushed my cart out following Ms. Hånh and a group of people gathered around her. They were her three brothers, sister (Vân), son (Hi‰u), daughter-in-law (Cúc), and granddaughter (ThÖ), who was about eighteen months. I felt Ms. Hånh's reception was quite different than other families around us. No one hugged each other or cried. Ms. Hånh told me to wait with her family while she and Vân went to buy a one way ticket to Hanoi and exchange money. I handed her $200: $100 for the plane ticket and $100 to exchange for spending money. What a way to travel! Get there at 10:00 in the morning on Sunday, drag 280 pounds of goods to a house, fly out of Tân SÖn NhÃt at 8:30 at night, and arrive in Hanoi at 11:30. I was not traveling as a tourist, but as a Vietnamese encumbered by my relationship with Ms. Hånh whose responsibility to her family weighed us both down. I was just beginning to see how heavy her loads were.

We got to the parking lot where a van sat, but the driver was not there. They had to go look for him. Vân carried my bag and sat next to me in the van.

Hi‰u, Cúc, and ThÖ rode to the airport by motorbikes, so they could not ride in the van with us. From the airport, I saw trails and trails of Honda motorbikes called *xe ôm*, which means "hugger" bikes. These bikes are the main transportaton in Vietnam. People put everything on these bikes. Anything they need to transport, they carried on these huggers. I saw two children put between a father and mother in the middle, or children dangle on the front across the bar. Men carred glass panes; others carry pots, statues, etc. Children as young as twelve or fifteen drove their friends on these huggers. The majority of them did not wear helmets or safety shoes. Many women protected their

hands from the sun by wearing long gloves, and they covered their mouths with cloths against the dust and smog. However, they still exposed themselves to the open elements: rain, cars, trucks, buses, bikes, rickshaws that clog up the deadly streets. You could hear beeps blaring from the huggers and honking from cars and trucks all around. No laws or regulations governed the directions where these motorbikes go. No laws regulated who goes and who stops. Vehicles, bikes, huggers, trucks, buses, cars, rickshaws, walkers, and the likes, rushed up and swerved to avoid hitting other vehicles. Professor Taylor told me that 100 people die daily from fatal car accidents in HCM City and 40 in Hanoi. Those who cross the streets do so at their own risk. I saw a man without legs wobble his way to the curb trying to cross the street.

The van dropped us off at the end road of an alley. Next to the alley was a large piece of land fenced off for construction. We walked through an alley to a one-room house no bigger than a standard American dining room. Several one-room houses stacked one on top of the other. A couple of feet behind the house belonged to another family who had a brown Shih Tzu tied to a fence. The dog barked non-stop as we walked in. Ms. Hånh's mother greeted me and told me to sit. Almost immediately,Ms. H ånh told me to wait there for her because she had to go take care of some businesses for her son.

Before Ms. Hånh left with H‰u, I looked at him closely for the first time. He was about 5'5 and of medium build. He had dark rough skin. There was nothing distinguishing about his looks, but he talked slower than everyone there. He did not look meet anyone's gaze for long. He and his wife had fearful looks in their eyes. They cowered away when I looked in their faces. No one talked to them. The only person who

spoke to H‰u was Ms. H ånh who sat at the table with him. Ms. Hånh had arranged to have the 280-pound goods taken to Hi‰u's apartment. A bony old man without teeth and shoes came to pedal the goods to Hi‰u's house. Ms. Hånh left me at her mother's home because she said she had many errands to run before going to Hanoi. She had to distribute goods that Vietnamese-Americans gave her to give to their relatives. She had to get clothes for Thäo and her, and she had to attend to her son. I had six hours to wait before we were to get on the plane for Hanoi.

I sat on a wooden platform that served as a bed, a table, and a sitting place. To my right was an altar of Ms. Hånh's father, and five feet away was a bedroom. The walls were painted an aqua blue like my parents' house, but this was nothing like my parents' house in America. The cleanest part of the house was a glass chest used as an altar. A picture of the father was placed in the center surrounded by brass candles and fruits.

Vân handed me a set of her clothes and insisted that I go bathe, though I told her that I was fine. She told me my jeans were too heavy and uncomfortable. She was very persistent and smiled as she handed a washcloth. Out of the whole family, she was the prettiest. She had light skin, her eyebrows were perfectly arched, her teeth were straight and white, she wore makeup, and she was thin. She asked me when we were riding in the van from the airport if I went outside a lot because my skin was dark. Vietnamese people value light skin as a mark of beauty. I told her yes.

I relented, allowing Vân to walk me to the backend of the house. I walked past two partitioned rooms. The bathroom was the same place where the dishes were washed and set. It was an open room with no roof. The floor of the bathroom was wet and muddy. There was a hole in the corner to serve as a toilet. It was the only water drain for

the whole house. There was no toilet paper, only water from a faucet. A plastic bucket and a pot were set underneath the faucet already filled with brown water. Vân came in just as I was changing and handed me shampoo to wash my hair. I just got my hair wet, changed clothes, and walked out. Her clothes fit tightly around my body. I knew right away that I had to go to a hotel room when we returned to HCM City from the north. I am an American who has to piss, shit, and bathe in a nice clean room. I have to sleep on clean sheets, and I have to have a private room where no one can walk in on me when I am in the bathroom.

Vân made me coffee and asked if I wanted to eat something. I told her that I would wait for Ms. Hånh who finally came back about two hours later. Ms. Hånh complained to Vân and her mother that the motorbike that Tùng bought for her son was a piece of junk. Tùng was the oldest son next to Ms. Hånh who was the eldest. She had called Tùng two days before her arrival to Vietnam and asked him to buy a motorbike for her son and have it insured and licensed for her when she got there. The motorbike cost Ms. Hånh $600. H‰ u was dissatisfied with his mother's gift; he told her that the motor was not a genuine Honda. He wanted something more expensive, and he wanted his uncle to return the bike and genuine Honda everything. Ms. Hånh's mother begged her not to exchange the hugger, fearing that it would hurt Tùng's feelings, but Ms. Hånh did not relent. She told Tùng that what he bought for her son was a piece of junk.

When Hi‰u's family walked into the house, no one spoke to them or looked at them. Cúc had on tight jeans, a spaghetti strap shirt, and high open-toe heels. She was a very pale looking girl whose neck and front chest had bite marks. She dangled her daughter as if she were a doll. When her daughter peed on the floor, she wiped it up with

the girl's underwear and said softly, "I told you not to do that. Why did you do that?" Then she put the underwear in her purse. No one tried to help her clean up. The family ignored Ms. Hånh, H‰ u, and his family. Cúc crouched down and bowed, hardly saying anything, perhaps because she knew no one in the family liked her husband.

Ms. Hånh told me to stay at her mother's house because she had to go do yet more business with Hi‰u. She was going to look at where he was currently living, which was with his wife's parents. She wanted to rent him a new apartment for his family. When Ms. Hånh left, Vân came out to talk to me about what I thought about Vietnam so far. Then, Tùng came back with Ms. Hiếu's hugger and parked it in the living room of the house. It was a nice maroon Honda which looked like new to me. Tùng sat on the platform and talked to me. Vân left and went to the back.

"If I had known there would a day such as today, I would have left V»ng TÀu thirty years ago. I was a translator for the Americans. The day Saigon fell, my commander told me to get on the plane. I asked him if the plane would ever fly back to Vietnam. He said never. I was twenty something and alone in VÛng TÀu. I had to get back to Saigon to see my parents no matter what. If only that officer would have lied and said the plane was heading to Saigon, I would be in America right now and would never be as bad off as I am today. I work at 3:00 in the morning, distributing papers to other local vendors. My wife and I make $80 to 100 a month. When we don't make enough, we starve," Tùng said. He was about 53, but he looked old. He smoked and sat scrunched up. "Did you have to go to reeducation camps?" I asked.

"I burned all my paperwork that linked me to my job as a translator. I lied and told them that I worked for my father. I knew English, but I had to act like I was

illiterate. I tried to escape the country in 1986 but was captured and sent to four years in prison. The prison condition was so horrible and grotesque," Tùng said as he shook his head. "I've lived under two government systems, Republican and Communism. You can tell which one is better by the number of people trying to leave the country. I would leave immediately if I had a chance, but there is no chance. My brother missed leaving under the political prisoner's program by two weeks. He was let go two weeks before serving three years, a criterion to leave the country through the H.O. program.

Tùng walked me outside to the fence where they are doing construction. "You see this site. This used to be the archbishop's place of residence, Ngô ñình DiŒm's brother. They tore it down to build a new shopping mall," he pointed and gave me a cynical smile. "It will be good for us because it make the value of our home go up."

Behind their house were the zoo and a museum. I told him that I would love to visit these places when I returned from the north. The rain poured down heavily. His other brothers who lived there came in and out of the house, while his mother and sister stayed in the back. Tùng left to go to his home, which was about ten miles away, and Vân came out to talk to me. Vân told me that they had to build a cement dam at their door or they were flooded every time it rained. Vân told me to come to the back room, lie on the bed, and watch TV with her. I sat for a little while, but I got uncomfortable and went to the living room. I still had nearly four hours to kill before we departed for Hanoi. I asked Vân if she could take me to a local barber to get my haircut. I had let my hair get too long.

Vân drove me on her hugger. I was terrified sitting in the back. It was raining, so she draped her raincoat over my head. It was dark. The only light came from where my

left foot rested. Puddles of wet water hit against my feet. I saw wheels drive by and heard huggers beeping. We finally stopped at a barbershop. The owner of the shop told me I needed to condition and straighten my hair. I told him I just want a haircut. Vân said it would make my hair very soft and delicate. A group of young girls gathered and told me that I need to get my hair conditioned. He said it will take three hours to get it done. I looked at Vân who told me it was fine with her. I did not want to wait at Ms. Hånh's house, so I agreed to get my hair straightened and conditioned.

While the man was cutting my hair, I saw a long rat's tail underneath Vân's hugger. A woman took me to a chair to wash my hair. I leaned back and saw thousands of ants on the ceiling. Then a green lizard crawled across the wall. Three feet from where my foot rested was a man sleeping on the floor. I realized thatbusinesses are worked out of people's homes. Restaurants, salons, vendors, welding shops, bike shops are partitioned halfway by a curtain or a wall separating the domestic space from the public space. You can stop to get a coke and peer into a family's life.

At the barbershop, I saw women balancing two baskets of goods on a long pole over their shoulders, children playing barefooted in the streets, people walking, and huggers driving by. Vân stayed to talk to me. She told me that her eyes were cosmetically tattooed and so were her lips and eyebrows. If I was interested, she could take me to have it all done for less than $50, but I told her that I was definitely not interested in that. She told me that her sister in California came back to Vietnam and had liposuction doe for $1000. Because the barber knew that I was a *ViŒt KiŠu*, a Vietnamese foreigner, he charged me $15, which was more than what I had planned to spend. But it was worth getting away from the house for a little while.

When we came home, Ms. Hånh was very upset that I was not home. I told her that I was not sure when she would be back. We ate a lunch that Vân cooked. It was delicious duck eggs and caramel pork. I told Ms. Hånh that I would get a hotel room when we came back from the north because I needed space to get my work done. We went to look at a hotel close by. I was glad to see that it was just as nice as a U.S. hotel but for only $12 a night. I was so happy that I even put an $8 deposit for them to reserve the room for me.

When we left for Tân SÖn NhÃt, no one said much to me Perhaps they felt angry at me for taking Ms. Hånh away. We rode the taxi out to the airport, and Ms. Hånh did not want to pay for her share of the taxi, which was $3. I had to ask her explicitly to contribute her share. She got very angry and told me that this trip to Hanoi was for my sake not hers. I could not believe that she was arguing over $3. I told her that I would pay a hotelin Hanoi b ecause it was too late when we arrived to go to Professor Taylor's home. I had planned to meet her face-to-face for the first time and talk to her about my dissertation.

Ms. Hånh was not enjoying herself. Her mind was with her son. She had to spend more money on him than she had expected. He had asked for an additional $400 more to buy a better motorbike. When she returned to HCM, she would have to rent a new place for him. She told me that before she left with me for Hanoi, he told her, "You are abandoning me again." She was anxious to get home. He called to tell her that he found an apartment. She told him to take it, that she would pay for it when she got back.

On the plane, I saw a tall white man dressed in a business suit who seemed to know where he was going. I asked him if he could suggest a hotel. His name was Alf.

He recommended the one he was staying which was the Polumbo Hotel on NguyÍn Du's street. It was $22 and came with breakfast for two.

We slept well, and the breakfast was delicious. Ms. Hanh wanted to stay there the next night and then leave right away to return to HCM City. She thought that I would agree to pay for all the hotel costs. But I told her that I had already made plans to meet my professor and stay with her. Compared to HCM City, I found Hanoi less hectic, less painful, less rushed, and not so sad. People walked around, and the city seemed less clamorous. I realized that I could not count on Ms. Hånh to show me around because she did not know where to go. The city had changed, and she never knew anything but the route to the prison. I asked Alf and later my professor about places to go. Ms. Hånh and I went to the HÒ Chí Minh's Mausoleum, the HÒ Chí Minh Museum, the Revolutionary Museum, and the Opera House. Ms. Hånh and I had mixed feelings about our visit to the Mausoleum. It was the coolest and cleanest place in all of Vietnam. From the steps up to the coffin and all around the body, the air conditioner was the cool crisp air comparable to an American shopping mall. It felt so refreshing. Guards dressed in clean white uniforms stood at attention guarded the dead body. Ms. Hånh said it was sickening to see, and I agreed. But we had to see it. People came in busloads to see it. HÒ Chi Minh was everywhere in Vietnam. His presence was everywhere in Vietnam. On billboards, in post offices, and in all the museums, HÒ Chí Minh was Vietnam's god.

I asked the taxi driver where the prisoners used to be in Hanoi, and he took us to the Hoa Lo Prison. Ms. Hanh said that was where she used to visit her husband. The Hoa Lo Prison where Mr. Phúc stayed was now a 26-floor tower used for offices and a hotel. I insisted that we stop at it. The wall was preserved to honor patriots and

communist prisoners, but not the South Vietnamese political prisoners. In fact, none of Vietnam's museums and exhibits that I visited acknowledged the facts of the reeducation camps. I visited several well-known museums in north and south Vietnam, and there was no mention of the reeducation camps existing after 1975. I was beginning to see Communist lies and propaganda.

Ms. Hånh and I found Professor Taylor's house in an alley away from the busy street vendors. We got to her home ten minutes early. When we saw her, she was riding the hugger wearing a helmet. Dr. Taylor was very much the person I imagined her to be, a tall beautiful Swedish woman with long hair. She wore kaki pants and a loose knit shirt. She parked her hugger inside the iron locked gate next to a girl's bike and a tricycle. Three raincoats hung against the iron wall opposite of the gate. Little girls' shoes scattered around the entryway which had a wooden stairway. On the right was the guest bedroom, and the left was a living room which further extended to the kitchen. A three-bedroom two-bathroom house, it resembled America's condos. Ms. Hånh and I were curious about how much Dr. Taylor was paying for rent.

"$550 not including bills," Dr. Taylor said. That was how much I was paying for my home in America. "Vietnam has changed a lot since I was here in 1991," Dr. Taylor said. "Everything the prisoners said about Vietnam, food coupons, inspectors, poverty was all true. People were starving not like now when people could afford giving their leftover food to dogs." She lived in Hanoi in 1991 when Vietnam was not a free market. She learned Vietnamese and did most of her research for her dissertation in her five years in Hanoi. She spoke Vietnamese fluently. Ms. Hånh had never met a non-Vietnamese

who could speak Vietnamese, so she could not get used to talking to Dr. Taylor directly. She spoke to her through me.

Dr. Taylor graciously showed us our bedroom and offered to make us lunch, but we told her we had eaten. Ms. Hånh and I brought mangoes and papayas as gifts. Dr. Taylor said that her daughters loved mangoes. They were not home because they were at school learning French, the language Professor Taylor spoke to her daughters. What an incredible courageous woman, I thought. I wondered how she managed to live in Hanoi when it was not an open society with businesses blooming everywhere. I became more in awe of after I met her two daughters, Lune (Moon-8 years old) and Soleil (Sun-2 years old). Dr. Taylor was not just an incredible scholar, she was an attentive and loving mother. After giving her daughters snacks, Dr. Taylor checked Lune's French homework. After Lune got comfortable with me, she showed me a Japanese picture book. She read the English translation from pages that her father typed for her. Her father, who was Danish, spoke Japanese, Thailand, and other languages. Professor Taylor spoke French, English, Vietnamese, and Russian. This was a high-functioning cultured family, I thought. Soleil, a darling two-year old toddler with blond curls and big blue eyes crawled around her mother.

Ms. Hånh went to sleep and spoke very little to the family. I could not have asked for a better hostess than Dr. Taylor, but she let me know upfront that she did not have much time to show me around the city. She was very busy with her children who came first in her life. She regulated their sleep, making sure they got full sleep. She saw to their education, their diet, and their health. When we went out to eat, she carried bug spray for her daughters. They have traveled across the world already. They stood worlds

apart from Thơm, Ms. Hạnh's granddaughter. Thơm learned to "dạh" all the adults around her. She learned to bow down to adults, but her future was left up to chance rather than to the care of her parents who invest in their children. Lune and Soleil were given the very best that their parents could give them, Thơm drifted from one place of living to another depending on her parents' state. Vietnamese children should obey their parents and elders, but they have very few rights and resources.

"I feel for the Vietnamese," Dr. Taylor said. "My father fought in WWII. He was an Englishman. I try not to waste anything." Dr. Taylor was a wonderful host, but her care for her children came first.

In Vietnamese culture, the host focuses her whole attention on the guests. If the host has children, their needs became secondary. It was the save-face culture which dictates that hosts should go out of their way to entertain and ensure her guests' comfort. In a Vietnamese household, children suffer through the wants and desires of the adults. Dr. Taylor was not Vietnamese. Her care for her daughters was uninterrupted even though she had guests. She made sure her children slept, bathe, ate, and studied accordingly. When we went out to eat the first night we arrived, we left the restaurant early because the girls were getting sleepy. I could move in and out of both worlds, but Ms. Hạnh felt estranged from Dr. Taylor's family. She withdrew from everyone around her and seemed to resent Dr. Taylor. She did not speak to anyone.

Ms. Hảnh could not sleep. Her son had been in contact with her, asking her when she was going to come home. I woke up at about 2:00 a.m. to find her rummaging through her bags. She told me she wanted to leave. She hated Hanoi because she felt people were ripping her off. I told her to go ahead. She said she did not want to go to

Hu‰ with me anymore. She said that she was out of money, but I did not believe her. It was just a ploy to get me to pay the entire trip back to HCM City. I told her to leave, but she said that she would not because she felt responsible for me. I felt confident that I could handle traveling around Vietnam because it was open, safe, and easy to get around. She said she had my plane ticket, that I had to get back to HCM City with her. I agreed to leave Hanoi Tuesday on the train if she agreed to go to Hu‰. She fussed about paying for her share of the hotel and taxi cost, but I told her that it was only fair. It was a miserable affair.

We rushed through Hu‰, and stayed there for only one night. As soon as we got there, Ms. Hanh bought us a train ticket to HCM leaving the next morning. We went to the Thiên Mø Pagoda. When we got there, Ms. Hånh left and went back to the hotel because there was a 25,000 ÇÒng entrance fee, which was about $1.50. She became indignant and hateful at the idea of sightseeing. She felt like everyone was taking her for a ride, and that she would have no money left for her son. When we walked around the street close to our hotel in Hu‰, she bargained with a vendor for a dress below half the marked price. The vendor tried so hard to sell the dress. Ms. Hanh pretended that she left her purse at another store and ran away. She was behaving like a miser, and I was embarrassed by her. Everywhere she traveled, no matter whom she was with, her son's plight plagued her.

I was starting to catch a cold and develop diarrhea. A nurse once told me that a cold was a sign that a person was unhappy; I was very unhappy. I could not believe we had traveled all this way to go home without seeing much of north Vietnam. I was hoping we would travel to SÖn La, the northern region, or the border of China where her

husband was also imprisoned. He had described tall mountains and trees. But nothing of scenery or connection to her husband's past was present in Ms. Hånh's mind. She did not care about anyone except her son who was suffering in HCM City. She felt guilty for taking a vacation with me.

The train ride from Hu‰ to HCM was 20 hours. The bathroom situation was so miserable. When the train moved, shit that went down the hole shot right out of the hole onto the seats and your buttocks. When there were no toilet papers, you had to wash yourself with a cup of water. It was so miserable and filthy. I was so sick of Vietnam. When I asked Ms. Hånh for the Pepto Bismal from my bag, she told me she did not bring it because she forgot. At 3:00 a.m., the train came to a loud screeching halt. A young man rose from the floor and screamed. His scream woke everyone up.

Rumor was that the train wheels had broken on the last four cars. No one official told us anything. People began shoving, pushing, and screaming their way to the first-class cars. It didn't matter if an old woman or a woman with a child stood right in front of them, they would push their way through. People loaded their things in beds where first-class passengers slept. They sat at the end of beds where first-class passengers were sleeping. We rode the last four standing outside thewalkway of the first-class cars. Ramen noodle soup was handed out to everyone. People ate and threw their paper bowls dripping with juice on the floor. When we got off and onto a taxi, Ms. Hånh said that our ride was nothing compared to the train rides she took with her children twenty years ago. "They didn't even have seats. Hi‰u stood the whole time. This is much better compared to the time I took the trains to visit my husband," she said proudly. But I was

too angry to pay attention. I was mad because she had taken my medicine out of the bag. I was mad because she had rushed us back. I didn't care if she had it worse.

Friday at 11:00 a.m., I checked into the hotel I had left a room deposit with. I bathed and rested and felt almost human again. Vân brought me my fresh clothes and took my dirty clothes to wash. I was refreshed.

Vân asked, "How was the trip." I did not say much. "Was it fun?" she prompted. I did not reply; instead, I asked her what Ms. Hånh was doing.

"What else? She's taking care of her son. She's getting him another apartment. Getting him a new refrigerator. Getting him a gas stove. Getting him a different motorbike. She's not happy with the one Tùng gave her," Vân said sarcastically. "She bought all these things for him the last time she was here. When she leaves, he sells everything."

I stayed quiet, not knowing whether or not I should tell Vân about my troubles with Ms. Hånh.

"None of us are happy when she comes," Vân continued. "There are always problems when she comes. Problems with her son. She thinks he's sick and dying so she sends him $600 each month. You know all the stuff she brought home. We saw nothing of it. In fact, I know nothing of what she brought. She took it all straight to her son. We, each of her brothers and sisters, got $50. My mother she gave $100, then borrowed the money back. That's how she treats us," Vân did not let up. "You wonder why we are so cold to her when she comes? We know she works hard. We told her that her son was a bad boy but she does not believe us. She thinks we speak ill of him for no reason. He

has no idea how hard his mother works to support him. Do you know what he does with the monthly $600 U.S. dollars?"

"Heroin," I said. "He's an addict."

"Anyone with eyes can see through it except my sister," Vân said. "She's killing him faster by giving him so much money, while her family gets nothing. She is sending him to the death squad," Vân said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"The comrades know Hi‰u's history well. All he has to do is not pay them and he's through. If something happens to her to where she can't send him money, he will steal or not pay the officials to keep quiet. They will charge him with conspiracy to deal. Then, they will execute him. They execute people here for heroin distribution," Vân said. "They are lying low because they know his mother in America is sending him lots of money. The apartment she rented for him is an area known as a nest for heroine users, prostitutes, and gamblers. All the officials have to do is arrest a group of heroin users at his apartment, accuse him of being a drug dealer, then he'll be executed," Vân said assuredly. She was angry. I could tell she had wanted to talk to me before I left for Hanoi.

I had suspected drug addiction all along, but I never heard anyone come out and say it. Heroin is a big problem in Vietnam. I flipped through the *Thanh Niên* (Young Men) newspaper dated September 1, 2004, which reported that the Hanoi officials had captured two heroin dealers.

"What happened to his first wife and son?" I asked. I was fearful of what she would say, but I wanted to know.

“His first wife is dying of AIDS from her heroin days with him. She’s locked up in the reeducation camps. Their son has AIDS too. He’s about Betty’s [Thäo’s daughter] age. They won’t let Hånh see him. The grandmother would rather see the boy die than let my sister sponsor him. That’s how much she hates Hi‰u. He has several wives not just these two,” Vân added emphatically.

I was horrified at the facts, but also at why Vân was telling me all this. Why was she betraying her own sister to a stranger?

“What about his current wife? Is she a heroin addict?” I asked, wanting to know the full story.

“No. She clings to him because she does not work. He has money. But any decent girl would have nothing to do with him. Her family is poor and needs the money, so they allowed the marriage. At first, she sent money to her son through us. But ever since we told her that her son was a drug addict, she stopped sending us the money. Instead, she sent it to other people, who report to her that her son is terminally ill. They get a portion of it. What do they care? They tell her he’s sick, and that’s what she wants to believe. They tell her what she wants to hear,” Vân said emotionally.

I was sad that Vân was telling me this, but I had come to Vietnam to get the story and I was getting it. Still, I felt like I was betraying Ms. Hånh. I tried to find something good in the whole situation.

“Was it always this way? Hånh told me how much fun she had when she came home the first time. What was that like?”

“That was when Hi‰u was in jail. He’s been in and out of jail five times. The first time she came home was good. The second time she came home, we buried our

father, and Hi‰u was still in jail. The last time she came home was a disaster. She yelled at everybody. Everybody was at fault because of her son," Vân cried. "Now, she gives us nothing. Her own mother she gave $100, then borrowed it right back."

"But Hånh spends no money on herself," I said defending Ms. Hånh. "She is selfless. She works so hard in America. She and her husband take no vacations. They don't even go to the doctor when they are sick."

"We know. So we don't ask her for money. But she knows nobody except her son. She didn't always used to be like that. It was only when her son went to jail that she lost her mind. She's crazy. From the time he was 14 and been in jail, she has been driven out of her mind," Vân said coldly.

"A heroin addict would sell his own mother for a hit," someone once told me. As I listened to Vân, the words rang literally true. Vân had a burning hate for her sister. Ms. Hånh knocked on the door. The sisters hardly said a word to each other. Vân left. She told me she would come back later to take me to Cû Chi. I wanted to visit the place where Mr. Phúc was captured.

Vân was the only person in her family who works for the state. A registered nurse, she was born in 1961 making her fourteen years old when Saigon fell. Her parents were street vendors, so she had a clean record. She earned a salary like those who work for the military, security, and public schools. She will get a pension when she retires. The state provided housing for her and allows her to go on tour around the country. Even with these benefits, she wanted to leave Vietnam.

"If you know an American who is interested in meeting a Vietnamese woman, please introduce him to me," she said frankly. "I'm tired of Vietnamese men. They have

little to offer, yet they do the most outrageous things that are beneath words." Van teared up and started crying. "I said nothing to my husband when I found out that he was living with a mistress. There was nothing for me to say. I went to the house where they lived. I introduced myself to the young woman. I told her I just wanted to see for myself if the rumors were true. Then I filed for a divorce. I never even argued with him. He's a bus driver; I am a nurse. I never thought he would stoop so low."

I asked Vân if she spoke English. She said no, but she told me she has always been good in school and can learn quickly if she has to. While I was in HCM City, Vân took me to nice expensive restaurants. Unlike Ms. Hånh who ate at vendors' partitioned homes, Vân ate at restaurants where hand towels were given for us to wipe our hands and faces. I imagined Vân in America shopping happily in the big malls. I told her I knew of no man who was interested in going overseas. It was strange for someone whom I did not know to ask for such a big favor. I was sure that I was not going to help Vân and wondered why her two sisters in America did not try to help her.

Vân took me to the Cû Chi tunnels after she shared with me the devastating struggles of her sister's life. I was glad to get away from Ms. Hånh. I wanted to see something about the war. Cû Chi tunnels were the place where Mr. Phúc was captured as well as where Ms. Hånh went to visit him. Going through the tunnels, seeing the booby traps that were laid there, any person would know there was no way the Americans could have won the war. There was a whole way of living and fighting that took discipline, ingenuity, and sacrifice. When the guide took us to show us the different weapons used to kill Americans, I said, "It must be hard for Americans to come to the tunnels." He told me that the prior week, a young American woman told him that her father was killed in

Cû Chi. She came to see where and how her father had been killed. She cried through the whole tour.

Vân took me to shopping malls and nice restaurants around HCM City. I paid for our expenses, gave her gas money for her hugger, and extra money for her time.

Ms. Hånh asked if I was okay. She asked me if I wanted her to spend the night with me at the hotel. I said no. I wanted be alone. She told me to be careful and not allow Vân to take me to expensive places fearing that I would have no money to spend on myself. "You two are similar in age, so you have more in common," Ms. Hånh said, almost apologetically. "Age has nothing to do with it," I said, still angry about how she had treated me in Hanoi.

On Sunday morning, I went to mass at the Notre Dame Cathedral with Vân. Later, we went to the old Republican Presidential Palace now called the Reunification Museum. It was so sad to imagine what the last days of April 1975 were like for the South Vietnamese. I thought of what Mr. SÙ said about seeing people climb the fences at the Palace and at the U.S. Embassy.

Later that day, I went to the Thì NghË church with Ms. Hånh. Outside the church, I saw a man who had no legs and fingers. We walked into a middle of a church service. Ms. Hånh was telling me significant things about how much the church has changed. But I felt uncomfortable because people were trying to worship. I asked her if we could go. When we walked through the gates, a beggar was sitting outside the church. His thighs oozed out bloody pus. I saw a similar situation at the Fatima Church where Mary supposedly appeared in 1954, a man used a long metal canister to extend his leg. Sitting at the church corner, the man said nothing, shook his head in sorrow, and

reached out his hand. We did not stay in Hanoi long enough, so I did not see much begging there. All over Vietnam, I saw a lot of unemployed young men sitting on huggers begging people to hire them for rides. In Hu‰, HCM City, CÀn ThÖ, Châu ñÓc, An Giang, and B‰n Gi§i people rushed up to me begging. People without arms or feet, old people, children, children pushing their parent's wheelchairs around all came up to beg for money. At Ch® L§n, in the Chinese quarters, old women roaming the streets came up to where Tùng and I ate and begged for money. There, Tùng reiterated his family's painful story.

"You know the sad situation in my home," Tùng said. "You must wonder why my family is so cold to Hånh. It is her son. He is a drug addict. Everyone tells her, but she does not listen. My father when he was alive told me to take him home and teach him. When Hi‰u got out of jail, who did he stay with but me? My wife and I washed his clothes, cooked food for him, and waited at night to open the door for him when he came home. Yet, he told my sister that every pair of his pants I washed, I charged him 10,000 ÇÒng. When his mother came home, I asked in front of him and my whole family if I did that. He sat still. My sister told me it was just a rumor. Every dime that my sister gave my son, I gave it to him. I was the one who took that boy to my home when he got out of jail. He lived in my house. His mother sent him money, I gave it to him. I never shortchanged him a penny." Tùng said.

I asked him if he knew anything about Ms. Hånh's grandson.

"I took him home from the hospital when he was just born. His mother was so sick. He was shaking from heroin withdrawal. I had to wrap him up. I raised him for

several months. Then he got better. But his grandmother came for him. I had no rights over him, so she took the boy. My sister has not forgiven me for that."

Everywhere people were selling lottery tickets, earning .10 cents each booklet that they could sell. In one of the pagodas in Hu‰, a young boy with a deformed hand held out his other hand to beg. I sensed that anything could happen in this bizarre country. I saw a man roll around in mud. I saw bike accidents where the victims laid on the side of the road unable to get up or get help. Outside my hotel, a woman, whose husband left her, laid on her elbows all day. She had lost her mind, so the state gave her a small corner of the house to live. Her children were sleeping in that corner when Ms. Hånh opened their shade from the outside to show me.

On Monday, I called Ms. Hånh at her son's home to see what she was doing. Hi‰u answered the phone and said his mother was on her way to see me. I told him, "Hi‰u your father loves you. He wants you to have a good life. He wants you to do right by yourself. He does not express his feelings because he's a man, but I know deep down inside he loves you." Hi‰u remained silent over the phone. At last he said, "Vâng," which is a polite "yes." Hi‰u knows his father wants nothing to do with him. Vân told me that Hi‰u's father did not see him when he was in Vietnam about two years ago. What can you say to a man who was on a destructive path?

Ms. Hånh came to see me and told me she had time now to spend with me because all her businesses were taken care of. Vân was at work, so Ms. Hånh and I walked to the zoo and the history museum inside it. These were places that Ms. Hånh grew up in, so she knew it well. Her husband and she had often taken Hi‰u to this zoo when he was a child. She pointed to the school where she attended and where Hi‰u had

attended. “Hi‰u was a naughty boy since he was a little boy,” Ms. Hånh said. “He ditched school, came to the zoo, and taunted a monkey, who bit him. The teacher rushed him to the hospital where he was treated. They yelled at both of us when I picked him up from school.”

Indeed, the zoo was an awful place. I dreaded going to the zoo because I had seen how dogs roam the streets in Vietnam, spotted and diseased. In Hanoi, several restaurants advertised cheap dog meat. The trees, flowers, and hedges were magnificent, but the animals were badly treated. Two large crocodiles laid on top of one another next to a small puddle of water. Monkeys were kept alone in small cages. A tiger was pacing aimlessly around in his small den. The animals of the zoo were a metaphor for the people, I thought. They lived in a beautiful landscape but were caged and badly treated.

Later that day, Ms. Hånh took me to her father-in-law’s house. When we parked the hugger, a woman came up to us. She was dressed in a black sweater and black pants. She wore a hat, and carried a gold purse. She held out her hand. When I looked at her face, half of the bottom of her nose and mouth did not exist. She did not have half a nose or a mouth. Her cheeks rose, so I could tell she was trying to smile. “I was burned in a fire,” she said. We gave her some money, and parked the hugger. Ms. Hånh told me, “She did not get burned. She was a young woman in her teens when she dated a high-ranking commander. The commander’s wife got jealous. She hired a hit man who threw acid on this woman’s face. That stuff happened all the time when I was growing up.” Seeing the woman who tried to smile at me, horrified me. She seemed to have come out of nowhere. That night, I woke up in a nightmare. I dreamt that I was sleeping in my bed with my pet dog Misty, a white Shih Tzu. When I touched her head, boils grew out

from her white hair. She clawed me because she was in so much pain. I woke up in sweat and fear. I felt like everything in South Vietnam was oozing with pain. Everywhere I went I saw pain.

Ms. Hånh came home in 2001 to bury her father in B‰n G§i, about twenty miles outside of HCM City. She wanted to visit her father's grave. She asked me to split the cost of the gas. "Fine," I said.

We got lost to trying to find the burial site. When we found it, I saw Ms. Hånh's dignity, worth, and humanity in the way she treated her father's coffin. She flew back to Vietnam in 2001, bought two burial sites for her parents, had a coffin built for her father, and prepared for her mother's final resting place. It cost her $600 for the coffin, the inscription, and the picture. The body was buried above ground. Beautiful small maroon tiles covered the entire rectangular shaped casket. Above the casket was an overhead cover. Ms. Hånh wiped the dust off the coffin and hugged it. We sat on the coffin and talked. A family close sang songs and ate food on the coffin. Their coffins and mausoleums are elaborate. They build a house or fortress around their coffins. Near Ms. Hånh's father's coffin was a coffin of a young girl which was decorated like a house. Tung told me that he pays a man $8 a month to keep his father's coffin clean. He said no matter if he starved, he would still pay the $8. Tùng makes $80 a month, and 10% of it goes to his dead father. Although I respected a need to honor his dead father, I did not see a need to put oneself out for the dead. The Vietnamese honor their dead more so than Americans.

On the way home, Ms. Hånh saw a sign that said school for the blind and deaf. She wanted to visit it, so we went in. The school served as a school for some and an

orphanage for others. The nun told us there were 320 students who live on the campus. The state gives the school $9 per child each month for the orphans. Those with parents have to pay that much to keep their child there, and many could not afford it. Some families, she said, were cursed with two or three deaf children. They have no other choice then to send their children here because they have to work to earn a living. The sisters have buried children who live there until their deaths. These were children who were left from the war. Her oldest student was a sixty-year-old woman whom she buried not too long ago. The children weave and do needlepoint for a living. When we visited one of the classes, the children stood up, folded their arms, and bowed. The children were treated very well by the sister and teacher, and seemed happy to be there. It was refreshing to see something good happening for children who otherwise would not have a chance. Ms. Hånh bought a framed picture of a needlepoint. Then, she was ready to spend time with her family.

I took a three-day, two-night trip to the Mekong Delta with Vân who asked for time off to accompany me. People live out of small wooden boats on the delta. The tour guide said, "They eat, sleep, marry, and make babies in the boats." They bathed in the rivers where shit, piss, and dirt congregate. Companies pay local people to scoop up the sand from the bottom, causing erosion of the land. The flood of 2000 killed 3000 kids who had thought it was a lot of fun to play in the rain. The guide said the people in the deltas have more TV antennas than there are babies. "T.V. antennas make less babies. That is good," he said sincerely. The tides were high when we landed in CÀn ThÖ. The streets were flooded up to our knees. The walk to the hotel was dreadful because we knew what the streets were like. I carried my tennis shoes, hiked up my jeans, and waded

through the water. I heard Michael Jackson's "Beat It" song blaring from one of the houses that we passed. I thought it was strange and sad at the same time.

When we got to the hotel, Vân and I washed our feet immediately. She said it was truly disgusting, and I agreed. Throughout the trip, she remained aloof to other foreign travelers whom the Vietnamese call Western backpackers. At night, she told me stories about the plight of divorced women in her district. None of the stories, though was as painful to me as that of her nephew. I realized that I had very little in common with Vân. She remained quiet and to herself during the long four-hour boat ride and three-hour bus ride back. In my native country of 81 million people, I felt lonely and homesick. I wished that someone in America was with me to share in the experience. America is my real home, I thought. There lived all the people whom I love. I thought about the saying which I used to detest, "Home is where the heart is."

The day before I left was a Saturday and Tùng was off from work. He wanted to take me to Tây Ninh to the Cao ñài Temple. I wanted to go there because Mr. ThiŒt told me that if he returned to Vietnam, he wanted to settle in the central area near Tây Ninh. Vân was very upset because she said there was nothing to see. She preferred that I go shopping with her, but I told her that I wanted to see the temple. I had a friend in Oklahoma City who gave us the address to his brother's house. "If you get lost," my friend told me, "just ask anyone where Ms. Nhãn's house is and they'll tell you. My father is known in all of Tây Ninh." It was just as she had said. Tùng and I did get lost and were told to go to the ceramic and tile shop. The back of the house was a beautiful two-story house with a wooden staircase and a full American standard bathroom. A young boy was playing video in his bedroom. An and his wife greeted us. They had

been expecting us for weeks now. By Vietnamese standards, he has done very well. Tùng asked him how he acquired his business. The man snickered, "My father owned most of properties in Tây Ninh. He owned a bike shop and became wealthy. The Communists took all our properties and left my sisters and I our homes. There's a school down the street which used to belong to us. My sister rents out her home to the barbers and lives upstairs. We make enough to get by. They don't buy any of my tiles for state use. I sell strictly to the private sectors." An and Tùng got along very well. They agreed that if the state thought An owned too much, they could take it away from him at any time. An took us to the Cao Dai temple where his father's funeral had taken place the month before ago.

The Cao ñài temple was an incredible work of art. The columns were vibrant, colorful, and majestic. I asked the spiritual leader if there was any literature that I could buy. She told me that the government forbids them to publish prayer books, history books, and religious books. She said they were not even supposed to teach Cao ñài religion. The temple extends to smaller temples and living quarters that seemed peaceful and respectful. There was not the begging or desperation in Tây Ninh that there were in other parts of South Vietnam. The priests and sisters fast eating mostly rice and potatoes. They willingly give of their meals to strangers.

On our way back, torrential rain flooded the streets, and we had to pull to a gas station. We were drenched and it was freezing. I was worried that Ms. Hånh would be mad at us for being late to the dinner party. She had invited her whole family and me to a dinner the night before our departure. She asked me to contribute money for the dinner. I said sarcastically that it wasn't much of an invitation if I was asked to pay. I gave her

the money, but I could not help commenting. We were late getting back to Ms. Hånh's dinner party, but she was happy to see us. She ordered an extra plate of egg rolls for us. I told her that Tùngand I had nothing to eat allday, but that was all she ordered for us. I knew where all the money was going, and the situation angered me. Her son and his family were not at the dinner party. He did not want to face his uncles and aunts. Vân was not there. I had given her $20 for taking me all over the place. Ms. Hånh told me that was too much, so she told me to tell Vân to give Tùng half of it. I did.

At the family dinner, not much was said. Ms. Hånh was asked by one of her brothers to give money to his son, and she did so. Afterwards, Ms. Hånh took me to her son's apartment. It was in the dead-end alley. There was a king-size mattress on the floor of the apartment. Next to it was a glass case which contained shampoos, soaps, toothpastes, toothbrushes, children's plastic watches and such that Ms. Hånh had bought. Ms. Hånh told me that many of the items had already been sold. Though she tried to persuade me to spend the night there. I insisted going back to my hotel.

The next morning, I could not wait to leave the country. Ms. Hånh told me leaving Vietnam was different than coming. "We go alone. No one takes us," she said sadly. At the airport, Hi‰u and his family, Tùng, and another brother were there. "Be well. Remember what I said about your father," I told Hi‰u. They did not hug their mother. Tùng gave me a farewell shake. "If there is anyway you could contact my former commander to help me get out, I would be so grateful," he said. "I can't promise anything, but I will try."

Ms. Hånh and I went through the check-in counter of China Airlines. Hi‰u and his family left. When we went through the baggage counter, it was the same 280-pound

maximum capacity drag only worse. We were asked to reduce the weight of our carry-on by half. Ms. Hånh spent 45-minutes repacking all our things. We were asked by an airline employee to please go to a corner, to get out of people's way. When she opened the luggage, I saw about 30 packages of coffee, boxes of candies, dry shrimps, dry squid, and other food items. On the plane, Ms. Hånh bought 20 boxes of 555 brand cigarettes. When we landed in Los Angeles, she called her nephew to come get the goods she had brought back. She told her sister in L.A. to sell the cigarettes for her and send the money to her mother because Ms. Hånh owed her mother some money.

Ms. Hånh never stops working to make an extra dollar here and there for her son. She takes the items she gets on her trip to Vietnam and sells them to people at her work. She told me she would sell the coffee packages for $4 a bag. The cigarettes were $20 a carton. I decided to buy nothing from her. I remember what Thäo said to me one day, "The only way my mother would ever be free is if my brother dies. His death would set her free." Then I remember what Tùng said about Hi‰u's life, "The way he's living, he won't last but two or three years max." My son, Minh, whom I sent to another foster when he was fourteen, was in no way as bad off as Hi‰u. I thought about what would have happened to my family had my parents not left Vietnam. My father would have died in the reeducation camps. My mother would have tried to escape and been thrown in jail. My sister Chi‰n, who was schizophrenic, may have been entitled to a subsidized shack. I would have been one of the children running up to people begging them to buy a lottery ticket. My older brother, who had lung surgery when he was thirteen, would surely have died in Vietnam. Even with all our traumas with my father, we were better off in America than we would have been had my parents stayed in Vietnam.

I now know from first-hand experience what my mother did for me when she left her land, home, family, friends, and everything she had known to go to V»ng TÀu to escape Vietnam. She saved me from a life of poverty, ignorance, disease, and cruelty. The government of Vietnam subjected its people to horrendous living situations. There was no middle class in Vietnam. There's only the very wealthy and everybody else. Everybody else lived a hand to mouth, day-by-day kind of existence. If you did not work, they starve. If they got sick and could not afford hospital treatment, they stayed sick. Despite the Communist rhetoric of unity, independence, and freedom, it was capitalism at its worst. It was buying and selling minus any social programs. The system was rotten and corrupt, so it trickles down to a people who must work so hard just to get by. As the barber in HCM City told me, "They say a wealthy country makes for a stronger people. Here it is a wealthy country makes for a weaker people." He meant that the few wealthy comrades who rule the country make everyone else poor. There were wealthy business people building hotels and selling real estates. They make up the wealthy few.

I have been having nightmares since my return from Vietnam. One night, I dreamt that I was still sailing the boat around the Mekong Delta and seeing these small boats where entire families lived. I was one of the children living on a boat. I woke up sweating. I was sick for a week with a cold and stomach problems.

I went to visit my mother after my return. My mother said, "Are you cured of Vietnam forever?"

"Yes, I am cured for good. I never have to see it again," I said somberly.

"Forever?" she asked surprised that at last we had agreed on something.

Mr. Thiệt guided me to the infernos of the Vietnam War. He told me he had gone do the deep far-reaching regions of hell and emerged. He led me to other Vietnamese who shared their hell, their triumph, their disappointments, and their hopes. I became less afraid and ashamed of the Vietnamese. I became less fearful and ashamed of myself.

Appendix 1

ThÖ Cho Phép

Công Trình Nghiên-CÙu Bäo Tr® Cûa TrÜ©ng ñåi H†c University of Oklahoma

LuÆn Án Ti‰n Sï Môn Anh-Væn t¿a ÇŠ: "Trong thÀm l¥ng, tôi tranh ÇÃu: Ti‰ng nói cûa nh»ng ngÜ©i tù chính trÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam" ("In Silence, I Struggle: Voices from the South Vietnamese Political Prisoners")

Giáo SÜ Ti‰n Sï Robert Con Davis-Undiano: Chû TÎch H¶i ñÒng Giám Khäo
NguyÍn ThÎ Mai Thúy NgÜ©i Th¿c HiŒn D¿ Án
NguyÍn ThiŒt Phø Tá

Møc Çích cûa công trình nghiên-cÙu này là Ç‹ Çúc k‰t s¿ tranh ÇÃu cûa nh»ng ngÜ©i tù chính trÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam sau ngày 30 tháng 4 næm 1975. PhÀn chÃt liŒu së ÇÜ®c Çúc k‰t b¢ng s¿ phÕng vÃn có thâu bæng và së ÇÜ®c ghi låi, dÎch sang ti‰ng Anh Ç‹ dùng vi‰t bän luÆn án ti‰n sï. LuÆn án có th‹ ÇÜ®c in thành sách sau này.

S¿ tham d¿ cûa Bác trong công trình nghiên-cÙu là hoàn toàn t¿ nguyŒn. BÃt cÙ lúc nào Bác không ÇÒng š ti‰p tøc tham d¿ cu¶c phÕng vÃn và công trình nghiên-cÙu thì Bác có quyŠn chÃm dÙt và së không có gì trª ngåi ho¥c khó khæn cho Bác và cháu không có quyŠn có phän Ùng gì ÇÓi v§i Bác. Cháu së giao låi cho Bác nh»ng cuÓn bæng, bän sao phÀn chÃt liŒu và bän phiên dÎch Bác Çã cho cháu. Bác có quyŠn yêu cÀu cháu không ÇÜ®c in m¶t phÀn ho¥c tÃt cä bài n‰u Bác thÃy không Çúng v§i š cûa Bác. N‰u bän luÆn án này ÇÜ®c in thành sách sau này, thì cháu së vi‰t thÖ thông báo cho Bác. Bác có quyŠn yêu cÀu cháu không in ÇÜ®c phÀn phÕng vÃn Bác trong quy‹n sách thì cháu së làm theo š Bác.

S¿ tham d¿ cûa Bác trong cu¶c phÕng vÃn này có th‹ làm Bác nh§ låi nh»ng næm Bác bÎ tù Çày và cÛng có th‹ änh hÜªng Ç‰n trång thái tâm thÀn cûa Bác khi‰n Bác cäm thÃy vô v†ng, buÒn chán, cô ÇÖn và tÙc giÆn. Vì vÆy cÖ quan St. Joseph's Family Counseling Center tåi 1501 N. Classen, Oklahoma City, OK 73106 sÓ ÇiŒn thoåi (405) 524-0969 s¤n sàng giúp Bác gi» cho trång thái tâm thÀn ÇÜ®c thæng b¢ng. ñây là cÖ quan chuyên giúp các cá nhân và gia Çình bÎ rÓi loån tâm thÀn. CÖ quan có ngÜ©i thông dÎch ti‰ng ViŒt n‰u Bác cÀn.

N‰u Bác cÀn hÕi ÇiŠu gì liên quan Ç‰n cu¶c phÕng vÃn và bän luÆn án ti‰n sï cûa cháu, Bác có th‹ liên låc:

1. Office of Research Administration: (405) 325-4757
2. Giáo SÜ Ti‰n Sï R. C. Davis-Undiano: (405) 325-4531
3. NguyÍn Thúy: (405) 946-8304

Tên cûa Bác ghi trong thÜ cho phép này së ÇÜ®c cháu ghi trong bän luÆn án ti‰n sï và trong sách sau này.

Tôi tên là _____.

Tôi ÇÒng š cho phép cô NguyÍn Thúy phÕng vÃn tôi và sº døng nh»ng ÇiŠu do tôi cung cÃp vŠ nh»ng næm tôi bÎ giam trong các trải tÆp trung cûa C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam Ç‹ vi‰t bän luÆn án ti‰n sï cûa cô t¿a ÇŠ: “Trong ThÀm L¥ng, Tôi Tranh ñÃu: Ti‰ng Nói Cûa Nh»ng NgÜ©i Tù Chính TrÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam.” (“In Silence, I Struggle: Voices from the South Vietnamese Political Prisoners.”)

Tôi ÇÜ®c cô NguyÍn Thúy cho bi‰t r¢ng bän luÆn án ti‰n sï së ÇÜ®c ÇŒ trình lên H¶i ñÒng Giám Khäo trÜ©ng ñåi H†c University of Oklahoma và së có th‹ ÇÜ®c in thành sách sau này.

Tôi hoàn toàn hi‹u rõ r¢ng cu¶c phÕng vÃn này có th‹ làm tôi nh§ låi nh»ng næm tôi bÎ tù Çày và cÛng có th‹ së änh hÜªng Ç‰n trång thái tâm thÀn cûa tôi khi‰n tôi cäm thÃy vô v†ng, buÒn chán, cô ÇÖn và tÙc giÆn. Cô Thúy Çã cho tôi bi‰t chi ti‰t vŠ cÖ quan St. Joseph’s Family Counseling Center, chuyên giúp Ç« vŠ tâm thÀn cho cá nhân và gia Çình.

Tôi hoàn toàn hi‹u rõ r¢ng cu¶c phÕng vÃn này së ÇÜ®c thâu bæng Ç‹ cô Thúy dùng vi‰t bän luÆn án ti‰n sï cûa cô và së có th‹ in thành sách sau này. BÃt cÙ lúc nào tôi cÛng có quyŠn yêu cÀu cô Thúy không ÇÜ®c in m¶t phÀn ho¥c tÃt cä bài phÕng vÃn. Cô Thúy phäi giao låi cho tôi nh»ng cuÓn bæng Çã thâu trong bu°i phÕng vÃn và không ÇÜ®c có bÃt cÙ phän Ùng gì ÇÓi v§i tôi.

Tôi ÇÒng š cho phép cô Thúy ÇÜ®c ghi tên tôi ghi trong thÖ cho phép trong Ç‹ in vào bän luÆn án ti‰n sï cûa cô và trong sách ÇÜ®c xuÃt bän sau này.

Tôi hoàn toàn ÇÒng š v§i tÃt cä nh»ng Çi‹m ghi trong lá thÜ cô NguyÍn Thúy gªi cho tôi và trong thÜ cho phép này.

_____

Kš tên Ngày

Consent Form

Research Project Supported by the University of Oklahoma

Dissertation Title: "In Silence, I Struggle: Voices from the Former the South Vietnamese Political Prisoners" ("Trong ThÀm L¥ng, Tôi Tranh ñÃu: Ti‰ng Nói Cûa Nh»ng NgÜ©i Tù Chính TrÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam")

Dr. Robert Con Davis-Undiano Ph.D. Committee Chair & Faculty Sponsor
NguyÍn ThÎ Mai Thúy Principal Investigator
Mr. NguyÍn ThiŒt Co-Principal Investigator

The purpose of this study is to collect stories and narratives from the experiences of former South Vietnamese political prisoners in the concentration camps after April 30, 1975. The stories and narratives will be collected through oral interviews which will be tape recorded, transcribed, and translated into English to be used as part of a Ph.D. dissertation, which may be published as a book.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You may withdraw at anytime in the process without any consequences at all. All the materials including tapes and written materials will be returned to you. You have the final editorial right to exclude any part of the written product, regardless of the methods by which you choose to narrate your stories. The dissertation may be published as a book. If this happens, you will be notified in writing. You have the right to withdraw your story at this time so as to not be included in the book if you choose.

Your involvement in this project may expose you to possible risks. The questioning may bring to mind painful events. You may relive traumatic experiences that may cause you to feel helpless, depressed, alone, and angry. Because of this risk, you are encouraged to contact the St. Joseph's Family Counseling Center at 1501 N. Classen, Oklahoma City, OK 73106, phone (405) 524-0969. The counseling center provides family and individual counseling assisted by a Vietnamese interpreter.

You may contact the Office of Research Administration at (405) 325-4757, Dr. R.C. Davis-Undiano at (405) 325-4531, and Thúy NguyÍn at (405) 613-7708.

The name that you provide in this form will be the name you wish to be used in the dissertation.

My name is _____.

I agree to give NguyÍn Thúy permission to use the collected material regarding my experiences in the Vietnamese Communist concentration camps to be submitted to the dissertation committee as part of her Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Oklahoma entitled: “In Silence, I Struggle: Voices from the Former the South Vietnamese Political Prisoners” (“Trong ThÀm L¥ng, Tôi Tranh ñÃu: Ti‰ng Nói Cûa Nh»ng NgÜ©i Tù Chính TrÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam”)

Ms. Thúy has informed me that the dissertation will be submitted to the Ph.D. dissertation committee at the University of Oklahoma. The dissertation may be published as a book afterwards.

I understand that my involvement in this project may expose me to possible risks. The questioning may bring to mind painful events. I may relive traumatic experiences that may cause me to feel helpless, depressed, alone, and angry. Ms. Thúy has given me adequate information about St. Joseph’s Family Counseling Center. I understand that I may withdraw at anytime without any retaliation against me.

I understand that the interviews will be used by Ms. Thúy to write her dissertation which may be published as a book. I have the right to exclude any portion of the interview. Ms. Thúy will return all tapes and written materials to me without retaliation against me.

I give Ms. Thúy permission to use the name indicated on this form to be used in the dissertation.

I completely agree with all the criteria set forth in the letter and in this form.

_____ _____

Signature Date

July 31, 2001

Nguyen Thi Mai Thuy
University of Oklahoma
Ph.D. Candidate

Dear Mr. :

My name is Nguyen Thi Mai Thuy. I am currently a student at the University of Oklahoma.

In 1975, my family and I fled to America when I was eight years old. It has been twenty-five years since we have lost our country and yet still I do not a clear understanding about our country, ViŒt Nam. This incomprehension has been a source of pain and sadness for me; nonetheless, I continue to search for knowledge and understanding of the Vietnamese people and our culture and history.

Two years ago, I came to know Mr. TrÀn Chung when I taught English to the Vietnamese refugees at Catholic Charities. From Mr. TrÀn, I became more aware of the tragic and sorrowful realities of our country in the days before April 1975 and in the days after. Solely through Mr. TrÀn, I came to know the truth about concentration camps instituted by the Vietnamese Communists regime under the guise of "Reeducation Camps."

This truth has moved me greatly and has inspired me to pursue this conviction: to speak out about the whole truth about your struggles and the struggles of others like you who were interned by the Communists in the dehumanizing concentration camps; to speak about your struggle against hunger, against the cold winter days, against inhumane oppression by the Communist guards; to speak about your struggle against your aloneness in the silent longing
for the people you love; to speak about your struggle against the temptation offered by the guards to become their informant.

Your struggles required great courage and demanded extraordinary strength to endure the non-stop day to day, moment-to-moment torture and deprivation. When you were released, and after you were allowed to immigrate to America, you continued in your struggle to adapt to the new life.

I propose to write my Ph.D. dissertation entitled "In Silence, I Struggle: Voices from South Vietnamese Prisoners" ["Trong ThÀm L¥ng, Tôi Tranh ñÃu: Ti‰ng Nói TØ Nhºng NgÜ©i Tù MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam"]. This dissertation will be a collection of voices of the political prisoners of the defunct South Vietnamese government, voices that have been up to now virtually been unheard. The voices speak not only to Vietnamese readers alone but also for non-Vietnamese Americans and to readers worldwide. I am sure that readers do not know the full account of the South Vietnamese political prisoners. I have submitted this proposal to the dissertation committee for their approval.

The completion and realization of this dissertation is only made possible with your help. Your experiences form the primary source of material for this dissertation. Mr. TrÀn encouraged and helped me develop a set of questions that will be given to you as a guide. In case you do not wish to write about your experiences, I will give you cassette tapes for you to record at your convenience. If you wish for Mr. TrÀn and I to interview you instead of the other two options, we would be happy to accommodate you.

Before submitting the written work to the dissertation committee, I will send you the transcribed and translated written work for your review. If you wish to exclude any part of the written work. In accordance with the University's policy, I ask that you please read and sign the Consent Form which gives me the permission to gather the narrative you have given me for the dissertation. I include this in the attachment.

I hope the voices of the South Vietnamese political prisoners collected in the dissertation will portray the reality of your struggles rather than the often distorted representations of books written about the Vietnamese Communist concentration camps and about the and about the South Vietnamese people.

I hope you will be able to help me with this project. Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Nguyen Thi Mai Thuy

Ngày 31 Tháng 7

NguyÍn ThÎ Mai Thúy

Kính ThÜa Bác:

Cháu tên NguyÍn ThÎ Mai Thúy, hiŒn là sinh viên trÜ©ng ñåi H†c University of Oklahoma.

Næm 1975, cháu theo gia Çình vÜ®t biên, và lúc Ç‰n MÏ, cháu chÌ có tám tu°i. ñ‰n nay Çã hÖn 25 næm trôi qua k‹ tØ ngày mÃt nÜ§c mà cháu vÅn chÜa hi‹u ÇÜ®c rõ ràng và ÇÀy Çû vŠ quê hÜÖng cûa mình. S¿ hi‹u bi‰t không ÇÜ®c tr†n vËn là m¶t ÇiŠu rÃt buÒn ÇÓi v§i cháu. Tuy nhiên cháu vÅn cÓ g¡ng tìm hi‹u c¶i nguÒn dân t¶c, væn hóa, và lÎch sº ViŒt Nam.

Cách Çây hÖn hai næm, lúc cháu dåy Anh-Væn cho ngÜ©i tœ nån ViŒt Nam tåi H¶i USCC, cháu ÇÜ®c bi‰t Bác Chung TrÀn. TØ Çó cháu b¡t ÇÀu hi‹u nhiŠu hÖn vŠ nh»ng bi‰n chuy‹n Çau buÒn cûa ÇÃt nÜ§c chúng ta vào nh»ng ngày trÜ§c và sau tháng 4-1975. ñ¥c biŒt qua Bác Chung TrÀn, cháu bi‰t ÇÜ®c chính quyŠn C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam Çã ngøy danh các tråi tù tÆp trung kh° sai là "TrÜ©ng H†c TÆp Cäi Tåo."

S¿ thÆt này làm cháu xúc Ç¶ng t¶t Ç¶ và Çã ÇÜa cháu Ç‰n m¶t quy‰t ÇÎnh: Çó là phäi nói lên tÃt cä m†i s¿ tranh ÇÃu cûa Bác và nh»ng ngÜ©i cùng cänh ng¶ nhÜ Bác trong suÓt th©i gian bÎ giam cÀm khÓn kh° trong ngøc tù C¶ng Sän; nói lên s¿ tranh ÇÃu chÓng v§i cái Çói triŠn miên, chÓng v§i cái rét mùa Çông; nói lên s¿ tranh ÇÃu chÓng låi nh»ng áp bÙc vô nhân Çåo cûa b†n cai tù C¶ng Sän; nói lên s¿ tranh ÇÃu âm thÀm vì nh§ nh»ng ngÜ©i mình thÜÖng yêu; nói lên s¿ tranh ÇÃu ngay cä v§i chính bän thân mình Ç‹ không bÎ sa ngã làm tay sai cho b†n cai tù.

ñÓi v§i cháu Çó là s¿ tranh ÇÃu vô cùng can Çäm, Çòi hÕi ª Bác m¶t nghÎ l¿c siêu phàm Ç‹ Bác có th‹ sÓng sót trong m¶t hoàn cänh bÎ thi‰u thÓn m†i thÙ mà thân xác lÅn tinh thÀn låi bÎ hành hå tØng gi© tØng phút không ngØng. Khi ÇÜ®c phóng thích, và sau này ÇÜ®c tái ÇÎnh cÜ tåi MÏ, Bác låi ti‰p tøc tranh ÇÃu Ç‹ thích nghi v§i hoàn cänh m§i.

Cháu Çã quy‰t ÇÎnh ch†n ÇŠ tài cho luÆn án ti‰n sï cûa cháu vŠ môn Anh-Væn (Ph.D. in English) t¿a là: "Trong ThÀm L¥ng, Tôi Tranh ñÃu: Ti‰ng Nói TØ Nh»ng NgÜ©i Tù MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam" "[In Silence, I Struggle: Voices from South Vietnamese Prisoners]." LuÆn án này së là ti‰ng nói cûa ngÜ©i tù chính trÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam tØ bao lâu nay không ÇÜ®c ai bi‰t Ç‰n; không phäi nói cho riêng ngÜ©i ViŒt chúng ta nghe mà nói cho ngÜ©i MÏ và nh»ng ngÜ©i ngoåi quÓc Çã chÜa ÇÜ®c bi‰t h‰t vŠ ngÜ©i tù chính trÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam. Cháu Çã ÇŒ trình lên h¶i ÇÒng giám khäo t¿a ÇŠ và ti‰n trình Çúc k‰t Ç‹ vi‰t bän luÆn án này.

ThÜa Bác, bän luÆn án cûa cháu ÇÜ®c thành hình là nh© s¿ giúp Ç« cûa Bác. ThÆt vÆy, Bác chính là ngÜ©i cho cháu chÃt liŒu **Çúng và thÆt** Ç‹ cháu Çúc k‰t låi vi‰t bän luÆn án. Bác Chung TrÀn Çã khuy‰n khích và phø giúp cháu soån m¶t sÓ câu hÕi và cháu xin gªi Bác Ç†c Ç‹ giúp cho cháu. Ngoài ra cháu xin gªi Bác m¶t cuÓn bæng cassette Ç‹ trong trÜ©ng h®p vì không có th©i gi© ngÒi vi‰t, Bác có th‹ nói vào bæng và gªi hoàn låi cho cháu theo ÇÎa chÌ ÇŠ trên lá thÜ. N‰u Bác ÇÒng š cho phép cháu phÕng vÃn Bác thì cháu và Bác Chung TrÀn së s¤n sàng làm theo š Bác.

TrÜ§c khi ÇŒ trình bän luÆn án lên h¶i ÇÒng giám khäo, cháu së gªi Bác bän sao phÀn chÃt liŒu và bän phiên dÎch Bác Çã cho cháu Ç‹ Bác ki‹m låi, và n‰u có Çoån nào cÀn bÕ Çi thì cháu së làm theo š cûa Bác. Ngoài ra, Ç‹ theo Çúng qui ÇÎnh cûa trÜ©ng, cháu xin Bác vui lòng kš giÃy cho phép cháu ÇÜ®c Çúc k‰t phÀn chÃt liŒu Bác Çã cho cháu Ç‹ vi‰t bän luÆn án. (MÅu giÃy cho phép Çính kèm.)

Cháu hy v†ng nh»ng ti‰ng nói cûa ngÜ©i tù chính trÎ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam qua chính l©i cûa Bác ÇÜ®c Çúc k‰t thành luÆn án này së trình bày trung th¿c s¿ tranh ÇÃu cûa Bác và nh»ng ngÜ©i ÇÒng cänh ng¶ v§i Bác, chÙ không phäi lÓi trình bày bóp méo s¿ kiŒn lÎch sº cûa nhiŠu cuÓn sách vi‰t vŠ tråi tù tÆp trung cûa C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam và vŠ MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam.

Xin Bác giúp cháu. Cháu cäm Ön Bác.

Kính chào Bác.

Cháu,

NguyÍn ThÎ Mai Thúy

Project Title: "In Silence, I Struggle"

Date of the interview:

Name of the Person:

Age:

Former rank in the SVNG:

Questions

1. **ThÜa Bác, trÜ§c ngày 30 tháng 4, 1975, Bác phøc vø trong cÖ quan nào cûa chính quySn MiSn Nam ViŒt Nam. ChÙc vø và cÃp bÆc cûa Bác nhiŒm vø là gì? Gia cänh cûa Bác lúc Çó nhÜ th‰ nào?**
   Before April 30, 1975, what was your position/rank in the SVNG? What wa your family life like?

2. **Vào nh»ng ngày cuÓi tháng 4-1975, lúc tình hình MiSn Nam ViŒt Nam bÃt °n, m¶t sÓ tÌnh Çã l†t vào tay C¶ng Sän, nhÃt là khi làn sóng di tän cûa ÇÒng bào MiSn Nam Çã lên cao, Bác có š ÇÎnh di tän hay không? Lš do nào Bác Çã ª låi và chÎu cänh tù Çày?**
   In the last days of April 1975, when you first realized that the conditions of South Vietnam were unstable and that many of the provinces were under the Vietnamese Communists' control, and when a great number of people had evacuated the country, did you have intentions of fleeing the country? Why did you stay?

3. **Bác Çã ª tù mÃy næm? Cu¶c sÓng trong tù rÃt cÖ c¿c và thi‰u thÓn m†i thÙ nhÜng Bác Çã sÓng sót cho Ç‰n ngày ÇÜ®c phóng thích. ñó là m¶t s¿ tranh ÇÃu vô cùng can Çäm và khó khæn. Bác có th‹ cho bi‰t Bác Çã phÃn ÇÃu và tranh ÇÃu chÓng låi m†i thi‰u thÓn, m†i khó khæn nhÜ th‰ nào Ç‹ tÒn sinh. Kinh nghiŒm cá nhân cûa Bác rÃt h»u ích cho m†i ngÜ©i.**
   How long were you in prison? During your time in prison, you must have endured many deprivations and harsh conditions until the time you were released. It must have been an extremely difficult and courageous struggle. Please let me know how you struggled under such deprived and harsh conditions to survive. Your own experiences are helpful to everyone.

4. **Bác ÇÜ®c phóng thích vào næm nào, tháng nào? Khi trª vŠ, gia Çình Bác ch¡c ch¡n có nhiŠu thay Ç°i. Bác phäi phÃn ÇÃu Ç‹ thích nghi v§i cu¶c sÓng chung cùng gia Çình. Bác phäi tranh ÇÃu Ç‹ có th‹ h¶i nhÆp vào m¶t xã h¶i m§i. Bác có th‹ cho bi‰t Bác Çã phÃn ÇÃu và tranh ÇÃu nhÜ th‰ nào v§i m†i hoàn cänh m§i Ç‹ có th‹ sÓng hòa h®p v§i m†i ngÜ©i k‹ cä v§i v® con.**
   When were you released? There must have been many changes in your family. How did you adapt to the new society? Please tell me about your struggle under the new circumstances to live harmoniously with everyone around you, including your family.

5. **Bác có th‹ cho bi‰t nh»ng khó khæn trong viŒc mÜu sinh ª gi»a m¶t xã h¶i hoàn toàn m§i lå ÇÓi v§i Bác, và Bác Çã phäi tranh ÇÃu nhÜ th‰ nào Ç‹ Çû sÓng?**
   Please let me know about the difficulties in earning a living in the new society. How did you struggle to survive?

6. **Cäm tÜªng và Ü§c mÖ cûa Bác khi bi‰t tin vŠ chÜÖng trình H.O.? Bác Çã nghï gì vŠ m¶t tÜÖng lai khi ÇÎnh cÜ tåi MÏ?**
   What were some of your hopes and dreams when you first learned about the H.O. Program? What did you think your future would be like when you came to America?

7. **Sau khi Ç‰n MÏ, Bác Çã thÃy có s¿ khác biŒt nào so v§i nh»ng gì Bác Çã cäm nghï khi còn ª ViŒt Nam? Bác cho bi‰t nh»ng khó khæn Bác Çã g¥p trong nh»ng ngày tháng ÇÀu tiên. S¿ phÃn ÇÃu và s¿ tranh ÇÃu cûa Bác nhÜ th‰ nào Ç‹ tåo ÇÜ®c m¶t cu¶c sÓng m§i tÜÖng ÇÓi °n ÇÎnh trên ÇÃt MÏ. Gia cänh cûa Bác bây gi© nhÜ th‰ nào?**
   After you came to America, what were the differences between the realities of American life and what you imagined? Please let me know some of the difficulties that you experienced in the first days in America. What were your struggles in creating a relatively stable life in America? What is your family life like today?

8. **HiŒn nay Bác có suy nghï gì ho¥c có Ü§c mÖ gì cho tÜÖng lai hay không?**
   What are your thoughts and dreams about the future?

Appendix 2

Có m¥t trong bu°i phÕng vÃn ThÙ Ba Ngay 30 Tháng 7, Næm 2001:
NguyÍn SÙ
Lê ThiŒp (Washington D.C.)
Lê Th¿
NguyÍn Long
NguyÍn Giáo

SÙ: Có Anh ThiŒp tØ Washington D.C. anh š vŠ d¿ Çám cÜ§i cûa cháu. Ông Ãy sãng sàng trä l©i câu hÕi cûa cô. Anh em tình c© g¥p ª Çây, uÓng cà phê.

ThiŒp: Cái ch‡ ÇÀu tiên Ç†c cái s¿ hi‹u bi‰t ÇÆp b‹ m¶t ÇiŠu rÃt buÒn. Phäi vi‰t s¿ hi‹u bi‰t không Çày Çû.

SÙ: Cô š muÓn tìm hi‹u thêm. Cô š qua Çây m§i tám tu°i.

ThiŒp: Câu sÓ 4 và câu sÓ 5, mình phäi nói xã h¶i nào. Cô vi‰t, "Xã h¶i MÏ hoàn toàn xã h¶i m§i." ñÓi v§i tôi xã h¶i C¶ng Sän hoàn toàn m§i. Câu hÕi 5, "Làm th‰ nào Ç‹ thích nghi v§i xã h¶i MÏ?", chÙ còn MÏ Çâu có gì mà phäi tranh ÇÃu. Qua Çây cái gì cÛng tr® cÃp cho mình Çû thÙ chÌ có cái mình thích nghi v§i cái xã h¶i này chÙ không có gì phäi tranh ÇÃu h‰t.

Th¿: Tôi có š ki‰n sÓ 3 và sÓ 4. Cô dùng hai ch», t¿ do. Thì câu Çó nói, "B¡c Çã sÓng sót cho Ç‰n ngày t¿ do." Th¿c ra nó thä chúng tôi vŠ chÙ không phäi t¿ do. Theo tôi nghÌ cô dùng ch» release, là ÇÜ®c thä. Chúng tôi ÇÜ®c thä chÙ chúng tôi không phäi là ÇÜ®c t¿ do. Khi mà nó thä tøi tôi ra khÕi trải š thì sau Çó vŠ ÇÎa phÜÖng nó còn quan ch‰.

Long: Nó vÅn g†i là house arrest có nghïa là s¿ quản ch‰. ñi Çâu phäi khai báo phäi xin phép trong vòng hai næm.

Th¿: Mà mÃt quyŠn công dân. Cô ÇØng nghï ràng chúng tôi ra cäi tảo g†i là thä t¿ do.

Long: Sau khi hai næm ÇÜ®c thä, thì chính quyŠn Çîa phÜÖng h†p rÒi nó cÙ xét là sau m¶t næm hai n‰u nó nói ngÜ©i Çó tÓt theo quan niŒm cûa nó chÙ không phäi là tÓt theo quan niŒm cûa mình thì m§i ÇÜ®c g†i là phøc hÒi công dân. Còn n‰u không là vÅn ti‰p không có quyŠn công dân cûa xã h¶i C¶ng Sän.

Ki‹m: Không có quyŠn công dân là không ÇÜ®c Çi bÀu trong cái bÀu cº. Nó có nh»ng cái h¶i h†p và xinh h†p thì mình không ÇÜ®c thæm d¿.

ThiŒp: Cái nghŠ nghiŒp làm cûa mình chính thÙc là self-employ vì nó không nhÆn mình.

Long: Nghïa là tÃt cä ÇÓi v§i tøi C¶ng Sän không có quyŠn công dân thì m‡i viŒc dì làm ÇŠu không ÇÜ®c bäo d« bäo løc. nh hÜªng h‰t tÃt cä nh»ng ÇÙa con Çi h†c Çi

xin viŒc làm có cha mË là tù nhân chính trÎ nó không nhÆn.
ThiŒp: Nó ghi s° h‰t.
Ki‹m: Nó ÇÜ®c Çi h†c, nhÜng mà vô h†c trÜ©ng chuyên môn thì không Çû Çi‹m.
Long: Khi mà ÇÆu song mà vô nh»ng cái trÜ©ng chuyên môn thì nó ghåt ra ngoài.
SÙ: Là cái sÓ Çi‹m Çòi hÕi cao hÖn. Thí dø nhÜ vào trÜ©ng Y Khoa thì con cán b¶ khoäng 5 chÃm. Con cûa tøi cäi tåo là phäi cao hÖn.
Long: Nghïa là nó có discount. Bây gi© là Çi bui ÇiŒn ngÜ©i Veteran nó chÌ cÀn 85 Çi‹m
nó ÇÜ®c g†i. NhÜng mà ngÜ©i không phäi là Veteran là phäi tØ 90 Çi‹m chª nên
nó v§i g†i là có cái point discount. Thì nh»ng con em cûa Çån C¶ng Sän thì ÇÜ®c
giäm Çi‹m. Còn nh»ng ngÜ©i con em cûa miŠn Nam là không ÇÜ®c giäm Çi‹m.
Tåo khó khæn Ç‹ không có cÖ h¶i Çi h†c.
Ki‹m: Ti‰ng MÏ g†i là discrimation. Cái kÿ thÎ.
Long: Cái Çó nó thông báo rõ ràng. Nó thông báo tÃt cä cái trÜ©ng Çåi h†c.
SÙ: Nó không có trª thành luÆt. Nó chÌ là m¶t cái thông cáo. Bõi vì C¶ng Sän nó cai chÎ b¢ng nh»ng cái thông cáo, b¢ng nh»ng cái quy‰t ÇÎnh. Nó không ÇÜa vào cái
luÆt cûa nó.
Long: Nó ra thông cáo Ç‹ lÜÖng Ç« cho con em cûa tøi nó. Con nh»ng con em cûa MiŠn
Nam là làm khó khæn.
SÙ: Nó vi‰t nh»ng t© thông cáo. Chính gia Çình tôi hÒi Çó cÛng nhÆn ÇÜ®c t© thông
cáo. Tôi Ç†c rÒi gøc Çi chÙ ai mà gi» Çó làm chi. Nó ÇÜa ra mÃy bän thông cáo
gián ª phÜ©ng ª quÆn. RÒi cÛng Çôi khi mÃy ông mà t° trÜªng ÇÜa vŠ thông báo
cho các dân ª trong sóm. Nh»ng ông t° trÜªng Çó thÜ©ng thÜ©ng là ngÜ©i cûa mình. TÙc là ngÜ©I chÍ Ç¶ cÛ. Cái thông cáo Çó cÛng ÇÜ®c Çæng lên trên báo chí
chÙ C¶ng Sän không lén lút Çâu.
Long: Báo chí trong ViŒt Nam là cûa Çäng C¶ng Sän. Nó Çæng nh»ng cái thông cáo Ç‹
cho bi‰t là ÇiŠu kiŒn nhÜ vÆy. Báo Nhân Dân, Báo Sài Gòn, Giäi Phóng, Tûi TrÈ,
Thanh Liên, Lao ñ¶ng Çæng mÃy thÓng cáo C¶ng Sän.
Ki‹m: VŠ cái ÇiŠu kiŒn thi cº cûa con nh»ng sï quan mà Çã Çi cäi tåo thì tôi nói cho cô rõ. Nó có 14 cái ÇÓi tÜ®ng. Thì cái ÇÓi tÜ®ng sÓ m¶t là thu¶c vŠ Çäng viên Çäng
C¶ng Sän. SÓ 2, 3, 4 cÛng cûa nó. SÓ mà cûa tù nhân chính trÎ là sÓ Ç‡i tu©ng 14
là chót h‰t. M‡i m¶t cái Ç‡i tÜ©ng thì dù con cán b¶ nó lÃy 19 Çi‹m 20 Çi‹m

ch£ng hản. Thì Ç‰n cái ÇÓi tÜªng mà con cûa sï quan ngøy thì phäi là Çi‹m thÆt
cao hÖn.
Long: ñ‡i tÜªng nghïa là category, tÃt là nó sÃp loåi phân loåi.
Ki‹m: Nó Üu tiên Ç‹ nó nhÆn.
Long: Đu tiên m¶t là con em Çäng C¶ng Sän và nh»ng ngÜ©i có liên hŒ t§i Çản C¶ng Sän. RÒi nó s¡p tØ sÓ: 1, 2, 3, 4 . . . . Thì nh»ng ngÜ©i cûa miŠn Nam là thu¶c hản 14, coi nhÜ là the bottom.
ThiŒp: Con cûa tù nhân chính trÎ có ÇÙa nào vô Çåi h†c. Hi‰m lám. Phäi nói là Ç¥c biŒt
thì v§I ÇÜ®c vô.
Ki‹m: Cái nhàn mà Çåi h†c tÓt thí dø nhÜ Y Khoa mà ra ki‰m viŒc ÇÜ®c thì nó không cho
con cûa tù nhân chính trÎ vô.
SÙ: Nó chÌ cho vô cái Çåi h†c t°ng h®p thôi. NhÜng cái Çi‹m nó rÃt là chênh lŒch. Thí dø nhÜ con em cán b¶ C¶ng Sän nó lÃy 70 Çi‹m thôi, còn con tù nhân chính trÎ phäi 100 Çi‹m. Mà 100 Çi‹m nó còn l¿a l†c theo cái lš lÎch cûa cha me cûa tØng ngÜ©i. Thành thº ra dù có ÇÜ®c 100 Çi‹m chÜa tr¡c Çã ÇÜ®c vào. Cái trÜ©ng Çåi h†c t°ng h®p là cái trÜ©ng Çåi h†c tÀy huÀy, h†c cái gì cÛng h†c h‰t. NhÜng vào trÜ©ng công nghê chuyên khoa là nó không cho thí dø nhÜ Y Khoa, KÏ SÜ thì
không cho.
Long: Cái gì mà có th‹ là tåo ra chuyŒn nghŠ là nó không cho. Thì cái vÃn ÇŠ nó là sau
Çó thì dÜ§i cái xã h¶i Çó là cái ÇÀu tiên là xét lš lÎch. Lš lÎch là cái background, cái history. Lš lÎch n‰u là công quân cánh chính cûa miŠn Nam Çó là s‰p hản sÓ 14. Khi có lš lÎch Çó là thÃy cái chuyŒn vô trong Çåi h†c là chuyŒn không tÜªng tÜ®ng cái viŒc Çó. Cái lš lÎch là cái quan tr†ng nhÃt ÇÓi v§i cái xã h¶i C¶ng Sän. N‰u Çã chÓng nó ho¥c là m¶t phân mà ÇÓi tr¶i v§i nó, coi nhÜ là cái Çó luôn luôn có t¶i. Và bao gi© cÛng s‰p hản tâm cùng cûa xã h¶i. Con cái tù nhân chính trÎ
không có cÖ h¶i. Coi nhÜ là làm ª ngoài ÇÜ©ng làm chui, làm illegal, làm bÃt cÙ
cái gì Ç‹ ki‰m ÇÜ®c mi‰ng sÓng. Không có luÆt lŒ gì Ç‹ bäo vŒ cho nh»ng cái viŒc
làm. Nhà thÜÖng thì ÇØng có nói vô tåi vì khi mà Çã g†i là illegal. Nhà thÜÖng Ç‹
ränh trÎ bŒnh cho nh»ng ngÜ©I công dân cûa xã h¶i C¶ng Sän.
ThiŒp: Đu tiên cûa h†.
Long: Khi nào mà có t§i mình là thÜ©ng thÜ©ng là tøi nó không có v§i t§i mình mà chuyŒn Çó hi‰m lám. Ch‰t bÕ. Mình sÓng nhÜ m¶t con thú vÆt, chÙ không phäi là
ngÜ©i quan tr†ng.
ThiŒp: NgÜ©i bŒnh thì có th‹ Çi y tá ÇÎa phÜÖng và cÛng có th‹ vô nhà thÜÖng. NhÜng
phäi có tiŠn.

KiŒm: Theo linh ta thì nó cÛng cho vô, nhÜng vô nó không sæn sóc.

Long: Không cho thuÓc. ChÌ là hình thÙc thôi, chÙ treatment thì không có. Thành ra cái ÇŠ tài này rÃt là t‰ nghÎ, rÃt là hay. M‡i anh em chú Bác ª Çây ÇŠu là nh»ng ngÜ©i cäm nhÆn và sÓng trong cái xã h¶i Çó.

ThiŒp: Tôi ÇŠ nghÎ cô soån câu hÕi.

Long: Câu hÕi qúa t°ng quát.

KiŒm: Thí dø nhÜ câu sÓ ba nhÜ Chú Long k‹ chuyŒn qu¶c sÓng trong tù rÃt c§ c¿c, thì nên vi‰t c§ c¿c nhÜ th‰ nào.

Long: Nên hÕi hoàn cänh nhÜ th‰ nào? Nó ÇÓi sº v§i Bác nhÜ th‰ nào? Thi‰u thÓn nhÜ th‰ nào? Thi‰u thÓn nh»ng gì? Có quÀn áo Ç‹ m¥c không? Cái ÇiŠu kiŒn nhÜ th‰ nào? Cái tÓi thiŒu con ngÜ©i nhÜ th‰ nào? NgÜ©i tù bŒnh nhân ÇÜ®c sæn sóc vŠ sÙc khoÈ không? ThuÓc men Çày Çû không? Nghïa là càng nhiŠu câu hÕi càng dÍ ràng hÖn.

KiŒm: MÃy cái ch‰ Ç¶ C¶ng Säm ÇÓi v§i ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ th‰ nào là quan tr†ng lám. HÍ nói là qu¶c sÓng thi‰u thÓn thì nó t°ng quát qúa, nó không nói v§i cái sâu só.

Long: Xin các Bác ª Çây vi‰t thêm câu hÕi rÒi gom låi giúp Ç«.

KiŒm: Vi‰t câu hÕi và trä l©i câu hÕi cûa mình luôn.

ThiŒp: Bây gi© Bác g§p š. Nh»ng câu hÕi này hÀu h‰t thì cÛng ÇÜ®c, nhÜng phäi s¡p s‰p låi cho rõ cái nghïa. Bác thông cäm cho cháu vì ti‰ng ViŒt không ränh. Ví dø nhÜ ch» ÇÜ®c thä t¿ do, were free, thì cháu dùng ÇÜ®c thä ra, were release.

Long: Cái vÃn ÇŠ vŠ væn hóa nhÜ th‰ này, nó hay lám. Th¢ng ViŒt C¶ng nó sº døng cái câu trä vŠ cho gia Çình trä ÇÖn s¿ vŠ cho gia Çình nhÜng mà giÙ s¿ quän ch‰ cûa ÇÎa phÜÖng. Gia Çình phäi chÎu trách nhiŒm má tÜ các cái s¿ sÓng cûa ngÜ§i Çó tåi vì ngÜ©i Çó không phäi là công dân. Release to family under house arrest by the local government. The family is responsible for everything when the person is released. House arrest is like probation.

ThiŒp: Nó quàn ch‰.

Long: Khi thä ra cho gia Çình ngÜ©i Çó không phäi là công dân.

ThiŒp: Nó chÌ thä ra khÕi tråi tù thôi.

Long: NgÜ©i Çó mÃt quyŠn công dân và gia Çình phäi chÎu trách nhiŒm Ç‹ ngÜ©i Çó sÓng theo xã h¶i m§i. TØ Çó phäi sÓng theo s¿ phi phán cûa n¡m nhiŒm cûa

local government. Có m¶t cái committee Ç‹ cÙu xét sau probation. Phäi theo ÇiŠu kiŒn h† muÓn chÙng tÕ thì ÇÜ®c là ti‹u thøc. Khi không có quyŠn công nhân thì Çi làm không ÇÜ®c. Phäi xin phép và không ÇÜ®c Çi t§i Çi lui dÍ dàng. N‰u nó nghi ng© mình thôi là ch‰t rÒi. Nó mà hÕi, "Tåi sao anh Çi ra khÕi phåm vi mà không báo. Anh Çi hoåt Ç¶ng chÓng chúng tôi." C¶ng Sän cai trÎ b¢ng cái s¿ nghi ng©. ñŠ tài này rÃt là hay n‰u cô làm ÇÜ®c thì các Bác tù nhân chính trÎ vinh d¿. TÃt cä nh»ng cái Çó phäi giäi thích kÏ càng vì ª ngoài xë không hi‹u.

ThiŒp: Mình Çi tØng bÜ§c m¶t. ThÙ nhÃt là mình soån câu hÕi. Cái n¶i dung nói hoàn toàn vŠ hoàn cänh tù nhân chính trÎ thì rõ rÒi. Tôi ÇŠ nghÎ nh»ng ngÜ©i nói phäi nói b¢ng s¿ trân thÆt. ñØng nói qúa vì ngÜ©i ta không tin. Tôi Çi phÕng vÃn phái Çoàn cûa MÏ thì ngÜ©i ta hÕi, "Tåi sao anh Çi kinh t‰ m§i?" Có ngÜ©i nói, "Nó b¡t bu¶c di c° tôi nói là tôi phäi Çi. N‰u không thì nó bÕ tù." Cái Çó MÏ không tin. MÏ hÕi tôi thì tôi nói, "Lš do tôi Çi kinh t‰ m§i vì chính quyŠn nói v§i v® tôi ràng n‰u bà Çi kinh t‰ m§i thì chÒng bà ÇÜ®c thä vŠ s§m. Vì v® tôi muÓn tôi vŠ s§m cho nên phäi chÃp nhÆn Çi kinh t‰ m§i Ç‹ tôi ÇÜ®c vŠ s§m. MÏ nó tin tôi. ViŒt C¶ng nó lØa Çäo. N‰u h† không muÓn Çi thì nó bäo ràng là không phøc h¶i quyŠn công dân thì vÃn ti‰p tøc probation. M¥c dù nó không b¡t bu¶c, nhÜng cái Çó hình thÙc là b¡t bu¶c vì v® nào không thÜÖng chÒng. ñó là m¶t cái b¡t bu¶c nhÜng rÃt tinh ly. Nó không phäi Çem súng Çån t§i b¡t mình Çi. CÛng có trÜ©ng h®p nó t§i b¡t Çi tùy theo ÇÎa phÜÖng, nhÜng nó không ph° bi‰n cái s¿ Çó.

Long: Kinh t‰ m§i là New Economic Zone. Ÿ ngoài này nghe thÃy Çó là m¶t cái chÜÖng tr©i chính sáng nhÜ m¶t cái rainbow. Nghe rÃt là ÇËp nhÜng phäi diÍn tä Çó là m¶t cái vùng trÜa develop. Ch‡ Çó là rØng, không ai sÓng Çó h‰t. ChÌ Çem t§i mi‰ng ÇÃt chung quan có cây. Nó ÇÜa nh»ng ngÜ©i miŠn Nam t§i Çó không cung cÃp Çày Çû nh»ng cái ÇiŠu kiŒn cho ngÜ©i ta sinh sÓng. Không có nhà cºa.

ThiŒp: Nó không cho mình ª thành phÓ; nó b¡t mình phäi Çi t§i mÃy khoäng vùng Ç‹ mà t¿ khai thác t¿ sÓng. SÓng ª Çó thì con mình làm sao ÇÜ®c Çi h†c.

Long: Không có nh»ng døng cø Ç‹ làm nhà long thì t¿ làm sao thì làm. Phäi gÌai thích trong cái thesis cho ngÜ©i ngoåi quÓc hi‹u chÙ không có ngÜ©i ta nghï, "Nó cái xa Ç‹ ÇÜa anh Çi vùng sinh sÓng m§i thì có sao Çâu mà phäi th¡c m¡c." Phäi ÇÜa ra ÇiŠu kiŒn, cái condition, cái environment cûa kinh t‰ m§i la m¶t cái vùng rÃt cho nh»ng ngÜ©i không trª låi thành phÓ cÛ mình n»a.

SÙ: Thêm cái phÀn lúc nÅy anh em ÇŠ cÆp t§i vŠ con cái cûa ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ có bÎ änh hÜªng nhÜ th‰ nào vŠ vÃn ÇŠ giáo døc, vŠ vÃn ÇŠ h†c vÃn, thì bªi th¿c rÃt là änh hÜªng. Trong m¶t cái dÎp vào khoäng næm 1981 tôi vŠ. Tôi phäi

có m¶t cái công viŒc làm tải thành phÓ cûa m¶t cái h®p tác xã thì v§i ÇÜ®c cÜ trú ª
thành phÓ m¥c dù trÜ§c mình ª Çó. N‰u không có h®p tác thì nó xë ÇÜa Çi chÌ
ÇÎnh cÜ trú có nghïa là nó xë ÇÜa Çi kinh t‰ m§i theo cái ÇÎa phÜÖng nó muÓn
mình Çi.

Thiêp: Nó b¡t bu¶c cÜ trú. Mình Çâu có quyŠn ch†n nÖi ª.

Long: Nó chÌ ÇÎnh ch‡ nào là phäi ª ch‡ Çó. Nó dùng cái kinh t‰ m§i Ç‹ chi‰m lãnh nhà
cûa và tài sän cûa ngÜ©i miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam. Nó vô trong miŠn Nam nó thÃy cái
nhà ÇËp cûa ngÜ©i viên chÙc phäi Çi tù thì nó hÙa hËn ràng Çi Ç‰n cái vùng chÌ
ÇÎnh rÒi thì nó xë thä ngÜ©i chÒng vŠ. NgÜ©i ta Çi rÒi ngÜ©i chÒng nó cÛng không
thä thì coi nhÜ mÃt nhà luôn. Tøi nó vô ª là không bao gi© lÃy låi. Cái
Çó phäi giäi thích.

KiŒm: Tù nhân này là không có bÃt án, không xét xº, không ÇÜa ra tòa.

Long: Không trial, không luÆt sÜ, không qui lÎch là ª bao lâu. Lúc nào Çu®c trä vŠ
không ai bi‰t. ´t nhÃt mÃy câu hÕi này phäi thành 200 câu hÕi. TØ nh»ng câu hÕi
này là có th‹ làm thành 10 câu hÕi thêm . Phäi break nó càng nhª thì càng tÓt Ç‹
cho mÃy Bác dÍ nh§. Vì lâu ngày qúa mÃy Bác quên thì câu hÕi xác ÇÎnh có th‹
nh¡c nhª. Cô có th‹ hÕi mÃy câu nhÜ vÀy: Tù chính trÎ bÎ Çàn áp nhÜ th‰ nào?
S¿ lo l¡ng cûa Bác là cái gì? Cái tâm lš rÃt là quan tr†ng hÖn là thi‰u vÆt chÃt, hÖn
là c¿c kh° vì lao Ç¶ng. Ai cÛng lao Ç¶ng c¿c kh°. C« nào cÛng chÎu Ç¿ng ÇÜ®c.
NhÜng con ngÜ©i mà bÎ Çánh vào tâm lš là dÍ bÎ gøc. Cái happiness cûa family breakdown. Con cái không ÇÜ®c h†c hành. Cä m¶t cái xã h¶i, generation, và generation chÜa ÇÜ®c recover. Cái Çó ÇŠu có phäi Çánh vô.
ViŒt C¶ng dùng hy v†ng Ç‹ tåo s¿ tranh Çua gi»a anh em trong tù vì nó hÙa là xë ÇÜ®c chª vŠ. Nh»ng ngÜ©i bÎ k› l¿c xë làm ÇiŠu không tÓt ÇÓi v§i anh em Ç‹ ÇÜ®c vŠ s§m. N‰u không thì ngÜ©i MÏ xë tÜªng là tù dÓng nhÜ cûa MÏ. ñây là m¶t cái nhiŒm vø chung. Cô t¿ ÇÙng ra vi‰t cái luÆn án vì thÃy cäm Ç¶ng, còn nh»ng ngÜ©i vi‰t Ç‹ lÃy bàng thì khác. Cái luÆn ¡n này phäi nói thÆt và rõ ràng. LÃy chính nghïa låi cái righteousness cho nh»ng ngÜ©i t§i bây gi© bÎ hi‹u lÀm. ñây không vŠ vÃn ÇŠ nhân Çåo mà là trách nghiŒm cûa ngÜ©i MÏ. Mình phäi Ç¥t vÃn ÇŠ Ç‹ nói lên cho ngÜ©i MÏ bi‰t. Khi mà làm cái này ra rõ ràng nhÜ chúng ta Çã tin, thì mÃy ÇÙa trÈ nó xë Ç†c ÇÜ®c tåi vì nó xë Ç†c ÇÜ®c ti‰ng anh. MÃy ÇÙa trÈ không Ç†c ÇÜ®c thi‰ng ViŒt. LuÆn án xë ÇÜ®c bÕ vô thÜ viŒn. ChÌ gi» Çó rÒi release to family theo cái quy‰t ÇÎnh cäm hÙng cûa nh»ng ngÜ©i C¶ng Sän. ñ©i sÓng ª MÏ khi qua Çây phÀn l§n nh»ng ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ nh»ng các Bác vá Chú rÃt cäm Ön xã h¶i này Çã cho cái cÖ h¶i Ç‹ sÓng Çu®c làm m¶t con ngÜ©i ÇÙng Ç¡n. Có

quyŠn nhu cÀu hånh phúc và con cái có cÖ h¶i có công æn viŒc làm cho mÃy em mà không ÇÜ®c Çi h†c ª bên ViŒt Nam. Còn con em nhÕ ÇÜ®c Çi h†c và thành công. N‰u ª bên ViŒt Nam chÌ là second citizen. Các công æn viŒc làm trong cÖ sª cûa C¶ng Sän là nh»ng công ty, cÖ sª thÜÖng måi là thu¶c vŠ quÓc danh, là cûa government chÙ không phäi tÜ nhân. N‰u mà cûa quÓc danh thì nó chÌ thâu nhÆn dân cûa C¶ng Sän. N‰u mình không thu¶c vŠ C¶ng Sän thì nó xë không thâu. Công viŒc cûa nh»ng ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ và ngÜ©i liên hŒ thì Çi bám ª ngoài long ròng thÃt thä làm nh»ng nghŠ mà C¶ng Sän không muÓn làm. TØ Ç¥p xích lô, Çäy xe, mÃy viŒc lao Ç¶ng là phäi làm. Tuy nhiên cái ÇiŠu kiŒn, cái psychology cûa m¶t con ngÜ©i bÎ tràn Çåp. Con ngÜ©i sÓng bàng cái hy v†ng bÕi cái tÜÖng lai. Nó ušnh gøp thì con ngÜ©i trª thành con thú.

SÙ: Bây gi© tóm låi là nhÜ vÀy. Nh»ng câu hÕi soån låi cho thêm nhiŠu câu hÕi vì mÃy câu Çây qúa t°ng quát thì nó không có Çi vào chi ti‰t. Thí dø nhÜ là nó phân biŒt ÇÓi sº v§i nh»ng cái ngÜ©i sÓng dÜ§i ch‰ Ç¶ miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam th‰ nào và phân biŒt trong bän thân nh»ng ngÜ©i Çó nhÜ th‰ nào? Phân biŒt ÇÓi sº v§i gia Çình v§i con cái nhÜ th‰ nào nhÃt là trong vÃn ÇŠ h†c vÃn? Ho¥c là khi th©i gian vŠ bÎ quän ch‰ nhÜ th‰ nào. Tôi bÎ quän ch‰ m¶t næm sau khi tôi ÇÜ®c trä vŠ. Trong cái næm Çó thì m‡i m¶t tuÀn là tôi phäi làm cái hÒ sÖ, cái report cho nó. Ngày nào, Çi Çâu, làm gì, nói chuyŒn v§i ai, nói vŠ cái gì, ti‰p súc v§i ai thì phäi khai vô cái report tÜ©ng ngày tÜ©ng gi© m¶t. Thí dø hôm nay ngày 30 tháng 7 bu°i sáng anh làm cái gì, gi© nào bu°i nào.

Long: Nguyên ngày.

SÙ: Tôi phäi vi‰t ra cái quy‹n sách Çó Ç‹ nó dùng quän ch‰ mình. M‡i tuÀn lÍ nó xét. N‰u nó ÇÒng š v§i nh»ng l©i khai mà nó cho mình làm tÓt thì nó Çóng cho cái dÃu. ñôi khi nó nói, “Anh vŠ anh làm låi cái hÒ sÖ vì b»a hôm Çó anh Çi Çó. Tôi thÃy anh.” Nó tåo ra nh»ng cái khó khæn và làm r¡c rÓi ghê g§m lám v§i nh»ng ngÜ©i tù cäi ta†. Trong xuÓt næm 52 tuÀn tôi phäi l®p cái report t§i công an phÜ©ng Ç‹ nó sát nhÆn. N‰u tôi không làm thì nó xë tìm nh»ng biŒt pháp Ç‹ nó làm khó dÍ ho¥c là nó k› luÆt. Sau m¶t næm thì có m¶t cái thiêu h†p ª trong cái t° dân phÓ Ç‹ nó xét có trä quyŠn công dân cho ngÜ©i Çó hay không. M¶t cái tô dân phÓ thì thÜ©ng khoäng 40-50 gia Çình h†p låi theo cái lênh cûa công æn phÜ©ng và cänh sát cûa công æn khu v¿c. TrÜ§c m†i ngÜ©i thì mình ít nhÃt phäi có cuÓn sách Çó Ç‹ Ç†c låi nh»ng phÀn quan tr†ng. Tôi phäi trình bÀy lên cái s¿

viŒc mình làm cái gì thÙc là phäi báo ra trÜ§c h‰t. Lúc Çó thì nh»ng ngÜ©i ÇÎa phÜÖng trong t° Çó h† nhÆn xét tÓt thì lúc bÃy gi© nó vào viên bän và nó trä quyŠn công dân cho mình. Khi có quyŠn công dân thì nó xét vÃn ÇŠ cÜ trú. TrÜ§c Çây mình vŠ chÌ tåm trú v§i gia Çình. Trong th©i gian Çó mà bÎ phåm t¶i thì nó xë tong Çi kinh t‰ m§i ngay. Sau khi tÓt tÃt cä m†i cái rÒi tÙc là mình không vi phåm nh»ng luÆt lŒ hay luÆt pháp cûa ÇÎa phÜÖng thì lúc bÃy gi© nó xë xét cho mình Ç‹ nhÆp h¶ khÄu tÙc là ÇÜ®c thÜ©ng chú. Cái h¶ khÄu ª ViŒt Nam rÃt là quan tr†ng. BÃt cÙ cái công viŒc gì làm, Çi xin viŒc, mua th¿c phÄm, Çi mua vé xe Çò hay xe lºa Ç‹ Çi ch‡ này ch‡ khia thì cÀn h¶ khÄu. H¶ khÄu là s° gia Çình.

Long: H¶ khÄu là cái report card cûa gia Çình. ñi Çâu cÛng phäi mang theo Ç‹ có sãng sàng. Ÿ Çây thân nhân cô t§i nhà ª không sao h‰t. NhÜng ª bên ViŒt Nam là cô phäi khai báo ràng là hôm Çó có khách t§i ª, khách tØ Çâu và © mÃy ngày là phäi báo trÜ§c. Nó xét nhà lúc tÓi. Nó xét t© h¶ khÄu mà thÃy dÜ ngÜ©i ª nhà là nó làm khó dÍ. Ai cÛng có bàng h¶i khÄu tØ cái th©i bây gi© và trÜ§c Çây cÛng vÆy.

SÙ: Tôi mang cái h¶i khÄu theo tØ ViŒt Nam tôi có th‹ cho m¶t cái bang copy. Có m¶t quy‹n sách report cûa tôi không bi‰t tôi mang theo hay døc ª ViŒt Nam rÒi. M¶t vài nh»ng chÙng tØ khác mà thí dø nhÜ trä quyŠn công dân tôi mang theo và tôi có th‹ cho b£ng copy Ç‹ ít nhÃt có cái mÅu vŠ cái xã h¶i Çó. ñi ch‡ nào cÛng phäi mang theo. Có cái bang photo Çút trong túi, 3-4 t©: GiÃy ra trải g†i là Release Certificate, giÃy Công Dân, giÃy h¶ khÄu.

PhÕng VÃn Bác SÙ riêng

VŠ vÃn ÇŠ báo chí cûa h¶i Tù Nhân Chính-TrÎ Çó thì ÇÜ®c trÜ§c Çây cÙ hàng tháng là chúng tôi Çæng m¶t cái bän tin tóm t¡t vŠ m¶t sÓ các hoåt Ç¶ng cûa h¶i và tin tÙc cÆp nhÆt m§i nhÃt vŠ vÃn ÇŠ ÇÃu tranh v§i C¶ng Sän Çòi cái t¿ do dân chû cho ViŒt Nam. Cái tài chánh cÛng eo-hËp cho nên là không có th‹ phát hành hàng tháng ÇÜ®c n»a. Bây gi© chÌ vào nh»ng cái dÎp lÍ nhÜ ngày 30 tháng 4, ho¥c là ngày quân l¿c ngày 19 tháng 6, ho¥c là vào ngày D‡ T° HÒng VÜÖng thì khu h¶i chúng tôi ra m¶t cái bän tin Ç¥c biŒt Ç‹ mà ph° bi‰n trong nh»ng ngày lÍ Çó. Và riêng cái ngày t‰t Nguyên-ñán thì v§i ra ÇÜ®c cái t© Ç¥t s¡p Ç‹ Çánh dÃu m¶t næm hoåt Ç¶ng khu h¶i. Trong Çó thì có nh»ng cái bài vi‰t vŠ væn hóa, khoa h†c, ÇÃu tranh chính trÎ, và sinh hoåt cûa h¶i trong næm. Ngoài ra ª ÇÎa phÜÖng này cÛng có m¶t t© báo mà ÇÜ®c s¿ ti‰n nhiŒm cûa ÇÒng bào c¶ng ÇÒng ª Çây là t© Oklahoma ViŒt Báo. Khi mà có nh»ng cái tin tÙc gì có liên quan cÀn phäi ph° bi‰n thì chúng tôi nh© cái t© báo Çó.

ThÜ©ng thÜ©ng hàng tháng chúng tôi cÛng có nh»ng cái bài gºi lên Oklahoma ViŒt Báo Ç‹ ph° bi‰n ra nh»ng cái tin tÙc sinh hoåt, ho¥c là nh»ng cái cu¶c ÇÃu tranh v§i C¶ng Sän nhÜ th‰ nào Ç‹ ít nhÃt nh»ng ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ Oklahoma này cÛng có ti‰ng nói qua cái t© báo Çó. Ph° bi‰n r¶ng rãi t§i ÇÒng bào ti‹u bang này và m¶t sÓ ti‹u bang cänh sát.

S¿ dï chúng tôi không th‹ ra t© báo là nói th£ng không có tiŠn. Bªi vì in 200 bäng tin thì tÓn h‰t $400.00 nên không có tiŠn Ç‹ làm trong khi Çó không có gì thÃu nhÆp vào h‰t. Thì cái tiŠn Çó là do anh em Çóng góp là niên liÍm. Cái tiŠn Çó rÃt là hàm ch‰. M‡i m¶t ngÜ©i m¶t næm Çóng $30.00. TiŠn ÇiŠu hành h¶i vŠ quan hôm tang ch‰ ho¥c là mÃy cái thÜ m©i ho¥c là in nh»ng cái tài liŒu Ç‹ gºi Ç‰n anh em. Thì cái tiŠn Çó cÛng chÌ vØa Ç‹ chi phí ra nh»ng ÇiŠu hành cûa h¶i thôi. N‰u mà có dÜ thì gi» ª Çó cho khi thi‰u. Vào nh»ng t° chÙc ngày lÍ thì anh em Çóng góp. H¶i không có bÃt cÙ m¶t cái fund nào cûa chính quyŠn hay là m¶t cái t° chÙc nào cho h‰t. Chúng tôi là mÃy ngÜ©i qua sau thì nh»ng cái t° chÙc mà xin fund Ç‹ tài tr® giúp Ç« cho nh»ng ngÜ©i mà anh em tù nhân chính trÎ. H¶i ViŒt MÏ Trung Tâm Tœ Nån Çã xin cái fund Çó Ç‹ h† giúp cho chúng tôi trong nh»ng ngày ÇÀu. Trong Çó cÛng có h¶i U.S.C.C. NgÜ©i ta giúp Ç« vŠ vÃn ÇŠ làm giÃy t©, Çi khám sÙc khÕe, ho¥c là Çi thông dÎch. Chúng tôi Ça sÓ là không có dành ti‰ng MÏ hÖn n»a m§i qua không bi‰t gì thì nh© h† giúp Ç« trong th©i gian ÇÀu. Nh»ng cái t° chÙc thiŒn nguyŒn Çó rÃt là tÓt. H† cÛng có nh»ng cái fund cûa chính phû Ç‹ tài tr® cho h† Ç‹ h† giúp cho chúng tôi. H† cÖ sª có s£n rÒi. Hàng næm cÙ xin fund. Chúng tôi không có cÖ sª thì không th‹ chÙng minh ÇÜ®c v§i chính quyŠn liên bang cÛng nhÜ ti‹u bang Ç‹ xin fund. Và muÓn có m¶t cái cÖ sª hoåt Ç¶ng bây gi© thì m¶t tháng thuê mÜ§n cÛng tÓn hàng b¥c ngàn.

NgÜ©i ViŒt Nam, nói chung ngÜ©i Á ñông, cái tình cäm ÇÓi v§i gia Çình rÃt là cao, cho nên nh»ng ngÜ©i Çi næm 75 cÛng nhÜ nh»ng ngÜ©i Çi sau này theo cái diŒn H.O. nhÜ chúng tôi thì vÅn còn Ç‹ låi cha mË anh chÎ em bên Çó rÃt nhiŠu. ChÌ Çi ÇÜ®c m¶t gia Çình cûa mình tÙc là v® và các con cûa mình thôi. Cha mË và anh chÎ em còn låi ViŒt Nam. Cái tình gia Çình vÅn quy‰n luy‰n. Sau khi °n ÇÎnh rÒi cÛng có m¶t sÓ anh em trª vŠ thæm cha mË, gia Çình, h† hàng, và bà con. Ho¥c là nh»ng ngÜ©i Çi næm 75, h† cÛng trª vŠ ViŒt Nam. Bªi vì cái ngÜ©i ViŒt Nam mình tình cäm gia Çình quê hÜÖng n¥ng nŠ l¡m cho nên ai cÛng muÓn trª vŠ Ç‹ thæm hÕi, g¥p g« nh»ng ngÜ©i thÜÖng yêu cûa mình thì riêng v§i tôi thì tôi chÜa có š ÇÎnh chª vŠ ViŒt Nam trong lúc này. Khi nào ch‰ Ç¶ C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam không còn n»a ho¥c ít nhÃt cái vÃn ÇŠ bÓn Hi‰n Pháp cûa C¶ng Sän nó không còn. Có nghïa là C¶ng Sän nó không còn có Ç¶c tài Ç¶c Ç£ng n»a, có nh»ng t¿ do thì lúc Çó tôi v§i vŠ quê hÜÖng thæm thân nhân ª ViŒt Nam. HiŒn nay tôi chÜa có š nghï Çó.

BÓ MË và các Anh Em tôi nh© cái s¿ bäo lãnh cûa m¶t ngÜ©i em bên này ÇÜ®c qua MÏ sau ba næm tôi qua Çây. Làm ÇÖn bäo länh tØ næm 1981 cho Ç‰n næm 1994 thì BÓ MË và các em qua. Bây gi© gia Çình tôi ru¶t thÎt thì chÌ còn låi cô em bên Çó. Còn gia Çình bên v® thì Cha MË và tÃt cä Anh Em vÅn còn låi ª ViŒt Nam. Chính v® tôi cÛng chÜa có dÎp Ç‹ vŠ ViŒt Nam. Cái mÓi s® cûa tôi ÇÓi v§i là C¶ng Sän là nó có th‹ làm bÃt cÙ l¿c viŒc gì gian ác nhÃt dù gian ác cª nào nó cÛng vÅn làm. Tôi e ngåi khi vŠ ViŒt Nam. Nó có th‹ trä thù bªi vì m¶t sÓ hoåt Ç¶ng cûa tôi. Tôi nghï r¢ng nó xë nghe tÃt vŠ hoåt Ç¶ng cûa tôi bªi vì nh»ng cái bài vi‰t cûa tôi khi tôi kš tên, khi tôi gºi Çæng báo không nh»ng ª riêng ti‹u bang này mà Çi xa cho nhiŠu ti‹u bang

khác và trong nh»ng cái næm ít nhÃt là sáu bäy næm nay tôi gi» cái chÙc h¶i trÜªng. Tôi kš rÃt nhiŠu væn thÜ chÓng c¶ng Çòi hÕi nh»ng vÃn ÇŠ t¿ do tôn giáo, t¿ do nhân quyŠn, ho¥c liên án C¶ng Sän. Trong nh»ng ngày lÍ tôi cÛng có nh»ng cái bang tuyên cáo Ç†c trÜ§c cuÓc dân ÇÒng bào ª Çây. Tôi nghï ràng nh»ng cái hoåt Ç¶ng cûa tôi cÛng không qua khÕi cái m¡t cûa m¶t sÓ nh»ng C¶ng Sän h† làm vùng ª tay sai C¶ng Sän tåi ÇÎa phÜÖng này. ñÜÖng nhiên h† th‰ nào cÛng báo cáo vŠ tòa Çåi sÙ ViŒt C¶ng ª Çây ho¥c là cho nh»ng cái t° chÙc C¶ng Sän chÌ huy th‰ nào cÛng phäi có cái ÇiŠu Çó.

Nh»ng cái con em mà sinh viên du h†c tØ ViŒt Nam qua phäi nói th£ng là hÀu h‰t là con cái cûa nh»ng b¶ C¶ng Sän cao cÃp ho¥c là m¶t sÓ cái ngÜ©i giÀu có thì v§i có tiŠn Ç‹ giº cho các con em cûa h† qua MÏ h†c hành ÇÜ®c. Cái viŒc mà Ç‹ ti‰p sÙc v§i các em h†c sinh tØ ViŒt Nam qua là Ü§c v†ng cûa nh»ng ngÜ©i hoåt Ç¶ng vŠ vÃn ÇŠ chính trÎ ª Çây thì chúng tôi coi h† cÛng nhÜ là t© giÃy tr¡ng. H† không bi‰t gì vŠ dân quÓc gia và ngÜ©i miŠn Nam. CÛng có Ü§c v†ng Ç‹ g¥p các em Çó Ç‹ nói cho các em bi‰t là cái s¿ lÜu vong qua Çây nhÜ th‰ nào. V§i các em ch¡c ch¡n không có hÆn thù. MuÓn ti‰p sÙc nói chuyŒn nhÜng mà nh»ng em Çó h† cÛng có cái t° chÙc rÃt là chÆt hËp. H† không bao gi© Ç‹ cho các em ti‰p súc v§i nh»ng c¶ng ÇÒng ho¥c là m¶t sÓ các t° chÙc hoåt Ç¶ng vŠ vÃn ÇŠ h¶i Çoàn chính trÎ ª Çây. ñôi khi h† Çi phÓ ho¥c Çi tr® thì cÛng g¥p cÛng nói chuyŒn, không có gì hÆn thù v§i các em. Riêng vŠ cái viŒc mà nghe tin chín em ÇÀu tiên qua h†c OU, thì C¶ng ÇÒng cÛng nhÜ m¶t cái sÓ các h¶i Çoàn ª Çây có g¥p m¶t sÓ các em lãnh Çåo cûa trÜ©ng OU Ç‹ nói cho các em là phäi ti‰p sÙc v§i các h†c sinh cûa ViŒt Nam qua nhÜ th‰ nào phäi dùng tình cäm, b¢ng cái s¿ chân thÆt, b¢ng cái t¿ do phóng phá cûa miŠn Nam, và cûa MÏ nhÜ th‰ nào Ç‹ cho mÃy em bi‰t. Mà n‰u có th‹ ÇÜ®c thì m©i các em vŠ nhà Ç‹ sinh hoåt. Thì các em v§i thÃy ÇÜ®c cái t¿ do tÓi thi‹u t¿ do cûa nÜ§c MÏ Çói v§i con ngÜ©i nhÜ th‰ nào. Thì nh»ng cái em Çó sau th©i gian h†c ª bên này có th‹ ba næm, nam næm, hay m¶t vài næm h† chª vŠ ViŒt Nam thì ít nhÃt h† cÛng Çã nói lên cho nh»ng ngÜ©i ª Viêt Nam Ç¥c biŒt là thân nhân cûa h† vŠ cái Ç©i sÓng ª bên MÏ nhÜ th‰ nào và Ç¥c biŒt là vÃn Ç‹ t¿ do ra là vÃn ÇŠ t¿ do ra làm sao. Thì cÛng hy v†ng r¢ng trong tÜÖng lai nh»ng em Çó là chª thàng nh»ng cái lãnh Çåo cûa ViŒt Nam thì tình hình có th‹ nó có cái Ç°i m§i hÖn chÙ bây gi© là nh»ng cái thành phÀn gìa nua kÎ cø Çæng lãnh Çåo là nó còn hÆn thù l¡m. H† hÆn thù tøi tôi thì tôi cÛng hÆn thù h† thôi. Làm sao mà sóa bÕ ÇÜ®c.

Thì vì vÆy riêng Çói v§i các em h†c sinh thì tôi cÛng có cái hy v†ng r¢ng khi mà trª vŠ ViŒt Nam thì hy v†ng r¢ng h† xë nói lên ÇÜ®c cho nh»ng cái ngÜ©i ª ViŒt Nam là chính BÓ MË và gia Çình h† bi‰t là cái t¿ do bên MÏ nhÜ th‰ nào và cái dân chû bên MÏ làm sao mà ViŒt Nam Çói dÜ§i C¶ng Sän là không có gì t¿ do. ñây là vÃn ÇŠ tâm lš thì chính cha mË h† cha mË h† là ai là nh»ng cái cán b¶ C¶ng Sän là nh»ng ngÜ©i giÀu có h† thÃy là con cái mình nó không nói dÓi không nói sai. Có ÇiŠu là bÓ mË Çó có dám nói ra nh»ng ÇiŠu con cái nói cho nh»ng ngÜ©i khác nghe hay không. Ch¡c ch¡n là ngÜ©i Çó không dám nói cho nh»ng ngÜ©i khác tåi vì ch‰ Ç¶ C¶ng Sän ki‹m soát rÃt là g¡t gao. Nh»ng ngÜ©i Çó ch¡c ch¡ng là xë g¥p nhiŠu cái khó khæn.

VŠ vÃn ÇŠ cái ngÜ©i tù t¶i cao änh hÜªng t§i súc khÕe vŠ tinh thÀn không thì th¿c t‰ là änh hÜªng. Trong tù ch‰t nhiŠu l¡m. Ch‰t vì thi‰u æn, ch‰t vì bŒn tÆt ch‰t vì lao Ç¶ng, ch‰t vì tai nån. Cái tinh thÀn rÃt là khu khÕe. Tôi muÓn nói t§i tinh thÀn cûa nh»ng ngÜ©i mà quÓc da chÓng c¶ng thì nhiŠu nh»ng anh em Çã b¶c l¶

cái tinh thÀn Çó b¢ng cách cøc th‰ trong cái trải tù cho nên bÎ xÜ tº trong tù ho¥c bÎ giam cÀm cho t§i ch‰t ho¥c bÎ Çánh ch‰t. Và nh»ng anh em Çó bi‹u l¶ b¢ng hành Ç¶ng bŠ ngoài cái sÓ này có nhiŠu ch‰t trong tù nhiŠu l¡m. Còn Ça sÓ thì h† chÓng b¢ng hình thÙc khác. Không chÓng b¢ng hình tÜ®ng bên ngoài. Cho nên C¶ng Sän nó không bi‰t ÇÜ®c mình d» v»ng tinh thÀn anh em.

Lš do chính hi‰u là ª cái ch‡ này. Tám cái ngÜ©i c¡n b¶ C¶ng Sän Çó có vÛ trang, nó có súng v§i m¶t cái sÓ lÜ®ng 400-500 ngÜ©i tù có th‹ gi‰t nó dÍ giàng, th‰ nhÜng mà gi‰t nó rÒi Çi Çâu bªi vì chính quyŠn mình không còn n»a. N‰u chính quyŠn mình còn trÓn vŠ v§i chính quyŠn cûa mình v§i nÜ§c cûa mình. Bây gi© gi‰t nó rÒi chảy vào rØng. RØng vÛ khí mình không có Ç‹ chÓng lải rÒi lÜÖng th¿c không có Ç‹ æn chảy vŠ v§I gia Çình là bÎ b¡t ngay. Chảy Çi Çâu. ñÜ©ng cùng là h‰t ch° rÒi. Mà khi mà gi‰t ÇÜ®c tám ngÜ©i nhÜ vÆy v§i 400 ngÜ©i chảy vào rØng thì ch¡c ch¡n nó xë mang huy Ç¶ng cä hàng trung Çoàn ra tải ch° rÃt là nhan tróng bao vây gi‰t tr†n. Nó xë gi‰t h‰t ngay. Mà không chảy Çi Çâu ÇÜ®c h‰t bªi vì nh»ng cái khu v¿c mà nó làm ra trải cäi tảo Çó là nó Çã bao vây ch¥t chë h‰t rÒi, sÓ Çó là không có dân chÌ có nó b†c chung quan h‰t cä. Nó có b° chí tÃt cä nh»ng cái chÓt Ç‹ nó ki‹m tra ki‹m soát h‰t rÒi. Khi mà có cái chuyŒn sÄy ra, nó bung nguyên m¶t trung Çoàn cûa nó h¢ng nhàn quân Çi v§i vÛ khí thì nó tiêu gi‰t næm sáu tram ngÜ©i Çó nhÜ trÖi. Nó xë gi‰t h‰t. Chảy vŠ v§i gia Çình là bÎ b¡t ngay mà liên hŒ v§i gia Çình n»a. Mà chính phû mình không còn. HÒi sÜa trÜ§c 75, mình bÎ b¡t hay bÎ nhÓt ª ch‡ nào thì mình còn phá tù ho¥c là gi‰t tøi nó Ç‹ mình chÓn vŠ v§i ÇÒng Ç¶i cûa mình. Mình ÇÜ®c bäo vŒ và ÇÜ®c chæn bÎ vÛ khí Ç‹ chÓng lải nó. ñ¢ng này h‰t rÒi, ÇÜ©ng cùng rÒi không ch‡ nào h‰t.

Th‰ còn cái viŒc mà nó nói r¢ng có nh»ng cái ngÜ©i mà co cái hy v†ng Ç‹ ÇÜ®c thä vŠ thì nó tảo ra cái hy v†ng Çó Ç‹ b§t cái s¿ chÓng ÇÓi ª trong trải tù. Ai cÛng hy v†ng Ç‹ trª vŠ v§i gia Çình cho nên không n°i loản. Lâu lâu nó lải cho vŠ vài chøc ngÜ©i có th‹ sau th©i gian hÖn m¶t næm nó cho vŠ m¶t sÓ, sau hÖn hai næm lải cho vŠ m¶t sÓ, sau th©i gian hÖn ba næm lải vŠ m¶t sÓ. Th‰ thì nh»ng cái sÓ ngÜ©i anh em Çó ÇÜ®c vŠ Çó thì ÇÜÖng nhiên khi mình ÇÜ®c thä vŠ v§i gia Çình là m¶t s¿ vui mØng cho nên tảo ra cái hy v†ng cho ngÜ©i còn ª lải. H† vŠ thì mình cÛng xë ÇÜ®c vŠ. Nh© cái hy v†ng Çó mà anh em cÛng có ÇÜ®c sÓng sót. N‰u còn ngÜ©i mà tuyŒt v†ng thì xë ÇÜa Ç‰n n°i loản và cái s¿ ch‰t Ç‰n rÃt nhanh. Còn n‰u mình bi‰t ch¡c ch¡n là không có cái hy v†ng vŠ thì xë n°i loản mà n°i loản thì b¡t bu¶c phäi có Ç° máu. H† ch‰t thì mình cÛng ch‰t.

Khi nó thä tôi ra khÕi tù, thì có th‹ hai ba næm nó m§i cho I.D. card. CÛng tuy ngÜ©i. NhiŠu th¢ng khó, nhiŠu th¢ng dÍ. Nó bäo, “Anh SÙ, chiŠu mai nhÆu, anh SÙ.” Mình cÛng phäi chiŠu nó bªi vì không là có chuyŒn. N‰u mình không có tiŠn thì æn nhÆu sÖ sÖ. Có tiŠn thì phäi Çi nhà h¢ng. Nó bi‰t r¢ng tôi vŠ tôi Çåp sích lô ho¥c Çi làm mÃy chê lá, tiŠn Çâu có. Nó bi‰t mình Çâu có. C¿c kh° nó vÃn quÃy rÀy. Nh»ng chuyŒn nhÕ nó cÛng xin, bây gi© nó nói, “Anh SÙ h¢ng Çêm tôi phäi Çi tuÀn canh mà Çèn bin h‰t rÒi, anh SÙ cho xin mÃy cøc bin.”

Tôi hÕi, “Bao nhiêu m¶t cøc?”

Th‰ dø bó bäo, “$500 ÇÒng m¶t cøc.” Thì tôi ÇÜa nó $2000 tiŠn HÒ Chí Minh Ç‹ nó mua bÓn cøc bin. Nó mua hay không là viŒc nó. Th¿c ra thì nó muÓn ki‰m tiŠn mình. Nó có rÃt nhiŠu khó khæn nhÜ vÆy.

Trong tù Çàn bà cÛng rÃt là nhiŠu nh»ng cán b¶. Sï quan quân cänh trinh ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa hÒi sÜa nam cÛng có nh» cÛng có. NhÜng thÀn phÀn Çó cán b¶ Çó là ÇŠu bÎ b¡t sau næm 75 Ç‹ vào tråi cäi tåo h‰t. Tråi n» h† nhÓt riêng không bao gi© nhÓt chung h‰t. Còn ª h¶i tù nhân chính trÎ có m¶t vài ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ là n». Bà Trung Tá HÒ Thi Vë, bà Ãy là chÌ huy trÜªng n» quân nhân l¶ng hòa hÒi sÜa bà š bÎ tù mÜ©i mÃy næm rÒi bà Ãy qua Çây næm 1995. HiŒn nay bà š sÓng ª Oklahoma. Bà cø hôm nay cÛng trên bÄy chøc tu°i. ThÌnh thoäng vào nh»ng ngày thí dø nhÜ ngày Çåi h¶i vŠ t‰t thì bà š thæm d¿. Tôi vi‰t trong cái quy‹n Ç¥c xã cûa h¶i tù nhân chính trÎ næm t‰t næm vØa rÒi k› nhiŒm mÜ©i næm thành lÆp h¶i thì tôi vi‰t ra cái qúa trình hoåt Ç¶ng mÜ©i næm. Là nh»ng cái hoåt Ç¶ng cûa khu h¶i Ç¥c biŒt là có vi‰t vŠ cái tr¡c ÇÜ©ng mÜ©i næm hoåt Ç¶ng cûa tù nhân chính trÎ. Nói vŠ nh»ng thành lÆp.

H¶i TØ Nhân Chính TrÎ ÇÜ®c thành lÆp ÇÀu næm 1991. Chúng tôi qua cuÓi næm 1990. ñÀu næm 1991 là thành lÆp. H¶i có 300 ngÜ©i. Tôi là ngÜ©i h¶ trÜªng thÙ næm. ñÀu tiên là Bác Lê Thành Danh. ñ‰n Bác thÙ hai là Mô Quang Thi, rÒi Ç‰n Bác Quÿnh Ng†c Thåch. Bác Ãy ra rÒi làm ÇÜ®c hai tháng rÒi ch‰t. B¡c thÙ tÜ là ñ‡i Uy ChÜng, bây gi© là chû tÎc c¶ng ÇÒng. Bác Lš Xuân M¶c lên làm h¶i trÜªng ÇÜ®c hÖn m¶t næm thì Bác Ãy ch‰t. Tôi lên làm thay quyŠn h¶i trÜªng. ñó là næm 1995. TØ 1996 t§i bây gi© tôi là h¶i trÜ©ng Tù Nhân Chính TrÎ. H‰t nhiŒm kÿ låi bÀu lên ngÜ©i khác. M‡i m¶t nhiŒm kÿ là hai næm. Cái h¶i Tù Nhân Chính TrÎ ÇÜ®c thành lÆp gia cái møc Çích là Ç‹ anh em tÜÖng tr® lÅn nhau vì nh»ng cái ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ m¶t cái hoàn cänh. NgÜ©i Çi qua trÜ§c thì giúp ngÜ©i Çi qua sau. ñÒng th©i cÛng Ç‹ tåo thành m¶t cái Çoàn th‹ Ç‹ tÆp trung ÇÜ®c sÙc månh. Cho nên sau cái th©i gian ÇÀu g†i là ái h»u thì chuy‹n qua ÇÃu tranh chính trÎ v§i C¶ng Sän. ñÃu tranh chính trÎ ngoåi giao, ÇÃu tranh tuyên vÆn và nhiŠu nh»ng m¥t khác. ñÃu v§i C¶ng Sän bªi vì n‰u mà mình lÆp ra m¶t cái h¶i Çoàn mà chÌ aí hºu tÜÖng tr® nhau không, nó cÛng phí phåm Çi. Mà Ç¥c biŒt là nh»ng ngÜ©i tú nhân chính trÎ là nh»ng ngÜ©i mà h† Çã hy sinh xÜÖng máu Ç‹ bäo vŒ t° quÓc miŠn nam ViŒt Nam.

Sau này cái s¿ phän b¶i cûa MÏ cÛng nhÜ cái s¿ länh Çåo y‰u kém cûa cÃp lãnh Çåo mi‰n nam. MÏ Çã bÕ miŠn nam cho nên miŠn Nam m§i l†t vào tay C¶ng Sän miŠn B¡c. Phäi có MÏ y‹m tr® vŠ vÛ khí, vŠ Çån dÜ®c và nhiŠu vÃn ÇŠ khác cho m¶t cái v¿c chi‰n tranh. Bªi vì C¶ng Sän ÇÜ®c khÓi C¶ng Sän th‰ gi§i trong Çó có Liên Sô, Trung C¶ng, Hungary, TiŒp Kh¡c, Ba Lan, Cuba y‹m tr®. Trong khi Çó MÏ c¡t y‹m tr® cho miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam thì quân l¿c ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa có th‹ nói là quân l¿c rÃt là hùng månh. Khi mà bÎ c¡t y‹m tr® nhÜ th‰ tÙc là có súng mà không có Çån, có máy bay mà không có xæng, có xe mà không có sang. Thi‰u thÓn nhiŠu m¥t khác n»a thì hÕi làm sao có th‹ chÓng c¿ ÇÜ®c v§i quân Ç¶i b¡c tuyŒt ÇÜ®c khÓi C¶ng Sän y‹m tr® nhÜ th‰. B¡t bu¶c phäi thua. Thua Çây là thua theo cái sách lÜ®c cái chi‰n lÜ®c cûa MÏ, chÙ th¿c ra n‰u mà có d»a miŠn Nam v§i miŠn B¡c mà ÇÒng lÜ®c Çánh nhau chÜa trác bên nào tháng bên nào thua.

Vì cái quyŠn l®i cûa MÏ nhÜ th‰ nào Çó nó bÕ miŠn Nam. CuÓi cùng chúng tôi không ÇÜ®c ti‰p t‰ súng Çån, Çánh nhau ª ngoài m¥t trÆn không có Çån, ho¥c là sÓ Çån rÃt là hånh ch‰ làm sao Çánh. M¶t ngày có th‹ m¶t cái canh cÙ ViŒt C¶ng nó có th‹ pháo khích vào m¶t chøc ngàn trái Çài b¡c Çû loåi tØ 105 ly, 155 ly, 130 ly, 122 ly vân vân cä h¢ng ngàn trái. Trong khi Çó chúng tôi phän pháo låi thì chÌ có 5, 10 trái thôi, làm sao Çánh. B¡t bu¶c là miŠn Nam phäi thua. Thua vì MÏ bÕ phäi nói th£ng. Th¿c ra

là MÏ bÕ. Vì vÆy cho nên bÎ C¶ng Sän miŠn b¡c nó thôn tính miŠn Nam m§i sÄy ra ngày 30 tháng 4 næm 1975.

Bây gi© h¢ng næm c¶ng ÇÒng ª Oklahoma cÛng nhÜ nh»ng c¶ng ÇÒng khác ª kh¡p nÜ§c MÏ và trên th‰ gi§i ÇŠu t° chÙc cái ngày 30 tháng 4, ngày quÓc hÆn Ç‰ tÜªng nh§ låi cái ngày mà miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam mÃt vào tay C¶ng Sän và nh»ng ngÜ©i ViŒt Nam không th‹ sÓng dÜ§i Ç¶ C¶ng Sän phäi bÕ nÜ§c ra Çi tìm t¿ do trên th‰ gi§i Ç¥c biŒt là ª nÜ§c MÏ này nhiŠu nhÃt là MÏ, Canada, Úc, và Pháp. Nói chung là rÃt nhiŠu nÜ§c khác trên th‰ gi§i thÆm chí cä nÜ§c Dio Thái, Phi Châu, cÛng có. Khi vÜ®t biên låc vã nh»ng cái tÀu Çó h† cÙu, thì có m¶t sÓ ÇÒng bào ViŒt Nam sÓng mây nÜ§c Çó. M¶t cái qu¶c chi‰n gia dãn nhÜ vÆy cÛng tÓn xÜÖng máu rÃt nhiŠu k‹ cä hai miŠn Nam B¡c mà cùng là ngÜ©i ViŒt Nam cä. ñây là m¶t cái Çau kh° lám chÙ không. NhÜng mà ai gây ra cái cu¶c chi‰n Çó thì câu trä l©i th£ng thánh nhÃt là qua sº liŒu tÃt cä nh»ng ngÜ©i mà h† nghiên cÙu vŠ s¿ liŒu và chúng tôi cÛng ÇÜ®c bi‰t rõ ràng là chính C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam ÇÙng ÇÀu là HÒ Chí Minh gây ra cái cu¶c chi‰n.

ThÜ©ng thÜ©ng ban chÃp hành chúng tôi thì cÙ m¶t tháng ho¥c là hai tháng h†p m¶t lÀn. Còn khi mà có nh»ng cái viŒc gì cÀn thi‰t thì chúng tôi có th‹ là m¶t tuÀn h†p hai lÀn ho¥c Ç¶t xuÃt, lúc nào cÀn thì triŒu tÆp v§i anh em ban chÃp hành Ç‹ ÇÜa ra m¶t sÓ kh‰ hoåt hoåt Ç¶ng cho h¶i ho¥c là y‹m tr® cho nh»ng cái qu¶c ÇÃu tranh cûa các t° chÙc các Çoàn th‹ ª nÜ§c MÏ cÛng nhÜ là nh»ng cái t° chÙc ÇÃu tranh ª quÓc n¶i. Thí dø nhÜ hiŒn nay là cái cu¶c ÇÃu tranh ª quÓc n¶i vŠ Çòi hÕi vŠ t¿ do tôn giáo, tÜ do dân chû cûa linh møc NguyÍn Væn Lš ª ngoài Hu‰, ho¥c Hòa ThÜ®ng ThÙc Quäng ñ¶, ho¥c là cûa bên giáo h¶i PhÆt Giáo ViŒt Nam ThÓng NhÃt, ho¥c là Cø Lê Quang Liêm cûa PhÆt Giáo Hòa Häo bên này. NgÜ©i ViŒt ª hài ngoåi có nhiŒm vø phäi y‹m tr® nh»ng cái cu¶c ÇÃu tranh trong nÜ§c Çó và khu h¶i cûa tù nhân chính trÎ cÛng phäi có cái trách nhiŒm Ç‹ y‹m tr® nh»ng cái cu¶c ÇÃu tranh Çó. Vi‰t nh»ng petition Ç‹ gºi cho nh»ng cÖ quan. Có khi tøi tôi giºi t°ng thÓng Hoa Kÿ. Có nh»ng trÜ©ng h®p phäi gºi cho Liên HiŒp QuÓc và cho ông b¶ trÜªng. Chúng tôi giºi cho ông B¶ TrÜªng Colin Powell. Ông Ãy qua ViŒt Nam vØa rÒi thì gºi cho ông š m¶t cái thÜ. Cái thÜ Çó xin yêu cÀu ông š ngoåi giao khi mà thi‰p xúc v§i chính quyŠn C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam thì Ç¥t vÃn ÇŠ t¿ do tôn giáo và thä nh»ng ngÜ©i C¶ng Sän b¡t b§ giam cÀm. Chúng tôi b¡t bu¶c phäi làm nh»ng cái viŒc Çó và không riêng gì cái khu h¶i Oklahoma ho¥c là c¶ng ÇÒng ª Çây mà trên toàn nÜ§c MÏ rÃt nhiŠu nh»ng cái khu h¶i và Çoàn th‹ ÇÃu tranh ÇŠu gºi nh»ng cái khánh thÜ ho¥c là nh»ng cái petition cho ông Colin Powell. Tôi là ngÜ©i Çåi diŒn h¶i thì xë kš tên xin ch» kš cûa anh em cû tÃt cä h¶i viên kèm theo.

ThÆt ra phäi nói th£ng ra mÃy cái næm ÇÀu næm 1975, tinh thÀn và nh»ng s¿ ÇÃu tranh Çó cûa ngÜ©i ViŒt häi ngoài Çi næm 1975 Çi suÓng h£n. TØ ngày mà nh»ng tù nhân chính trÎ tái Çình cÜ ª Hoa Kÿ theo trÜÖng trình g†i là H.O. thì lúc Çó là cái phong chào mà Ç‹ ÇÃu tranh chÓng Ç¶c tài C¶ng Sän thì bÃy gi© m§ bùng phát trª låi, m§i là sÓng trª låi månh më nhÜ ngày hôm nay. Trong m¶t cu¶c ÇÃu tranh nào cÛng cÀn phäi có m¶t cái s¿ y‹m tr® cûa nhiŠu cái t° trÙc. Thí dø nhÜ cu¶c ÇÃu tranh tôn giáo ª ViŒt Nam bây gi© cÀn có nhiŠu nh»ng cái t° chÙc không nh»ng ª trong nÜ§c mà nhÃt là ª ngoài này n»a Ç‹ ÇÃu tranh vŠ vÃn ÇŠ chính trÎ. Cái sÓ ngÜ©i tù nhân chính trÎ qua Çây cÛng rÃt là nhiŠu. Cái Ü§c lÜ®ng vào khoäng 40,000 t§ 50,000. Thì n‰u k‹ gia Çình n»a thì con sÓ ngÜ©i có th‹ lên 200,000.

Bây gi© các Bác Çâu có súng Çản Ç‹ ÇÃu tranh b¢ng vÛ kš thì mình phäi ÇÃu tranh b¢ng phÜÖng tiŒn khác. Cái nhiŒm vø cûa tøi tôi trÜ§c m¡t là phäi d» cái s¿ mà cùng cÓ æn toàn æn ninh ª cái ÇÎa phÜÖng này. N‰u ª ti‹u bang và thành phÓ nào mà không có cái t° chÙc c¶ng ÇÒng ngÜ©i ViŒt, hay h¶i Çoàn quân nhân, hay t° chÙc Tù Nhân Chính TrÎ thì C¶ng Sän nó së t¿ tung t¿ tác và nó xë xuÃt hiŒn ª các thành phÓ ch® búa và có th‹ là nh»ng cái c© ÇÕ sao vàng cûa C¶ng Sän, c© máu mình, nó xë xuÃt hiŒn nhiŠu nÖi. Và nó xë t¿ do nó làm gì nó làm. Nh© có c¶ng ÇÒng nh© cái Çoàn th‹ quÓc gia và trong Çó có nh»ng Çoàn th‹ nhÜ là Tù Nhân Chính TrÎ thì h† không dám t¿ tung t¿ tác h‰t. Khi mà ch‡ nào xuÃt hiŒn lá c© C¶ng Sän thì chúng tôi t§i Ç‹ liên låc v§i nh»ng cÖ quan ho¥c nh»ng t° chÙc Çó Ç‹ mình Ç¥t vÃn ÇŠ v§i h† và yêu cÀu h† hå lá c© C¶ng Sän và d¿ng lá c© quÓc gia cûa mình lên, lá c© vàng ba s†c ÇÕ. Tåi Oklahoma này là chúng tôi hå ÇÜ®c næm lá c© C¶ng Sän. Ch® Buy 4 Less cách Çây khoäng 3 næm h† treo rÃt nhiŠu c©. Trong Çó có m¶t cái lá c© C¶ng Sän. H† treo nay ª cºa bÜ§c vào bên tay trái. Có ngÜ©i Çi ch® thÃy thì h† vŠ báo tôi. Tôi h†p v§i m¶t sÓ anh em thì t§i g¥p cái ngÜ©i quän lš cûa ch® nói cho h† bi‰t là Çây là lá c© C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam. Mà chính vì lá c© này mà chúng tôi phäi bÕ nÜ§c ra Çi. Chính vì lá c© này mà 58,000 quân nhân Hoa Kÿ Çã làm xuÓng tåi miŠn nam ViŒt Nam. Vì vÆy chúng tôi có th‹ nói r¢ng c¶ng ÇÒng ngÜ©i ViŒt quÓc gia chúng tôi không chÃp nhÆn lá c© này. ñŠ nghÎ ông quän lš hå lá c© Çó suÓng và d¿ng lá c© quÓc gia ViŒt Nam lên. H† hÕi lá c© nhÜ th‰ nào. Thì chúng tôi ÇÜa ra cái lá c©. H† rÃt vui vÈ. H† nhan chóng hå lá c© xuÓng trÜ§c m¥t mình và h† treo lá c© cûa mình lên. Nay n‰u Çi ch® Buy 4 Less, cÙ Çi vào bên tay phäi giÅy tính tiŠn thì thÃy lá c© ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa treo ª Çó. Chính lá c© tôi trao cho h†. Ho¥c là ª trong cái ch® fleamarket ÇÜ©ng N.W. 10 và Penn. Khí Çó cÛng vÆy, cÛng có nh»ng ngÜ©i h† Çi trong Çó hô thÃy m¶t cái tiŒm Çó bán nhiŠu thÙ l¡m cä c© n»a. Trong Çó nó treo rÃt nhiŠu c© cÛng có c© C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam. Nh»ng ngÜ©i Çi ch® Ç§ thÃy nhÜ vÆy thì h† vŠ báo tôi. Tôi tÆp chung m¶t sÓ anh em Ç‹ t§i g¥p chû nhân cûa tiŒm. Tôi trình bÀy cÛng giÓng nhÜ ª ch® Buy 4 Less. Tôi mæng sÅn c© QuÓc Gia. Sau cái trình bÀy h† rÃt vui vÈ. H† g« xuÓng và h† xin l‡i h† không bi‰t ÇÃy là lá c© C¶ng Sän. Ho¥c là gÀn Çây có hai nhà th© Tin Lành ª tåi Oklahoma. H† cÛng treo nhiŠu c©, thì trong Çó cÛng có lá c© C¶ng Sän. Nh»ng ngÜ©i Çi lÍ h† bi‰t, h† vŠ báo. Tøi tôi liên låc v§i Møc SÜ ho¥c ngÜ©i quän trÎ ª cái nhà th© tin lành Ç‹ yêu cÀu h† tháo g« lá c© ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa mình lên. Thì h† cÛng vui vÈ h† làm. H† xin l‡i là h† không bi‰t. Nhà th© Çó có nhiŠu ngÜ©i ViŒt Nam t§i thæm d¿ thánh lÍ Chúa NhÆt. H† muÓn treo lá c© ViŒt Nam lên Ç‹ làm vui long nh»ng ngÜ©i t§i thæm gi¿ các thánh lÍ Çó. Khi mà h† dª sách ho¥c Internet thì h† thÃy ViŒt Nam tÙc là c© ÇÕ sao vàng là h† lÃy ra h† treo. H† không bi‰t bªi vì c© ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa coi nhÜ bây gi© bÎ quÓc t‰ không còn công nhÆn n»a. NhÜng ÇÓi v§i nh»ng ngÜ©i ViŒt QuÓc Gia thì lá c© tÒn tåi mãi. BÃt cÙ ª Çâu tåi Oklahoma này mà phát hiŒn cái lá c© C¶ng Sän treo lên thì chúng tôi t§i yêu cÀu hå xuÓng. H¤ng CMI hÒi Çó ª xe l¶ I-40 ª Yukon treo rÃt nhiŠu c©. Cái kÿ Çó nó cÛng treo m¶t cái lá c© C¶ng Sän. Tôi liên låc v§i C¶ng ñÒng. Nh© bên H¶i C¿u Chi‰n Binh Hoa Kÿ v§i bà dân bi‹u Debbie Blackburn Burn, và mÃy t© báo American Hero liên låc v§i chû hãng Ç‹ hå lá c© xuÓng. Và k‰t cu¶c Çó cÛng thành công. Thì ª Çó hiŒn nay có lá c© Moroque, cÛng c© ÇÕ sao vàng nhÜng mà có cái viŠn Çen. NhiŠu ngÜ©i Çi qua nhiŠn thì tÜªng lá c© C¶ng Sän. Tôi cÛng bÓn næm lÀn ÇÜ®c ÇÒng bào báo cáo nhÜ vÆy. Thì m‡i lÀn báo cáo thì tôi Çi xem. Thì sau

Çó tôi vi‰t thÜ ho¥c là ÇiŒn toải cho h† bi‰t là Çó là c© cûa Moroque chÙ không phäi lá c© C¶ng Sän.

Ÿ Çải h†c OU thì trÜ§c Çây không có c© C¶ng Sän. TØ khi bang giao thì có m¶t sÓ sinh viên chính quyŠn MÏ bang giao v§i chính quyŠn C¶ng Sän ViŒt Nam. Có m¶t sÓ sinh viên tØ ViŒt Nam qua du h†c tải trÜ©ng OU thì h† ÇÜa lá c© ÇÕ sao vàng lên vào nhºng cái ngày mãn khóa ra trÜ©ng ho¥c là Çi diÍn hành thì h† dËp cái lá c© cûa ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa. Qua nh»ng cái s¿ liên hŒ tranh ÇÃu cûa c¶ng ÇÒng ª Çây cÛng nhÜ là Ç¥c biŒt các em h†c sinh OU, thì ban dánh hiŒn nhà trÜ©ng Çã chÃp nhÆn cho lá c© ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa ÇÜ®c Çi diÍn hành trong nh»ng các ngày lÍ. NhÜng mà có vÃn ÇŠ tÒn tải cái lá c© cûa ViŒt C¶ng thì trong tÜÖng lai mà n‰u mà các em h†c sinh OU có nh»ng cái vÆn Ç¶ng månh më hÖn n»a thì có th‹ lá c© C¶ng Sän xë không còn xuÃt hiŒn trong bu°i viÍn hành cûa trong quân viên nhà trÜ©ng.

M¶t cái quÓc gia bao gi© cÛng là m¶t cái bi‹u tÜ®ng lá c© là cái bi‹u tÜ®ng cái linh hÒn. Mà bây gi© cái miŠn Nam mình là bi‹u tÜ®ng ba s†c ÇÕ mà miŠn Nam mình bÎ C¶ng Sän chi‰m rÒi. MiŠn Nam không còn n»a. Nh»ng lá c© còn tÒn tải ª trong long nh»ng ngÜ©i miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam. NhÃt là nh»ng ngÜ©i Çã chi‰n ÇÃu v§i C¶ng Sän và khi mà cu¶c di tän cÛng nhÜ là Çi tÎ nån ª nÜ§c ngoài thì ngÜ©i ViŒt Çó mang theo cái hÒn Çi. TÙc là cái lá c©.

Interview July 30, 2001

NguyÍn SÙ

Lê ThiŒp (Washington D.C.)

Lê Th¿

NguyÍn Long

NguyÍn Giáo

Su: Mr. Thiep is here from Washington D.C. He is attending his niece's wedding. He would be happy to answer any questions you have. We brothers meet here regularly drinking coffee.

Thiep: The first part of the letter in which you wrote, "my understanding was shattered," it needs to be written that your understanding was not complete.

Su: She wants to learn more. She came here when she was eight years old.

Thiep: Questions 4 & 5, you need to clarify which society you are referring. You wrote that American society was a new society. To me, the Vietnamese Communist society was something completely foreign as well. Question 5 should read, "How were you able to adapt to the American culture?" because once we are in America, you do not have to struggle. We were given everything we need to live; the only thing we had to do was to adapt to the new society.

Thu: I have a suggestion concerning questions 3 and 4. You used the word freedom, "You were incarcerated until the day you were freed." The truth is that they let us go home but we were not freed. I think you should use the word release which means to be let out. After they released us to a location, they still directed us.

Long: It is called house arrest. Everywhere we went, we had to get permission. This went on for two years.

Thu: We lost our citizenship. Do not think that we were freed once they let us go from the prison.

Long: After two years, the local committee meets to examine whether you have been good, according to their standard of goodness, and whether they should restore your citizenship. If you have not been good, citizenship in the new Communist society is not granted.

Kiem: Without citizenship, we could not participate in the election and political and social activities.

Thiep: The only work we could do was work we created because they would not hire us.

Long: This means that none of the work was sponsored. No citizenship affects every aspect of life from education for the children to employment. Former political prisoners are not employed by the state.

Thiep: They write everything on your file.

Kiem: Children do get to go to school, but they are not accepted to specialize schools because they do not have enough points.

Long: Children whose fathers' were prisoners were scratched off from being admitted to specialized schools.

Su: They demanded higher scores for those children. For instance, the school of medicine would require cadres' children 5 points whereas prisoners' children higher than 5 points.

Long: They get special discounts. For example, a librarian position may require one to earn 85 points for veterans but 90 points for nonveterans. Communists' children were given discounts on their points but not prisoners' children. They created hardship so that there would be no opportunities.

Kiem: The English word for that is discrimination! Discrimination!

Long: They post those notices at the universities.

Su: They did not write this into laws, but they wrote these notices in the bulletins. The Communists governed by bulletins and decisions not by laws.

Long: They come out with announcements to support their own children while South Vietnamese children are left out.

Su: They wrote these bulletins. My family got one. I read it and threw it away. Why would I want to keep it? They post those bulletins on streets and at county and district meetings. Sometimes, county chiefs, our people from the old government, would notify us about these bulletins. They print these edicts in newspapers. The Communists do not hide these agenda.

Long: These newspapers are published by the Communists: Nhan Dan, Sai Gon, Giai Phong, Tui Tre, Thanh Lien, Lao Dong.

Kiem: There are 14 categories, and we were the 14th one, the last one. The first one, second, third, and fourth belong to the different Communist ranks. Political prisoners of South Vietnam were placed as the last one on the list of priority. If the criteria to get into specialized schools were 19 or 20 points for the Communist cadres, then our children would have to have higher points than that to get in.

Long: They organized society by categories.

Kiem: They favored their children.

Long: They favored their children and the ones affiliated with them. South Vietnamese were placed on the bottom of the list.

Thiep: It would be an exceptional case for children of prisoners to enter college.

Kiem: The school of medicine where one could get work would not admit children of prisoners.

Su: Our children could attend general schools and take general courses, but the specialized schools such as medicine and engineer are closed to them. The criteria are biased. For example, cadres' children require 70 points; prisoners' children would require 100 points. Even with 100 points, they would select the students based on their parents' background. There is no way our children could attend such schools.

Long: Whatever degree programs that would enable a person to develop skills or craft would be shut to prisoners and their children. Communism organizes society by a person's background or history. If a person was a high-ranking military member of the old government of South Vietnam, he is classified as #14th, the lowest category in the new society. With that background, their children's entrance into college is but a dream. Once a person is classified as being oppositional or defiant, he is marked forever a sinner. He will always be at the bottom of society. His children will have no chance. He works on the street in secret and in hiding. His work is considered illegal. He does whatever it takes to eat. No laws protect him or his work. He cannot enter a hospital because he is not a citizen. Hospitals treat citizens of the Communist state. They are reserved for them. It is extremely rare for him to get treatment at the hospital. He lives like an animal, not a human being.

Thiep: He can go to local clinics, but it costs a lot of money.

Kiem: They may admit him, but they would not treat him.

Long: They would not give him medicine. If they admit him at all, it is just a formality because they have no intention in treating him.

Long: This is a very decent project. All of these men have witnessed and lived through that society.

Thiep: I suggest you rework these questions.

Long: They are too general.

Kiem: Question 3 just as Long told you about the hardship under Communist society. You should asks, what hardship did you face?

Long: What is your circumstance? How did they treat you? What did you lack? Did you have proper clothes? What were the living conditions? How were the sick and injured treated? Was there enough medicine? The more specific you can be, the deeper the discussion. I ask all of you to write more questions for Thuy.

Kiem: Write the questions and answer them.

Thiep: I understand your circumstance since you came here when you were eight years old, you do not know Vietnamese well. Change the word freedom to release.

Long: The Vietnamese Communists were very clever about their wordings. When they released prisoners, they specifically wrote, "Release to family under house arrest by the local government." The family is responsible for everything but the person is still under house arrest, placed under probation.

Thiep: That was how they controlled us.

Long: Once released, they were still not citizens.

Thiep: They only let us out of the camps.

Long: They lost all their rights as citizens. Their families were responsible for them. They had to obey local officials who controlled their lives. A committee examines their progress. Without their citizenship, they are not allowed to work. They have to get permission to go back and forth; they cannot travel with ease. If they are even suspected of subversive activity, they are in deep trouble. An official could ask, "Why did you leave the premise without informing us. Are you meeting to protest us?" That person is in deep trouble. The Communists govern by suspicion. You must explain all of that so that others would understand.

Thiep: Go one step at a time. First, redo these questions. The contents pertaining to the political prisoner situation is clear. I suggest that we speak truthfully or else people will not believe us. Do not exaggerate. When I went to interview with the American delegation, they asked us if we had to go to the New Economic Zone. One person said yes. They forced him to go. If he did not go, they would imprison him. The Americans did not believe him. When I was asked why I went to live in the New Economic Zone, I told them that a Communist official told my wife that if she lived in the Zone, then I would be returned home sooner. Because my wife wanted me to quickly return home,

she accepted the condition to go live in the Zone. The Communists swindled us. They don't have to use force; they use other means like the love of a wife for her husband. What wife would not want her husband to return home. Using force with germinal reasons, they did not need to carry guns and bullets to get us to move. In certain cases they had to resort to guns to force people out of their home; but this was done by local officials and not at all published.

Long: People hearing about the New Economic Zone may think it is glorious like a rainbow. New economic zone sounds pretty, but this is an undeveloped inhabitable place surrounded by jungles. No one lives there. South Vietnamese were sent there without proper provisions. There was no housing.

Thiep: They did not allow us to live in the city. They forced us to live in undeveloped regions so that we would have to create a whole new way to survive. At such places, how could our children attend schools?

Long: No tools to build houses. You must explain in your thesis so that others do not misunderstand and say, "They brought you to a new region so you could start your life anew. What more do you want?" You must bring out the conditions, the environment of the New Economic Zone. They sent them to regions far away from the city, so that they would not return.

Su: Our children's education was severely affected by our status as prisoners. When I returned home in 1981, I had to prove that I was part of the post exchange in order for me to work in the city, even though it used to be my home. If you could not prove that you were part of the cooperative, they would send you to the New Economic Zone according to the region which they pick for you.

Thiep: They forced you to live where they want you to live; you could not choose where you want to live.

Long: They assign you your place of residence. They use the New Economic Zone to seize homes, businesses, and properties from South Vietnamese. When they see a beautiful home belonging to a former South officer, they promise that family that if they go to the Zone, the husband would return soon. The family leaves never to own their homes again and the husband is not returned. Once they live in that house, the owners can never reclaim that house. You must explain that.

Kiem: This is a kind of prison where there was no trial, no court, no judge.

Long: No trial, no attorney, no stipulation of time as to how long a person would be detained. No one knew when they would be released. There should be at least 200 questions. Each question raises ten more. Break the questions into smaller units so that they can recall easier the past. When you get specific in your questions, the questions would help them remember. You may ask questions like these: How repressive was the prison? What were your worries? Their state of mind was crucial to their survival. It

was more important than deprivation of material goods, more important than labor. Everyone has to labor and endure the hardship of labor. But if a person is struck down emotionally, he falls easily. Their family's happiness was broken. Their children could not attend school. Generation after generation has not yet recovered. You must write about that. The Communists used hope to get prisoners to betray their own brothers so they could leave early. I am moved by this project because you were not moved to write to complete a degree but you were moved by righteousness for those who up to this point have been misunderstood. It is not even a matter of being humane but an American responsibility to know the truth about what happened. Once you have written clearly as we believe you will, then young Vietnamese Americans will be able to read it. They do not know Vietnamese, but they can read your dissertation in English. The dissertation will be available in libraries. They held prisoners for an indefinite time and release them to their families under jurisdiction of Communist local officials.

Long: Their lives in America. For the most part political prisoners and I are grateful to America for giving us a chance to live as human beings. In this country, we have a right to fulfill our needs and desires to happiness. We have a right to work. Our children have a right to have an education. For those who do not want an education, they have a right to work and be successful. Whereas in Vietnam, they would be second-class citizens. Good jobs leading towards careers are reserved for Communists' children. Cooperation, and trade and commerce belong to the government and are not privately owned. Because they are not members of the Communist, they were not considered for those jobs. Prisoners and their families work at jobs nobody wants. As street vendors, peddlers, and hard laborers, they work on the outskirts of society. Such conditions go to the heart of a their psychology which were trampled down. A person lives by hope for a better future. They kicked these people down to a state no less than animals.

Su: In short, here is what I suggest: that you rewrite these questions so that they will be more specific since they are too general. You need to differentiate between how prisoners were treated versus non prisoners. You also need to distinguish in how prisoners' families were treated especially in terms of their education. After being released, how were you controlled? I was controlled for one year after my release. Each week, I had to file a report about my daily activities. Where I went, what I did, whom I talked to, whom I socialized with had to be explained in the report down to the hours and minutes. For example, this very day of July 30, 2001, in the morning. What I did, whom I spoke with, for how long, and for what purpose?

Long: The whole day has to be accounted for in such manner.

Su: After release, my living with my family is considered temporary until I meet all the criteria set out by the regional officials. If at anytime after my release, I violate the local officials' rules, I would be immediately sent to the New Economic Zone. I had to write it in a book. That was how they controlled me. Each week I had to be examined. At times, they would say, "You need to rewrite this file and include this activity because I saw you there on that day." They made life a living hell for prisoners. This went on for 52 weeks. I had to go up to the security official to verify all my activities. If the

committee agrees, they stamped my file. If I did not do according to what they want, they would make it unbearable for me, restrict me even more. After one year, there is a meeting held by the citizens of the Communists to review whether my citizenship should be restored or not. Forty to fifty families meet with the police of the local security unit. In front of everyone, I had to make a case of why I should be given citizenship. I had to explain what I have done in that last year. I had my book with me so that I could highlight my work and what I have learned. They had to evaluate and decide on whether or not I should be a citizen. Once I was granted citizenship, they continued to control where I lived. I could be sent to the Zone at any time for offenses against the officials. They continued to monitor my progress before issuing me my residential status. This status of residence is imperative for work, for purchasing goods, for traveling etc. If you wanted to buy a train ticket, you have to have a residence card. A residence card is a family's report card.

Long: You have to carry that card with you wherever you go. Here if you want your family to spent the night at your home, there is no problem. In Vietnam, you have to inform them ahead of time as to which day, where the person is coming from, and how long the person would be staying. They search your home and examine the family's report card. If an extra person is there who is not on the report card, they will make life hard on you. Everyone has a family report card, even today.

Su: I brought my family report card from Vietnam. I would be happy to provide you with a copy as representing that society. I have an entire book of my reports. I do not know if I brought that with me or not. I had to carry three or four documents with me at all times: the Certificate of release from prison, my citizenship paper, and my report card.
Mr. Su speaking to me alone

America's betrayal—their abandonment—caused us to lose our country. South Vietnam lost because we were victims of America's policy of withdrawal. America cut off our supplies of weapons, ammunitions, and so many other things necessary for combat. We had guns and no bullet; cars without gas, planes with no fuel. We fought against an enemy who was well supported by the then Soviet Union , China, Hungary, Poland, and Cuba—the Communists countries. On any given day, the enemy would fire thousands of 105mm, 122mm, 130mm, 155mm. While we fired 5 or 10 rounds back. We did not stand a chance; we had to lose. An army completely cut-off against a well-supplied army is doomed. If North and South Vietnamese armies had fought each other

on equal ground, it is uncertain who would have won or lost. But, the Communists overran us and hence, April 30, 1975.

Former prisoners today are physically, emotionally, and spiritually scarred. There are about 300 former political prisoners living in Oklahoma City. Former prisoners share similar pasts, so come together as a group to gain strength and support from each other. Our primary purpose in establishing this Association is to support each other. Our secondary objective is to continue our fight against the Communists. If we exist only to support our members, then it would be wasteful. These are people who have sacrificed with blood to protect South Vietnam. Each year in Oklahoma City and in other parts of the world, people commemorate April 30 as a national day of mourning, a day of national shame when South Vietnam was lost to the Communists. Vietnamese who could not live under the Communists had to flee their country in search of freedom. Vietnamese are scattered all over the world. They live in America, Canada, Australia, Israel, Africa, etc. They went to whatever nations that picked them up from their escapes by boats.

The Vietnam War cost us so many lives. So much bloodshed on both sides, North and South! We are all Vietnamese! That is what is so painful. Who started this war? Who caused this bloodshed? The most direct answer I can give you judging from my reading of historical documents and historians' interpretation is the Vietnamese Communists headed by Ho Chi Minh. He provoked the war.

I have written about the history of the Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners to mark our tenth year anniversary in a special edition book. I wrote about how our Association got started and how it has grown over the last decade. Many of our members came to the United States at the end of 1990. The Association was established

at the beginning of 1991. The first president was Mr. Le Thanh Danh. Then after that Mr. Mo Quang Thi served as the second president. Mr. Quynh Ngoc Thanh, our third president, served for only two months before he died. The fourth president was Mr. Doi Uy Chuy who is now President of the Vietnamese-American Association. Mr. Ly Xuan Moc was our fifth president who served for over one year before he died in 1995. I replaced Mr. Moc and have served from then to now (July 2002).

Many died in prison. They died from starvation, sickness, and hard labor. But their spirit in prison was very strong. Some openly resisted their conditions and were killed or confined and beaten to death. There were many of them killed that way. The majority of our other brothers resisted in ways that were invisible to the Communists. They opposed the Communists by keeping the spirit of their brothers alive. It is hope that kept us alive. When a man is in despair, death comes quickly to him. The seed of hope is planted by the fact that the Communists would release a number of prisoners after one year. The 2nd year, another group, the 3rd, another group . . . . For those who remained, it gave us enough hope to endure. If we thought we had no chance to survive then we would shed blood. We die; they die too.

People ask me why eight cadres could control 400 to 500 inmates. Of course we could have easily taken over the eight. But after killing them where would we run? All the concentration camps had stops that were thoroughly searched. In case of a breakout, they would send an army of thousands to slaughter us. Each and every one of us would surely die. We had no weapons to fight and no food to sustain us. If we went home, we would wreck havoc on our families. Before 1975, when we had our government, our

own troops, we would break out of jail and kill the enemy if we were captured. After 1975, there were only dead ends.

Life after prison was another struggle. We would not be issued I.D. cards that would allow us to be full citizens until after two or three years, depending on the local party chief. Some make it hard; some make it easy. The bottom line is they want to make money off of you.

These chiefs would say to me, “Brother Sú, let’s have dinner tonight.”

They knew I had no money because I pedaled a rickshaw and hung bamboo leaves to make a living. We ate lightly. If I had money, I was expected to take them out to a restaurant.

One chief said to me, “Brother Sú, I have to do nightly watch and I am out of batteries. Could you please give me four batteries?”

“How much does each battery cost?” I asked.

“$500 dollars each,” he said.

I gave him $2000 Ho Chi Minh dollars. They knew how much I suffered; yet they continued to harass me. There was so much of that going on. If you did not cooperate, they would make trouble for you.

Women who were officers of the military police force were also imprisoned. They were held at camps separate from the men.

There are a couple of women who are members of our Association. Lieutenant Colonel Ho Thi Ve commanded the women’s army and spent 10 years in the re-education camps. She came to America in 1995. She is over 70 years old. She attends the New Year celebration.

In the past, Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners published a monthly bulletin about our activities, the latest news about human rights struggles in Communist Vietnam. Our funding was very limited so we could not continue the monthly publication. We publish on special occasions such as our Memorial Day April 30, Veterans day on June 19, and day of honoring our ancestors. For the New Year, we put out a special bulletin, which highlights our activities for that year. Our bulletins consist of literary, scientific, political writings, and year-round activities. I have signed my name to letters, articles, and writings for newspapers in Oklahoma and other states. I have sent letters and notices to the people in Oklahoma and in other states. I write about human rights violations and oppression of religious freedom and rights committed by the Vietnamese Communists. I have declared in front of the people in Oklahoma how I feel about what the Communists have done. I am sure these things that I do have not gone unnoticed by the Communists, whose lackeys live here in Oklahoma. I am sure that they have heard what I have been doing in the last six or seven years as President of the Former South Vietnamese Political Prisoners. These lackeys, living in America who spy on us, have surely reported to the embassy or the Communists in Vietnam. I have no plans to go back. My fear in returning to Vietnam is that the Communists can do anything they want to me no matter how wicked are the acts. They might take revenge against me because of what I have done here.

Besides our bulletin, there is a local newspaper called the *Oklahoma Viet Bao*. If there is important news that needs to be dispersed then we submit the information to *Oklahoma Viet Bao*. We submit monthly news of our activities, updates on our struggles

with the Communists so that at least prisoners in Oklahoma have a voice to broadly communicate to those in this state and other states.

Vietnamese people and Asian people in general have deep connection with their families. Vietnamese who came in 1975, as well as those who came later like the political prisoners left many blood relatives behind. We were only allowed to have our wife and children come under the Humanitarian Operation Program. Many of our deepest attachments were left in Vietnam. As for me, my younger brother, after he was stabilized, sponsored by Father, Mother, Sisters, and Brothers. I have only one sister still living in Vietnam. My wife's family, her Father, Mother, and all her brothers and sisters are left in Vietnam. She has had no opportunity to return. Many Vietnamese have returned to their native home because their attachment to their family is so deep. They miss their families greatly.

The reason our Association does not have our own newspaper is because we have no money. If we print 200 news bulletin, the cost could run to $400 while we have no incoming fund. Our annual membership fee is very limited. Each member pays an annual fee of $30 which barely covers our yearly activities and the cost of printing invitations. Our members have to contribute additional funds on certain special occasions when we do not have enough money. We do not get any government funds to finance our cause. We were the Vietnamese who came to America later than other Vietnamese. Most of the prisoners came in 1991. Existing groups such as the Vietnamese American Refugee Center and Catholic Charities helped us in the first days of our new life. They filled out paperwork for us, took us to our physicals, and translated for us, since we did not English. They were very charitable to us. These existing groups

could apply for annual funds because they have established a social mission. If we wanted to start a similar mission, we would have to rent a place which would cost us thousands of dollars that we do not have.

Let us be very clear about students from Vietnam who come to the U.S. to study. They are sons and daughter of high-ranking Communists. Either that or their families must be extremely wealthy in order to send their children here. Vietnamese former political prisoners want to meet with the students to talk with them about what we believe. Their knowledge of the South Vietnamese people and our former nation is like a blank sheet of paper. They know nothing about us, nothing about our government or the people of the South. We bear no grudge or hatred against the students. Absolutely none. We want to share with them our experiences as refugees. We want to meet them, but they are also limited in socializing with us. The host parents do not want the students to interact with us. When we heard about the first nine students from Vietnam attending the University of Oklahoma, many of the Vietnamese in the community met with the residential Vietnamese student leaders at the University. We told them they should treat students from Vietnam with the utmost sincerity and honesty. If they get a chance to talk to them, they should speak honestly about their experiences in South Vietnam and in America. If the opportunity allows, they should invite these students to their homes so that they can see how freedom works in America. After spending three or four years in America, these students will return to Vietnam. They will tell people closest to them about what life is like in America. Who are those closest to these students but their mothers, fathers, and other families? Who are their parents but the rich Communist cadres. The conversation about American life would have to include freedom that is

America. It would have to make comparisons about freedom in America and the lack of it in Vietnam. The Communists see that their children do not lie to them. The thing is will the parents be bold enough to speak about this to anyone else. For sure not. They do not dare because the Communist system keenly monitors them. I hope these students become leaders of Vietnam, then perhaps the situation may change. Right now, those in power are the old and bitter Communist cadres who despise us, and we likewise despise them. There is no avoiding that.

Former prisoners do have ammunitions to fight against Communism. We have to find other means to fight against oppression. Our weapon against oppression is in our united stances with other organizations who fight for human rights and freedom. We meet once a month, sometimes weekly, or as needed. Special meetings are called to plan special activities or to support other domestic as well and international organizations in the fight for human rights and freedom. Right now, we along with other Vietnamese social organizations, also committed to ending human rights violation in Vietnam, are calling for the release of Father Nguyễn Van Ly, Monk Thuc Quang Liem, Monk Thong Nhat, Monk Cu Le Quang Liem. We have written letters and petitioned to the president of the United States, to the United Nations, and to the Secretary of State, Colin Powell. When Colin Powell visited Vietnam, we sent him a letter to request that he call for the release of political prisoners and place human rights and freedom as part of his agenda. As president of the Association, I have signed my name to letters and petitions that protest the abuse of human rights and freedom.

In the first years after 1975, the spirit to fight against the Communists was weakened. From the time that the former political prisoners of South Vietnam came to

America, a movement to resist Communism and demand freedom has flourished. The strength of the movement came from the 40,000 to 50,000 political prisoners who now live in America. If you count family members, there are about 200,000 people connected to the prison experience. That's a lot of people who share a common political agenda. Our agenda is first to make sure that we are safe where we live. If we did not organize in states and cities, then the Communists would instigate disorder and chaos. They might emerge with their red-yellow-star flag, the flag stained with our blood. It is in our political organization that deters them from self-promoting. Wherever a Vietnamese Communist flag flies, we ask those who put them up to take them down and put in its place the flag of the Republic of Vietnam, the yellow flag with three red stripes. We have taken down the five Communist flags here in Oklahoma City.

About three years ago, people who shopped at Buy 4 Less saw the Vietnamese Communist flag hanging at the entrance on the left side along with other flags. They informed me about what they had seen. I met with the brothers, and after that went to meet with the manager of Buy 4 Less.

I told him, "This is the Communist flag of Vietnam. This very flag is the reason we have had to leave our homeland. This very flag was responsible for the deaths of 58,000 American soldiers who died in South Vietnam. We, the Vietnamese people of the Republic, do not accept this flag. We request that you take down the flag and raise this flag, the people's flag of Vietnam."

The manager asked me, "What does this flag of yours look like?

We brought our flag out and gave it to him to hang. He was very pleased. If you shop at Buy 4 Less, you will see the flag of the Republic of Vietnam hanging along with

the other flags. The same incident occurred at the A.M.C. flea market on N.W. 10th and Penn, two Baptist churches, at C.M.I. Company, and at the University of Oklahoma. We acted in the same way as similar to the Buy 4 Less situation.

Vietnamese who shopped at the flea market saw the Communist flag and told me what they had seen. I spoke with the owner of the stand. He was happy to replace the Communist flag with the Republican flag. The same situation occurred at two Baptist churches. We spoke to the Pastor and the person in charge at those churches. They happily complied. They apologized for not knowing that it was the Communist flag. They wanted to welcome the many Vietnamese who attend their churches by raising the national flag. Although we were successful in deposing the Communist flag at C.M.I. Company, many Vietnamese mistake the Moroccan flag which is a yellow flag with a yellow star but it has a black border for the Vietnamese Communist flag. They called me to tell me, and I assured them that the flag is Moroccan not Vietnamese. The University of Oklahoma raised the Communist flag after America normalized diplomatic relations with Vietnam and a group of students from Vietnam came there to study. They raised the Communist flag along with other flags during graduation and did away with Vietnam's Republican flag. Through the activism of the Vietnamese community here and the students at the University of Oklahoma, the University has allowed for both flags to stand. Perhaps in the future, with strong active involvement, the students will be able to rid the Communist flag from ever flying on the campus.

A nation's soul is exhibited in the national flag. Though South Vietnam is lost, its flag lives in the people especially those who fought to the Communists. These people carry the Republican flag in their hearts.

Appendix 3

Oklahoma City, ngaøy 6 thaùng 6 naêm 2004

Coâ Thuyù Nguyeãn thaân meán,

Trong laù thö cuûa coâ vieát cho toâi ñeà ngaøy 6 thaùng 5 naêm 2004, coâ cho bieát ñang trình luaän aùn Tieán Só noùi veà ñôøi soáng cuaû nhöõng ngöôøi cöïu tuø nhaân chính trò Vieät Nam tröôùc vaø sau ngaøy 30.4.1975. Nhöõng ngaøy bò giam caàm trong "Traïi Caûi Taïo" vaø cuoäc soáng cuûa hoï hieän nay ôû nöôùc Myõ. Keøm theo laù thö laø 66 caâu hoûi cuûa coâ. Toâi raát vui loøng traû lôøi taát caû nhöõng caâu hoûi veà cuoäc soáng cuûa caù nhaân vaø gia ñình toâi moät caùc trung thöïc. Nhöng coù theå thieáu xoùt, vì thôøi gian ñaõ laâu quaù roài neân toâi queân moät soá nhöõng chi tieát. Toâi chæ traû lôøi toùm löôïc, vì neáu traû lôøi chi tieát thì toâi nghó raèng phaûi vieát thaønh moät cuoán saùch. Vì toâi bieát coâ ñang laøm moät coâng vieäc raát höõu ích laø phoå bieán cho moïi ngöôøi, nhaát laø nhöõng ngöôøi Myõ bieát veà nhöõng ngöôøi Vieät Nam tî naïn Coäng Saûn taïi haûi ngoaïi vaø ñaëc bieät laø nhöõng ngöôøi cöïu tuø nhaân chính trò. Nhönõg ngöôøi ñaõ bò coäng saûn traû thuø moät caùch man rôï trong caùc traïi caûi taïo.

Tröôùc khi traû lôøi nhöõng caâu hoûi cuûa coâ, toâi xin töï giôùi thieäu veà caù nhaân toâi. Toâi laø Nguyeãn vaên Söù, sinh ngaøy 20.8.1945 taïi laøng Phöôøng Caàu, tænh Baéc Ninh, Baéc Vieät Nam. Toâi theo cha meï di cö töø Baéc vaøo Nam naêm 1954 sau khi Coäng Saûn chieám ñöôïc mieàm Baéc. Ñònh cö taïi Saøi Goøn töø 1956 cho ñeán ngaøy ñi ñònh cö ôû Myõ. Cha meï chuùng toâi sinh ñöôïc 8 ngöôøi con, goàm 5 trai, 3 gaùi. Toâi laø anh caû trong gia ñình. Toâi laäp gia ñình ngaøy 10.8.1969. Vôï toâi teân laø Ñoaøn Thò Thaûo, chuùng toâi coù 2 ngöôøi con gaùi, hieän nay caû hai ñaõ laäp gia ñình vaø ñaõ coù con, gia ñình caùc con toâi ñeàu cö nguï taïi Oklahoma City. Gia ñình chuùng toâi ñeán thaønh phoá naøy ngaøy 15.3.1991 theo dieän H.O.
Sau ñaây toâi laàn löôït traû lôøi nhöõng caâu hoûi maø coâ ñaõ göûi cho toâi:

A. **<u>Ñôøi soáng tröôùc ngaøy 30.4.1975:</u>**
Toâi ñöôïc goïi nhaäp hoïc khoaù 27 Só Quan Tröø Bò Thuû Ñöùc. Ra tröôøng ngaøy 10.8.1968 vôùi caáp baäc Chuaån UÙy. Ñôn vò ñaàu tieân toâi phuïc vuï laø Ñaïi Ñoäi 409 Thaùm Kích tröïc thuoäc Sö Ñoaøn 23 Boä Binh, ñoàn truù taò thaønh phoá Ban Meâ Thuoät, tænh Darlac. Chöùc vuï laø Trung ñoäi Tröôûng. Naêm 1971, toâi veà laøm vieäc tai Boä Tö Leänh Sö Ñoaøn 23/ Phoøng 1 (Nhaân Vieân). Taïi ñaây toâi giöõ chöùc vuï Tröôûng Ban Chöông Trình Quaân Soá. Trong thôøi gian gaàn 7 naêm phuïc vuï taïi SÑ23BB (1968 - 1974), toâi ñaõ tham döï nhieàu cuoäc haønh quaân taïi Ban Meâ Thuoät, Ñöùc Laäp, Quaûng Ñöùc, Pleiku, ñaëc bieät laøcuoäc haønh quaân "Muøa Heø Ñoû Löûa" ngaên chaën CSBV tieán chieám Kontum vaøo caùc naêm 1972 – 1973. Traän ñaùnh keùo daøi gaàn 2 naêm ñaõ gaây toån thaát naëng neà veà nhaân maïng cho caû baéc quaân coäng saûn vaø quaân ñoäi Vieät Nam Coäng Hoøa. Haøng chuïc ngöôøi baïn thaân cuûa toâi ñaõ hy sinh taïi chieán tröôøng naøy.

Thaùng 4 naêm 1974, toâi ñöôïc thuyeân chuyeån veà Tieåu Ñoaøn 18 Coâng Binh (TÑ18CB) thuoäc Sö ñoaøn 18 Boä Binh (SÑ18BB) ñoàn truù taïi tænh Long Khaùnh vaø caên cöù Long Bình (Bieân Hoaø), toâi phuïc vuï ôû ñôn vò naøy cho ñeán ngaøy 30.4.1975. Giöõ chöùc vuï Tröôûng Ban 1. Nhieäm vuï cuûa toâi vaø caùc nhaân vieân thuoäc quyeàn laø quaûn trò quaân soá cuûa Tieåu Ñoaøn, löu giöõ vaø nhaät tu hoà sô caù nhaân cuûa quaân nhaân caùc caáp trong ñôn vò.

Toâi ñaõ phuïc vuï trong quaân ñoäi 7 naêm 4 thaùng. Toâi ñaõ laøm vieäc vôùi taát caû khaû naêng cuûa mình ñeå phuïc vuï toå quoác, choáng laïi Coäng Saûn Baéc Vieät gaây chieán xaâm laêng Mieàn Nam Vieät Nam, baûo veä mieàn Nam khoâng khoâng bò loït vaøo tay Coäng Saûn vaø baûo veä ñôøi soáng vaø söï an laønh cuûa ñoàng baøo. Toâi ñaõ ñöôïc khen thöôûng 2 huy chöông Anh Duõng Boäi Tinh, nhieàu loaïi huy chöông khaùc vaø nhieàu baèng Töôûng Luïc. Toâi cuõng ñöôïc mang huy hieäu “Kontum Kieâu Huøng”.

Lòch söû ñaõ chöùng minh coäng saûn cai trò daân baèng baïo löïc, baèng söï löøa bòp vaø doái traù. Chuùng duøng moïi thuû ñoaïn taøn baïo nhaát ñeå cöôùp ñöôïc chính quyeàn. Chuùng gieát ñoàng baøo cuûa chuùng khoâng gôùm tay, mieãn laøm sao giöõ ñöôïc caùi chính quyeàn ñoäc ñaûng cuûa chuùng ñeå ñeø ñaàu ñeø coå boùc loät nhaân daân, laøm giaàu treân xöông maùu vaø söùc lao ñoäng cuaû ñoàng baøo.

Sau khi chieám ñöôïc mieàn Nam Vieät Nam. Coäng Saûn ñaõ löøa haøng traêm ngaøn Só Quan, Caûnh saùt, caùn boä Xaây Döïng Noâng Thoân, caùn boä Xaõ AÁp, thaønh vieân caùc ñaûng phaùi Quoác Gia vaø nhaân vieân Chính Quyeàn töø trung caáp ñeán cao caáp VNCH vaøo trong caùc traïi tuø khoå sai maø chuùng goïi laø “Traïi Caûi Taïo”. Thaäm chí chuùng baét giam taát caû nhöõng tu só tuyeân uyù Coâng Giaùo, Phaät Giaùo, Tin Laønh... taäp trung caûi taïo, nhieàu linh muïc tuyeân uùy Coâng giaùo cuøng traïi vôùi toâi ôû Hoùc Moân vaø traïi Taân Hieäp nhö linh muïc Cao, LM. Khaûi, LM. Nam, LM. Trình... sau ñoù caùc linh muïc naøy chuyeån ra caûi taïo ngoaøi Baéc. Nhöõng ngöôøi giaàu coù chuùng tìm ñuû moïi thuû ñoaïn cöôùp heát taøi saûn roài ñöa ñi caûi taïo hoaëc bò ñi ñaøy ôû caùc vuøng khæ ho coø gaùy maø chuùng goïi laø “Kinh Teá Môùi”. Nhieàu ngaøn ngöôøi ñaõ bò coäng saûn gieát taïi choã khoâng caàn ñem ra toaø xeùt xöû. Nhieàu ngaøn ngöôøi ñaõ bò boû ñoùi, oám ñau beänh taät khoâng coù thuoác chöõa beänh, hoaëc bò gieát trong caùc traïi caûi taïo. Toäi aùc cuûa coäng saûn ñoái vôùi daân toäc Vieät Nam thaät kinh hoaøng vaø ñoäc aùc nhieàu khoâng keå xieát.

Bieán coá 30.4.1975 xaûy ra laø moät nieàm ñau ñôùn voâ cuøng lôùn lao cho daân toäc Vieät Nam. Mieàn Nam Vieät Nam bò maát vaøo tay coäng saûn Baéc Vieät phaûi noùi thaúng ra laø Myõ ñaõ boû rôi Mieàn Nam Vieät Nam vì quyeàn lôïi cuûa nöôùc Myõ. Caùi cheát cuûa Toång Thoáng Ngoâ Ñình Dieäm ngaøy 2.11.1963 do chính phuû Myõ chuû möu gaây ra, Myõ ñaõ möôïn baøn tay cuûa moät soá töôùng laõnh phaûn loaïn nhö Döông vaên Minh, Mai höõu Xuaân, Traàn vaên Ñoân, Toân thaát Ñính.... laøm cuoäc ñaûo chaùnh gieát Toång Thoáng Ngoâ Ñình Dieäm, laø moät sai laàm lôùn cuûa chính phuû Myõ trong coâng cuoäc ngaên chaën laøn soùng baønh tröôùng cuûa coäng saûn quoác teá. Vôùi ñöôøng loái, chính saùch cuûa chính phuû Myõ ñaõ laøm cho Mieàn Nam VN hoaøn toaøn leä thuoäc vaøo Myõ nhö laø moät “chö haàu” chöù khoâng phaûi laø ñoàng minh. Chæ coù moät nöôùc Myõ duy nhaát vieän trôï nhoû gioït cho Mieàn Nam VN trong chieán tranh. Trong khi coäng saûn Baéc Vieät ñöôïc caû khoái coäng saûn quoác teá nhö Lieân Bang Xoâ Vieát, Trung Coäng, Cu-Ba vaø caùc nöôùc coäng saûn Ñoâng AÂu nhö Tieäp Khaùc, Ba Lan, Ñoâng Ñöùc, Hungary, Bungary, Rumany.... vieän trôï vuõ khí chieán tranh hieän ñaïi vaø haøng chuïc ngaøn coá vaán quaân söï sang giuùp coäng saûn Baéc Vieätï. Sau hieäp ñònh Paris naêm 1973, Myõ caét vieän trôï quaân söï cho Mieàn Nam trong luùc coäng saûn Baéc Vieät ñang ñem ñaïi quaân oà aït xaâm chieám Mieàn Nam laïi ñöôïc söï hoå trôï tích cöïc veà vuõ khí ñaïn döôïc vaø caùc trang thieát bò cho chieán tranh khoâng haïn cheá cuûa caû khoái coäng saûn quoác teáá. Nhö theá thì laøm sao quaân ñoäi Vieät Nam Coäng Hoaø ñöôøng cöï noåi vôùi baéc quaân coäng saûn. Chuùng toâi raát ñau loøng vì bò Myõ boû rôi vaø uaát haän vì caùi thua nhuïc nhaõ naøy. Ngaøy 30.4.1975 ñaõ trôû thaønh ngaøy ñau thöôøng cuûa caû daân toäc Vieät Nam maø chuùng toâi goïi

laø Ngaøy Quoác Haän. Vì theá moãi naêm cöù ñeán ngaøy 30.4, ngaøy ñau thöông cuûa ñaát nöôùc, Ngaøy Quoác Haän, ngaøy maø CSBV xeù boû Hieäp Ñònh Paris ñöa quaân xaâm chieám Mieàn Nam VN ñem tang thöông, cheát choùc vaø ñoùi ngheøo ñeán cho daân toäc, trong loøng moïi ngöôøi laïi daâng leân nieàm ñau uaát haän vì toå quoác ñang bò loaøi quyû ñoû daøy xeùo. Coäng ñoàng ngöôøi Vieät tî naïn coäng saûn taïi haûi ngoai khaép nôi treân theá giôùi ñeàu toå chöùc Ngaøy Quoác Haän ñeå töôûng nhôù ñeán ngaøy ñau thöông cuûa ñaát nöôùc.

BNgaøy 30.4.1975 :

Vaøo nhöõng ngaøy cuoái cuøng cuûa thaùng 4 naêm 1975. Luùc ñoù Sö Ñoaøn 18 Boä Binh phaûi ñöông ñaàu vôùi 5 sö ñoaøn quaân coäng saûn Baéc Vieät ôû tænh Long Khaùnh. “Nhaát hoå nan ñòch quaàn hoà”, trong khi laïi khoâng ñöôïc yeåm trôï vaø thieáu vuõ khí ñaïn döôïc cho neân Sö Ñoaøn 18 BB ñaõ phaûi môû ñöôøng maùu ruùt veà caên cöù Long Bình, Bieân Hoøa. Cuõng ngaøy hoâm ñoù, neáu toâi nhôù khoâng laàm laø ngaøy 23.4.1975 cuõng laø ngaøy Toång Thoáng Nguyeãn Vaên Thieäu leân ñaøi truyeàn hình tuyeân boá töø chöùc vaø trao quyeàn Toång Thoáng cho Phoù Toång Thoáng Traàn Vaên Höông. Ngöôøi ngöôøi hoang mang, quaân ñoäi hoang mang. Luùc ñoù, maëc duø toâi ñaõ mang caáp baäc Ñaïi UÙy nhöng söï hieåu bieát cuûa toâi veà chính trò coøn raát non keùm. Toâi khoâng hieåu gì caû! Taïi sao Toång Thoáng Thieäu laïi töø chöùc? AÙp löïc cuûa Myõ hay cuûa moät theá löïc naøo khaùc? Toâi hoaøn toaøn khoâng hieåu! Vaø chæ ít ngaøy sau Toång Thoáng Traàn vaên Höông phaûi trao quyeàn Toång Thoáng cho Ñaïi Töôùng Döông vaên Minh vì bò aùp löïc cuûa phe thaân coäng saûn vaø phaûn chieán naèm trong chính quyeàn vaø Quoác Hoäi!

Luùc ñoù, mieàn Trung vaø vuøng Cao Nguyeân Trung Phaàn ñaõ loït vaøo tay Coäng Saûn Baéc Vieät (CSBV). Quaân Ñoaøn I vaø Quaân Ñoaøn II ñaõ tan raõ tröôùc söùc taán coâng nhö vuõ baõo cuûa CSBV. Nhieàu ngöôøi lính cuõng nhö só quan caùc caáp vaø moät soá töôùng laõnh ñaõ troán khoûi ñôn vò. Hoï ñaøo nguõ veà vôùi gia ñình, hoaëc troán ñi theo nhöõng chuyeán bay di taûn cuûa Myõ. Nhöõng ngöôøi coøn ôû laïi vaãn tieáp tuïc chieán ñaáu . Hoï chieán ñaáu cho ñeán khi Döông Vaên Minh tuyeân boá ñaàu haøng, duø chieán ñaáu trong tuyeät voïng. Toâi khoâng ñaøo nguõ, toâi laø nhöõng ngöôøi ôû laïi chieán ñaáu ñeán giaây phuùt cuoái cuøng, vaø chính tai toâi ñaõ nghe Döông Vaên Minh tuyeân boá ñaàu haøng coäng saûn treân ñaøi phaùt thanh. Toâi ñaõ khoùc, thöïc söï toâi ñaõ khoùc vì caùi nhuïc ñaàu haøng cuûa Döông Vaên Minh. Ñôn vò cuûa toâi di taûn theo Boä Tö Leänh Sö Ñoaøn 18BB veà ñeán Cuïc Coâng Binh ôû ñöôøng Nguyeãn Tri Phöông, Saøi Goøn vaøo buoåi saùng ngaøy 30.4.1975.

Thöïc tình toâi khoâng bao giôø nghó Quaân Löïc Vieät Nam Coäng Hoaø huøng maïnh nhö theá maø laïi thua coäng saûn. Neáu Myõ vaãn tieáp tuïc vieän trôï chaéc chaén chuùng toâi khoâng theå thua coäng saûn. Nhöng, chính phuû Myõ vì quyeàn lôïi rieâng tö cuûa nöôùc Myõ, vaø nhaát laø bò aûnh höôûng naëng neà cuûa nhöõng ngöôøi phaûn chieán neân ñaõ boû rôi ñoàng minh moät caùch khoâng thöông tieác!

Buoåi tröa ngaøy 30.4.1975, toâi ñi xe ñaïp leân Toaø Ñaïi Söù Myõ ôû ñöôøng Thoáng Nhaát, nhìn caûnh haøng ngaøn ngöôøi chen chuùc, xoâ laán taïi coång ra vaøo, thaäm chí treøo leân haøng raøo Toaø Ñaïi Söù coá vöôït vaøo beân trong ñeå ñöôïc Myõ cho di taûn, toâi thaät ngao ngaùn. Toâi gheù Beán Baïch Ñaèng, haøng ngaøn ngöôøi cuõng ñang xoâ laán nhau leân chieác taàu ñaõ ñaày aép ngöôøi choán

chaïy coäng saûn. Toâi thöông hoï, toâi thöông toâi vaø toâi thöông daân toäc toâi. Nhöng toâi khoâng laøm ñöôïc gì caû!

Luùc ñoù toâi ñaõ coù moät con gaùi vaø vôï toâi ñang coù baàu ñöùa con thöù hai gaàn ñeán ngaøy sinh. Thöïc söï toâi khoâng coù yù ñònh di taûn vì ngoaøi vôï con toâi ra, toâi coøn cha meï giaø vaø 7 ngöôøi em coøn nhoû. Toâi khoâng theå boû vôï con, boû cha meï giaø vaø ñaøn em ñeå thoaùt thaân moät mình. Toâi raát thöông yeâu vôï con toâi, thöông yeâu cha meï vaø taát caû caùc em toâi. Toâi quyeát ñònh ôû laïi. Tôùi ñaâu hay tôùi ñoù!

Ngaøy coøn raát nhoû, vaøo nhöõng naêm 1949 - 1950 toâi ñaõ theo cha meï taûn cö khoûi laøng toâi vì Vieät Minh (tieàn thaân cuûa Coäng Saûn) ñaùnh chieám maø chuùng goïi laø “dieät teà”. Naêm 1954, sau hieäp ñònh Geneøve, luùc ñoù toâi 10 tuoåi, toâi theo cha meï di cö vaøo Nam ñeå choán chaïy coäng saûn. Baây giôø coäng saûn tieán chieám mieàn Nam, toâi chaïy ñi ñaâu?

Buoåi chieàu ngaøy 16.6.1975 toâi ñöa vôï toâi ñi sanh ôû beänh vieän Tröng Vöông, ñöôøng Nguyeãn Vaên Thoaïi, Saøi Goøn. Vôï toâi ñaõ sanh chaùu gaùi thöù hai vaøo ngaøy hoâm sau 17.6.1975. Luùc naøy treân ñaøi phaùt thanh, UÛy Ban Quaân Quaûn ñaõ keâu goïi caùc Só Quan ñi trình dieän hoïc taäp. Só quan aáp UÙy ñi trình dieän mang quaàn aùo vaø löông thöïc 10 ngaøy. Só quan caáp Taù trôû leân 30 ngaøy. Ai cuõng noân nao ñi trình dieän hoïc taäp ñeå coøn trôû veà vôùi gia ñình lo laøm aên sinh soáng. Trong buïng nghó vaø ngaïc nhieân taïi sao coäng saûn noù khoâng traû thuø? Vì thaáy raèng tröôùc ñoù haøng traêm ngaøn Haï Só Quan vaø haøng traêm ngaøn Binh Só chæ hoïc taäp coù 3 ngaøy hoaëc 1 tuaàn leã, saùng ñi chieàu veà, vaø giôø naøy hoï ñaõ ôû nhaø vôùi gia ñình. Theá laø moïi ngöôì trong caùc dieän maø chuùng keâu goïi ñeàu “yeân taâm” töø giaõ gia ñình ñi trình dieän “taäp trung hoïc taäp caûi taïo”.

Theo yù nguyeän cuûa vôï toâi, ngaøy 22.6.1975 toâi ñöa vôï toâi vaø ñöùa con gaùi nhoû môùi sanh ñöôïc 6 ngaøy veà nhaø Ngoaïi (cha meï vôï) ôû Xoùm Môùi, Goø Vaáp. Toâi noùi vôùi vôï toâi sau 10 ngaøy “hoïc taäp” veà toâi seõ leân ñoùn veà Noäi (cha meï toâi) ñeå röaû toäi cho chaùu, theo luaät ñaïo Coâng Giaùo. Chieàu ngaøy 23 thaùng 6, em trai toâi chôû toâi treân chieác xe ñaïp ñi trình dieän ôû Tröôøng Ñaïi Hoïc Y Khoa ôû ñöôøng Traàn Hoaøng Quaân, Chôï Lôùn. Ngay ñeâm hoâm ñoù coäng saûn doàn chuùng toâi treân nhöõng chieác xe Molotova bít buøng chôû ñeán traïi caûi taïo ñaàu tieân ôû Hoùc Moân (doanh traïi cuõ cuûaLieân Ñoaøn 5 Coâng Binh VNCH).

C. Sau Ngaøy 30 thaùng 4 naêm 1975:

Nhöõng ngöôøi baø con, hoï haøng taïm truù taïi nhaø cha meï toâi töø thaùng 3.75 sau khi mieàn Trung vaø vuøng Cao Nguyeân bò maát vaøo tay coäng saûn, nay tìm ñöôøng trôû veà queâ quaùn. Cha meï toâi ngheøo, nhöng ñaõ phaûi nuoâi aên treân hai chuïc ngöôøi keå caû anh em chuùng toâi, cho neân ñaõ phaûi ñem baùn ñi taát caû nhöõng ñoà ñaïc trong nhaø coù theå baùn ñöôïc ñeå laáy tieàn mua gaïo. Cuoái cuøng laø chieác xe gaén maùy hieäu Honda laø phöông tieän di chuyeån duy nhaát cuûa caû gia ñình cuõng phaûi ñem baùn.

Nhöõng ngaøy ñaàu thaùng 5/1975, toâi vaø nhöõng anh em hoï cuûa toâi laø nhöõng só quan VNCH raát lo sôï coäng saûn traû thuø. Vì chuùng toâi ñaõ nghe vaø nhìn thaáy boä ñoäi coäng saûn baén gieát nhieàu ngöôøi ngay ngoaøi ñöôøng phoá. Moät ngöôøi lính cuõ cuûa toâi laø Trung só Thònh ñaõ bò coäng saûn loâi ra khoûi nhaø baén cheát khi coäng saûn chieám Ban Meâ Thuoät ngaøy 10.3.1975 . Vì theá chuùng toâi khoâng daùm ôû nhaø, phaûi taïm troán traùnh ôû nhaø ngöôøi Coâ. Sau moät tuaàn leã thaáy khoâng coù ai ñeán nhaø tìm kieám, neân chuùng toâi trôû veà vôùi gia ñình.

Khoaûng nöûa thaùng sau, moät ngöôøi baïn hoïc cuûa toâi hoài coøn nhoû ôû ngoaøi Baéc teân laø Caáp ñaõ ñeán nhaø toâi thaêm hoûi cha meï toâi - Caáp laø Trung UÙy boä ñoäi coäng saûn - Gaëp toâi, Caáp noùi taïi sao toâi khoâng boû chaïy ra nöôùc ngoaøi. ÔÛ laïi laø toâi seõ khoå laém! Baây giôø tìm ñöôøng ñi vaãn kòp. Baèng moïi giaù toâi phaûi troán ñi. Nhöng nhö treân toâi ñaõ noùi, toâi khoâng theå troán chaïy moät mình boû laïi vôï con vaø cha meï giaø vaø ñaøn em nhoû. Toâi ñaõ ôû laïi muoán ra sao thì ra! Trong chieán tranh toâi khoâng cheát thì baây giôø toâi cuõng khoâng theå cheát ñöôïc. Caáp coøn caên daën cha meï toâi raèng baèng moïi giaù phaûi ôû laïi Saøi Goøn, ñöøng vì baát cöù lyù do gì ñi "Kinh Teá Môùi". Vì thöïc teá "kinh teá môùi" laø nôi ñaày aûi nhöõng ngöôøi daân thaønh thò, ôû ñoù khoâng theå soáng ñöôïc! Sau ngaøy ñoù thì toâi khoâng coøn gaëp Caáp nöõa.

Theá laø taát caû ñeàu bò löøa! Caû mieàn Nam Vieät Nam bò löøa! Ñaâu phaûi 10 ngaøy hay 30 ngaøy nhö chuùng ñoïc ra raû treân ñaøi phaùt thanh cuõng nhö ñaêng treân baùo Saøi Goøn Giaûi Phoùng (SGGP) veà chính saùch "khoan hoàng nhaân ñaïo" cuûa "Chính Phuû Caùch Maïng Laâm Thôøi Mieàn Nam Vieät Nam". Ngöôøi ít nhaát laø bò "caûi taïo" treân moät naêm, coù ngöôøi 5 naêm, 10 naêm vaø thaäm chí ñeán 17 naêm nhö Thieáu Töôùng Leâ Minh Ñaûo, Tö Leänh Sö Ñoaøn 18 Boä Binh. Rieâng caù nhaân toâi bò tuø 6 naêm. Toâi ñaõ traûi qua 6 traïi tuø: Traïi caûi taïo Hoùc Moân, Long Giao (Long Khaùnh), traïi Taân Hieäp (Bieân Hoaø), traïi Buø Gia Maäp (Phöôùc Long), traïi Minh Höng ôû Buø Ñaêng, vaø cuoái cuøng laø tuø ôû traïi Gia Trung (Pleiku). Toâi ra traïi ngaøy 11.6.1981. Chính caùn boä quaûn giaùo teân laø Hieån (cai tuø coäng saûn) noùi vôùi chuùng toâi raèng ngöôøi naøo chöa qua traïi caûi taïo Gia Trung coi nhö chöa caûi taïo! Ñieàu naøy coù nghóa laø traïi caûi taïo Gia Trung laø traïi gian khoå nhaát! Khoâng bieát laø haén noùi thaät hay chæ laø huø doaï. Vì nhöõng ngöôøi baïn toâi bò tuø ôû ngoaøi Baéc cho bieát taïi caûi taïo Coång Trôøi laø kinh khuûng hôn caû. Moät ngaøn ngöôøi thì may ra chæ soáng soùt ñöôïc vaøi chuïc ngöôøi! Kinh hoaøng hôn caû traïi Lyù Baù Sô ôû Thanh Hoaù.

Tuaàn leã ñaàu tieân ôû traïi caûi taïo Hoùc Moân, chuùng toâi phaûi khai lyù lòch baûn thaân, quaù trình hoaït ñoäng phuïc vuï cho chính phuû VNCH... khai lyù lòch ba ñôøi cuûa doøng hoï. Phaûi khai ñi khai laïi naêm laàn baãy löôït maø caùn boä coäng saûn cuõng vaãn coøn muoán chuùng toâi khai nöõa, cho neân sau ñoù cöù moãi naêm phaûi khai laïi lyù lòch ít nhaát laø moät laàn, ñaây laø vieäc laøm töôûng nhö deã daøng, nhöng söï thaät laø moät ñieàu khoù khaên vaø nguy hieåm! Ñoàng thôøi doïn deïp veä sinh trong traïi. Sang tuaàn leã thöù hai, chuùng toâi ñöôïc ñöôïc leänh phaûi ñaøo gieáng, moãi ñoäi (30 ngöôøi) ñaøo moät caùi gieáng ñeå laáy nöôùc aên uoáng vaø taém röûa. Chuùng toâi nghó khoâng hieåu taïi sao hoïc taäp chæ coù 10 ngaøy maø laïi baét phaûi ñaøo gieáng trong khi ñaõ coù nöôùc maùy cuûa Lieân ñoaøn 5 Coâng Binh tröôùc ñaây vaãn xöû duïng, hay laø hoï baét ñaøo gieáng ñeå choân soáng mình? Chuùng toâi baét ñaàu lo sôï, nhöng cuõng vaãn phaûi laøm! Gaàn moät thaùng sau coù moät soá anh em thaéc maéc hoûi caùn boä coäng saûn: "*Taïi sao "caùch maïng" noùi hoïc 10 ngaøy maø ñeán nay ñaõ gaàn moät thaùng roài maø chöa thaáy hoïc taäp gì caû?"* Hoï noùi: *"Ai baûo caùc anh laø hoïc taäp 10 ngaøy hay 30 ngaøy?"* Chuùng toâi traû lôøi: *"Thì ñaøi phaùt thanh vaøbaùo SGGP coù ñaêng tin naøy, chuùng toâi coù ñem theo tôø baùo SGGP".* Hoï laïi noùi: *"Sao caùc anh laø só quan maø ngaây thô theá! Caùc anh ñoïc laïi baøi baùo cho chuùng toâi nghe xem naøo! Leänh chæ noùi caùc anh ñem theo quaàn aùo vaø löông thöïc 10 ngaøy, chöù coù baûo caùc anh hoïc taäp 10 ngaøy hay 30 ngaøy ñaâu. Caùc anh seõ cheát ruõ tuø caû luõ, chöù ñöøng coù noùi 10 ngaøy hay 30 ngaøy. Nhöõng coâng vieäc laøm cuûa caùc anh hieän nay cuõng laø hoïc taäp caûi taïo ñaáy! Ai thaønh thöïc khai baùo vaø hoïc taäp "tieán boä" thì treân xeùt cho veà ñoaøn tuï vôùi gia ñình. Ai ngoan coá thì cheát ruõ tuø!"*

Sau hôn moät thaùng, coù moät vaøi só quan ôû khu beân caïnh ngaên caùch vôùi khu toâi bôûi haøng raøo keõm gai tìm caùch troán traïi ñaõ bò Vieät Coäng baén cheát caïnh haøng raøo keõm gai! Vì laâu quaù roài toâi khoâng coøn nhôù teân vaø caáp baäc cuûa nhöõng só quan bò gieát ñoù. Khoaûng ba, boán thaùng sau treân phaân nöûa soá ngöôøi trong traïi bò beänh gheû ngöùa, kieát lî, phuø thuûng söùc khoûe suy giaûm ñi khoâng ñöôïc phaûi choáng gaäy hoaëc vòn vaøo vai ngöôøi khaùc môùi coù theå ñi ñöôïc, toâi cuõng bò beänh nhö nhöõng ngöôøi ñoù. Khoaûng naêm thaùng sau thì ¾ soá ngöôøi trong traïi bò beänh. Lyù do laø aên uoáng thieáu thoán, khoâng ñuû chaát dinh döôõng laïi coøn bò khuûng boá tinh thaàn lieân tuïc. Traïi Hoùc Moân chöùa khoaûng moät ngaøn ngöôøi. Thaáy tình traïng nguy ngaäp nhö vaäy, coäng saûn ñaõ cho moãi ngöôøi vieát thö veà gia ñình xin tieáp teá thuoác chöõa beänh vaø thöïc phaåm, giôùi haïn moãi ngöôøi 3 kilogram. Söï thaät, neáu khoâng coù thuoác vaø ñoà aên cuûa gia ñình göûi cho chuùng toâi thì coù leõ chuùng toâi ñaõ cheát vì beänh ngay nhöõng thaùng ñaàu tieân trong traïi caûi taïo Hoùc Moân.

Naêm 1976, chuùng toâi ñöôïc ñöa ñeán traïi Long Giao, tænh Long Khaùnh,(traïi naøy nguyeân laø khu gia binh cuõ cuûa moät ñôn vò thuoäc SÑ18BB). ÔÛ ñaây ñöôïc hôn 1 thaùng ñaõ coù maáy ngöôøi troán traïi bò baén cheát vaø moät anh thaét coå baèng giaây ñieän thoaïi töï töû. Laâu ngaøy quaù neân toâi cuõng khoâng nhôù teân nhöõng ngöôøi naøy. Cuoái naêm 1976, chuùng toâi laïi ñöôïc chuyeãn veà traïi Taân Hieäp, tænh Bieân Hoaø. ÔÛ ñaây ñöôïc gaàn moät naêm, qua naêm 1977 chuùng toâi bò ñöa ñi lao ñoäng khoå sai ôû Buø Gia Maäp thuoäc tænh Phöôùc Long.

Buø Gia Maäp laø maät khu cuûa coäng saûn tröôùc ñaây, caùch bieân giôùi Kampuchia khoaûng 6 caây soá ñöôøng chim bay. Chuùng toâi phaûi chaët caây, phaù röøng ñeà laøm nhaø ôû, laøm ruoäng raãy troàng luùa, baép, khoai mì, khoai lang.... Chuùng toâi chöa bao giôø laøm nhöõng coâng vieäc naëng nhoïc naøy, vì theá ñaây laø moät cöïc hình ñoái vôù chuùng toâi, trong khi aên uoáng laïi raât thieâu thoán. Buïng chuùng toâi luoân luoân ñoùi, phaûi kieám rau röøng, maêng tre, cuû röøng... aên cho ñöõ ñoùi. Moät soá ngöôøi ñaõ bò ngoä ñoäc vì aên rau röøng, cuû röøng vaø naám röøng... Ngay thaùng ñaàu tieân ñaõ coù moät ngöôøi toâi coøn nhôù teân laø Thieáu Taù Nguyeãn vaên Thoâng chòu cöïc hình khoâng noåi phaûi nhaåy vaøo ñoáng löûa töï töû. Chính maét toâi vaø nhieàu ngöôøi chöùng kieán nhöng khoâng cöùu ñöôïc vì löûa chaùy quaù lôùn töø moät ñoáng caây khoâ ñöôïc ñoát chaùy ñeå laáy tro laøm phaân boùn vaø troáng choã ñeå troàng khoai mì, troàng luùa... Vaøi ba thaùng sau, coù nhieàu ngöôøi troán traïi vöôït bieân giôùi sang Kampuchia ñeå ñi Thaùi Lan baèng ñöôøng boä. Nhöõng ngöôøi naøy khoâng thoaùt ñöôïc, hoï ñeàu bò gieát ôû doïc bieân giôùi, nhöõng ngöôøi baïn cuûa toâi laø Ñaïi uùy Taøi, Ñaïi UÙy Sanh vaø Ñaïi UÙy Thieäp ñaõ bò gieát khi troán traïi. Moät soá troán veà Saøi Goøn baèng xe ñoø do gia ñình toå chöùc vôùi giaáy tôø giaû thì thoaùt.

Chuùng toâi lao ñoäng lieân tuïc töø saùng ñeán chieàu, nhö leân röøng chaët caây goã, chaét tre, chaët nöùa...laøm nhaø, troàng luùa, troàng khoai lang, khoai mì, baép, laøm coû luùa... Ñeán muøa thì taäp trung thu hoaïch ñem veà traïi. Nhöng chuùng toâi khoâng ñöôïc aên nhöõng ñoà töôi toát naøy maø phaûi aên toaøn ñoà cuõ gaïo moác, khoai suøng. Laøm vieäc thaät cöïc nhoïc nhöng chæ ñöôïc aên hai cheùn côm ñoän vôùi khoai lang, khoai mì vaø moät chuùt caù khoâ vôùi nöôùc muoái vaø rau röøng, hoaëc maêng tre chuùng toâi töï kieám ñöôïc khi ñi lao ñng trong röøng. Ngaøy naøo cuõng lao ñoäng khoå sai vaø aên uoáng thieáu thoán nhö vaäy, neân chuùng toâi kieät söùc raát nhanh, ngöôøi chæ coøn da boïc xöông. Khoå nhuïc khoâng keå xieát! Ñaõ theá, moãi buoåi toái chuùng toâi coøn phaûi hoïc taäp, kieåm kieåm coâng vieäc haøng ngaøy ñeán chín, möôøi giôø ñeâm môùi ñöôïc ñi nguû! Laøm khoâng ñuû chæ tieâu thì bò coäng saûn ñaùnh ñaäp, giam caàm vaø bò ruùt bôùt phaàn aên voán ñaõ

quaù ít. Chæ sau moät naêm, ít nhaát ñaõ coù vaøi chuïc ngöôøi cheát vì kieät söùc, hoaëc ñau beänh kieát lî, soát reùt röøng... nhöng khoâng coù thuoác chöõa. Taát caû nhöõng ngöôøi naøy toâi ñeàu khoâng nhôù teân.

Naêm 1978, khi coäng saûn Vieät Nam ñaùnh chieám Kampuchia. Chuùng toâi phaûi chuyeån traïi ñeán "Khu Kinh Teá Môùi" Minh Höng gaàn soùc Baêm Bo, nôi giam caàm nhöõng thaønh phaàn teä ñoan xaõ hoäi ñeå traùnh chieán tranh. Veà traïi naøy chuùng toâi laïi phaûi chaët caây phaù röøng ñeå troàng luùa, troàng ñaâu phuïng, troàng khoai mì, khoai lang vaø troàng caây cao su. Chuùng toâi laø nhöõng ngöôøi tuø ñaõ bò ñaøy ñoïa aên uoáng khoå sôû thieáu thoán, ñoùi aên vaø laøm vieäc cöïc nhoïc, nhöng khi nhìn thaáy nhöõng ngöôøi daân thaønh thò veà soáng ôû ñaây goïi laø "vuøng kinh teá môùi", chuùng toâi laïi caøng thöông hoï hôn, vì hoï coøn ñoùi khoå hôn chuùng toâi, nhaát laø nhöõng ngöôøi giaø vaø caùc em nhoû. Sau khi ñaõ troàng haøng traêm maãu cao su vaø luùa cuõng nhö caùc caây noâng nghieäp khaùc. Chuùng chuùng toâi laïi phaûi chuyeån ñi traïi Gia Trung, tænh Pleiku vaøo cuoái naêm 1979 vaø moät soá lôùn chuyeån ñi Haøm Taân, tænh Bình Tuy.

ÔÛ traïi Gia Trung, toâi ñöôïc xeáp vaøo "ñoäi rau xanh", coâng vieäc haøng ngaøy cuûa toâi laø ñi laáy phaân traâu, phaân boø, vaø phaân ngöôøi veà boùn cho ruoäng rau. Vieäc laøm thaät cöïc khoå, baån thæu vaø maát veä sinh, nhöng toâi khoâng theå traùnh neù. Khi ñi lao ñoäng luoân luoân coù moät caùn boä quaûn giaùo vaø hai veä binh vuõ trang caàm suùng AK daãn ñi vaø kieåm soaùt chuùng toâi laøm vieäc. Nhieàu ngöôøi quaù yeáu keùm söùc khoûe khoâng laøm ñuû chæ tieâu ñaõ bò ñaùnh baèng baùng suùng hoaëc nhoát trong nhaø giam vaø bò cuøm chaân. Buoåi chieàu veà ñeán traïi laø bò nhoát ngay vaøo trong phoøng giam, ñeán böõa aên ñöôïc môû cöûa ra ngoaøi nhaän ñoà aên. Böõa aên cuõng chæ coù moät cheùn côm ñoän vôùi khoai mì hoaëc khoai lang khoâ, aên vôùi canh rau vaø chuùt nöôùc muoái. Côm gaïo vaø khoai ñeàu cuõ vaø aåm moác boác leân muøi raát khoù chòu vaø chaéc chaén khoâng coøn chaát boå döôõng. Nhöng neáu khoâng aên thì aên caùi gì ñaây!

Lao ñoäng khoå sai ôû traïi Gia Trung 18 thaùng thì toâi ñöôïc tha veà vôùi gia ñình. Trong Giaáy Ra Traïi ghi veà ñeán ñòa phöông phaûi trình dieän coâng an phöôøng vaø bò quaûn cheá 1 naêm. Tröôùc khi nhaän Giaáy Ra Traïi chuùng toâi phaûi laøm tôø cam keát, phaûi tuaân haønh theo leänh veà cö truù vaø lao ñoäng cuûa chính quyeàn ñòa phöông. Thôøi gian quaûn cheá 1 naêm cuõng laø moät cöïc hình vaø thöû thaùch, haøng tuaàn chuùng toâi phaûi trình dieän coâng an phöôøng vôùi cuoán soå ghi chi tieát nhöõng ngaøy trong tuaàn ñaõ laøm caùi gì, ñi nhöõng ñaâu vaø tieáp xuùc vôùi ai, trao ñoåi nhöõng caâu chuyeän gì vôùi nhöõng ngöôøi naøy. Ñi laøm vieäc thì laøm caùi gì, laøm vôùi ai, kieám ñöôïc bao nhieâu tieàn moät ngaøy.v.v... Sau moät naêm neáu khoâng vi phaïm nhöõng ñieàu luaät do chính quyeàn ñeà ra chuùng toâi seõ ñöôïc xeùt cho phuïc hoài quyeàn coâng daân, vaø sau ñoù ñöôïc xeùt cho nhaäp khoä khaåu thöôøng truù. Khi xeùt traû quyeàncoâng daân hay xeùt cho thöôøng truù, coâng an khu vöïc seõ hoïp toå daân phoá. Nhöõng ngöôøi trong toå seõ nhaän xeùt veà caùc haønh vi ñaïo ñöùc, coâng vieäc laøm aên cuûa mình coù löông thieän khoâng? Thaùi ñoä ñoái vôùi chính quyeàn ñòa phöông vaø ngöôøi daân trong toå daân phoá... Nhieàu ngöôøi phaùt bieåu yù kieán vaø nhaän xeùt, neáu khoâng coù gì sai phaïm thì xeùt cho nhaäp hoä khaåu thöôøng truù hoaëc traû quyeàn coâng daân

Khi chuùng toâi ñöôïc tha ra traïi. Chuùng toâi ñöôïc traïi phaùt moät boä quaàn aùo vaø 100$ VN ñeå laøm loä phí ñi veà vôùi gia ñình. Toâi vaø moät soá ngöôøi baïn duøng phöông tieän xe löûa veà Saøi Goøn. Toâi ra traïi ngaøy 11.6.1981, nhöng maõi ñeán ngaøy 16.6.81 môùi veà ñeán nhaø vì phaûi chôø ñöïi maáy ngaøy môùi coù xe löûa veà Saøi Goøn.

Maáy ngaøy nay gia ñình toâi vaãn mong chôø toâi veà vì chính quyeàn ñòa phöông ñaõ baùo tin cho gia ñình toâi töø hôn moät tuaàn leã tröôùc. Khoaûng 9 giôø

toái toâi veà ñeán nhaø. Cha meï toâi, vôï con toâi, caùc em toâi möøng rôõ voâ cuøng. Meï toâi ñaõ khoùc khi nhìn thaáy toâi. Haøng xoùm laùng gieàng cuõng ñeán thaêm hoûi toâi. Thaät laø caûm ñoäng. Tình caûm cuûa moïi ngöôøi ñoái vôùi toâi thaät toát ñeïp.

Cha meï toâi troâng giaø ñi raát nhieàu, gaày goø vaø ñen ñuûi vì haøng ngaøy cha toâi phaûi ñi ñaïp xích loâ, meï toâi nöôùng baùnh traùng ñi baùn ñeå kieám soáng haøng ngaøy. Vôï toâi thì quaù gaày vaø xanh xao, haøng ngaøy vaãn phaûi ñaïp xe ñaïp ñeán taän Long An, Beán Löùc mua gaïo veà baùn nuoâi con vaø nuoâi toâi trong tuø. Caùc con toâi nay ñaõ goïi laø lôùn, vì khi toâi ñi tuø, con gaùi lôùn môùi coù 4 tuoåi thì nay ñaõ 10 tuoåi. Con gaùi nhoû môùi sanh ñöôïc 6 ngaøy nay ñaõ 6 tuoåi. Caùc con toâi nhìn toâi thaät xa la, phaûi moät luùc laâu sau caùc con toâi môùi nhaän ra toâi vaø toû veû thaân thieän.

Nghæ döôõng söùc ñöôïc 10 ngaøy, toâi phaûi baét tay vaøo coâng vieäc laøm ñeå phuï giuùp vôï toâi nuoâi caùc con. Laøm gì ñeå kieám tieàn baây giôø? Cha toâi baûo cöù ñi ñaïp xích loâ, tuy coù cöïc khoå nhöng ñöôïc “töï do”, luùc naøo khoeû thì ñi chôû khaùch, luùc naøo meät thì tìm goác caây coù boùng maùt naèm nghæ treân xích loâ. Tieàn kieám khoâng ñöôïc nhieàu nhöng cuõng taïm ñuû aên. Toâi nghe lôøi cha toâi vaø baét tay vaøo “ngheà” xích loâ. Ñaïp xích loâ ñöôïc hôn moät naêm toâi bò kieät söùc vaø bò beänh phoåi coù nöôùc. Toâi phaûi nghæ gaàn moät naêm trôøi ñeå chöõa beänh. Raát may, toâi coù ngöôøi em trai laø lính Haûi Quaân ñaõ theo taàu chieán ñi Myõ töø naêm 1975 ñaõ göûi thuoác vaø tieàn veà cho cho chöõa beänh vaø aên uoáng boài döôõng söùc khoeû. Trong thôøi gian naøy, toâi xin vieäc laøm ôû Hôïp Taùc Xaõ Hôïp Nhaát, sau ñoù laø Hôïp Taùc Xaõ Xuaân Yeán, chuyeân laøm haøng maây tre laù vaø maønh truùc xuaát khaåu.

Khoûi beänh, toâi boû vieäc laøm ôû hôïp taùc xaõ, theo cha toâi ñi laøm thôï hoà, thôï moäc - luùc naøy cha toâi khoâng coøn ñi ñaïp xích loâ, oâng ñaõ trôû veà ngheà cuõ laø ngheà xaây döïng nhaø cöûa - Tröôùc ñaây cha toâi ñi lính cho quaân ñoäi Phaùp, caáp baäc Trung Só. Khi quaân ñoäi Phaùp ruùt veà nöôùc, cha toâi giaûi nguõ naêm 1955, vaø oâng ñi laøm ngheà thôï xaây döïng nhaø cöûa töø naêm ñoù. Toâi laøm ngheà xaây döïng nhaø cöûa cho ñeán ngaøy ñi Myõ.

Toâi vaø vôï con rôøi Saøi Goøn ngaøy 8.3.1991 ñeán Oklahoma City, tieåu bang Oklahoma ngaøy 15.3.1991. Gia ñình toâi vaø nhöõng gia ñình cuøng ñi moät chuyeán bay phaûi ôû laïi nhaø tuø Suan Plu, Thaùi Lan moät tuaàn leã ñeå laøm thuû tuïc nhaäp cö vaøo Hoa Kyø. Tính ñeán nay, toâi ñaõ soáng ôõ nuôùc Myõ ñöôïc 13 naêm vaø 3 thaùng. Toâi caùm ôn nöùc Myõ ñaõ cöu mang gia ñình toâi, cöu mang haøng trieäu ngöôøi Vieät Nam tî naïn coäng saûn, trong ñoù coù treân 100 ngaøn cöïu tuø nhaân chính trò.

Nhö toâi ñaõ trình baøy vôùi coâ Thuùy trong cuoäc phoûng vaán ngaøy 30.7.2001. Qua ñaây, toâi vaø vôï laøm ngheà quay heo, quay vòt vaø nhieàu moùn aên khaùc nhö baùnh cuoán, chaùo loøng, caø pheâ... Tieäm Hôïp Kyù laø nôi toâi laøm vieäc töø hôn 13 naêm nay do vôï choàng ngöôøi em ruoät toâi giuùp voán. Tieäm Hôïp Kyù cuõng laø nôi hoäi hoïp cuûa Hoäi Cöïu Tuø Nhaân Chính Trò maø hieän nay toâi laøm Hoäi Tröôûng vaø haøng ngaøy toâi gaëp gôõ caùc chieán höõu trao ñoåi nhöõng caâu chuyeän veà thôøi söï, chính trò vaø nhöõng chuyeän vui buoàn trong ñôøi soáng haøng ngaøy. Vaø baøn tính phöôøng thöùc ñaáu tranh giaûi theå cheá ñoä coäng saûn.

Hoäi Cöïu Tuø Nhaân Chính Trò ñöôïc thaønh laäp thaùng 1/1991. Nhaân soá luùc ñaàu chæ coù hôn 20 ngöôøi. Luùc cao ñieåm nhaát laø naêm 1996 – 1997 leân ñeán 300 gia ñình,(khoaûng 1500 ngöôøi) nay chæ coøn khoaûng 220 ngöôøi vì coù moät soá gia ñình di chuyeån ñi tieåu bang khaùc, vaø 20 ngöôøi ñaõ cheát vì beänh. Hoäi Cöïu TNCT ñöôïc thaønh laäp vôùi muïc ñích ban ñaàu laø töông trôï laãn nhau.

Sau vaøi naêm Hoäi vöõng maïnh chuùng toâi chuyeån sang ñaáu tranh vôùi coäng saûn Vieät nam döôùi nhieàu hình thöùc, tranh ñaáu cho moät nöôùc Vieät Nam Töï Do, Daân Chuû vaø Nhaân Quyeàn. Toâi ñöôïc caùc chieán höõu trong Hoäi tín nhieäm baàu laøm Chuû Tòch töø naêm 1996 ñeán nay. Toâi laøm vieäc vôùi Ban Chaáp Haønh goàm 21 ngöôøi.

Naêm 1993, toâi ñöôïc oâng chuû tòch Coäng Ñoàng Vieät Nam/OK môøi laøm vieäc trong Ban Xaõ Hoäi. Naêm 1996, toâi ñöôïc ñoàng höông tín nhieäm baàu vaøo chöùc vuï Phoù Chuû tòch Noäi Vuï Coäng Ñoàng ñöùng chung lieân danh vôùi cöïu Chuaån Töôùng Töø vaên Beâ, Chuû Tòch Coäng Ñoàng. Sau ñoù vôùi cöïu Trung Taù Ñoã Duy Chöông. Toâi laøm PCT Noäi Vuïï/CÑVN/OK cho ñeán naêm 2003 thì maõn nhieäm. Vì baän roän nhieàu coâng vieäc neân toâi ñaõ töø choái ra öùng cöû chöùc Chuû tòch Coäng Ñoàng nhieäm kyø 2003 - 2006. Ngoaøi ra toâi cuõng ñöôïc baàu vaøo chöùc vuï Phoù Chuû Tòch Noäi Vuï Toång Hoäi Cöïu Tuø Nhaân Chính Trò Vieät Nam nhieäm kyø 2003 – 2005.

Taâm nguyeän cuûa toâi laø tieáp tuïc ñaáu tranh vôùi coäng saûn Vieät Nam. Ñaáu tranh cho töï do, daân chuû vaø nhaân quyeàn cho Vieät Nam. Ñaáu tranh cho haïnh phuùc cuûa ñoàng baøo vaø söï tröôøng toàn cuûa daân toäc Vieät Nam

Nhìn laïi queâ höông sau 29 naêm goïi laø thoáng nhaát ñaát nöôùc, chuùng ta chæ nhìn thaáy söï ngheøo ñoùi cuûa ngöôøi daân, chæ nhìn thaáy söï tha hoùa toät cuøng cuûa xaõ hoäi. Thöû hoûi ai khoâng ñau loøng tröôùc caûnh nhöõng coâ gaùi vaø nhöõng treû em bò baùn ra nöôùc ngoaøi laøm noâ leä tình duïc chæ vì ñoùi ngheøo. Ai ñaõ gaây ra caûnh ñôøi nhuïc nhaõ naøy? Xin thöa, chính Hoà Chí Minh, teân ñoà teå ñaïi gian ñaïi aùc vaø nhöõng teân laõnh ñaïo ñaûng CS hieän nay laø thuû phaïm gaây ra toäi aùc ñieám nhuïc naøy.

Taïi sao 29 naêm khoâng coù chieán tranh, maø ñaát nöôùc vaãn ngheøo, ñaïi ña soá ñoàng baøo trong nöôùc haøng ngaøy vaãn phaûi aên ñoän khoai saén, maëc duø Vieät Nam ñöôïc nhieàu nöôùc treân theá giôùi vieän trôï kinh teá, vieän trôï nhaân ñaïo haøng tæ ñoâ-la...vaø treân 3 tæ ñoâ-la haøng naêm ñoàng baøo ôû haûi ngoaïi göûi veà? Caâu traû lôøi thaät ñôn giaûn: Ñoù laø ñaûng CSVN khoâng coù thöïc taâm xaây döïng ñaát nöôùc, chuùng chæ coá vô veùt taøi saûn cuûa nhaân daân, taøi nguyeân cuûa ñaát cho ñaày tuùi tham.

Neáu ñaûng CSVN coù thöïc taâm xaây döïng ñaát nöôùc, thöïc söï muoán ñaát nöôùc phaùt trieån vaø giaàu maïnh, ñaûng CSVN haõy thöïc thi daân chuû vaø nhaân quyeàn, traû töï do cho nhöõng ngöôøi yeâu nöôùc ñang bò giam caàm vaø toå chöùc baàu cöû töï do coù quoác teá giaùm saùt ñeå toaøn daân choïn ngöôøi taøi ñöùc ra laõnh ñaïo ñaát nöôùc. Baèng khoâng taát caû nhöõng chính saùch an daân, keâu goïi queân ñi dó vaõng, hoøa hôïp hoøa giaûi hay keâu goïi thanh nieân, trí thöùc ôû haûi ngoaïi veà xaây döïng ñaát nöôùc chæ laø chieâu baøi löøa bòp maø thoâi.

Theå cheá chính trò naøo roài qua ñi, chæ coù daân toäc laø tröôøng toàn. 29 naêm qua, ngöôøi Vieät ôû haûi ngoaïi cuõng nhö ôû trong nöôùc ñaõ lieân tuïc ñaáu tranh cho Töï Do, Daân Chuû vaø Nhaân Quyeàn, phong traøo moãi ngaøy moät lôùn maïnh. Nhìn veà töông lai, chuùng ta raát laïc quan vaø tin töôûng chaúng bao laâu nöõa cheá ñoä CSVN seõ suïp ñoå. Toâi coù theå khaúng ñònh: Chuùng toâi thua trong cuoäc chieán, nhöng chuùng toâi seõ thaéng trong hoaø bình.

Treân ñaây laø toùm löôïc veà gia ñình cuûa toâi, veà cuoäc soáng vaø nhöõng hoaït ñoäng vaø nhöõng taâm tö nguyeän voïng cuûa caù nhaân toâi. Toâi mong seõ

giuùp ích ñöôïc phaàn naøo cho cuoäc nghieân cöùu cuûa coâ veà nhöõng ngöôøi cöïu tuø nhaân chính trò döôùi cheá ñoä coäng saûn. Kính chuùc coâ thaønh coâng.
Thaân meán chaøo coâ Thuùy,

Nguyeãn vaên Söù

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Ñính keøm caùc baûn sao:

- Giaáy Ra Traïi.
- Quyeát ñònh Phuïc Hoài Quyeàn Coâng Daân
- Phieáu Ñeà Xuaát Ñaêng Kyù Hoä Khaåu
- Giaáy Baùo ñöôïc nhaäp hoä khaåu
- Giaáy Chöùng chæ Cö Truù
- Giaáy baùo Tin Xuaát Caûnh
- Thö Môøi Ñaêng Kyù Chuyeán Bay
- Hoä chieáu (Passeport)

Appendix 4

"Trong ThÀm L¥ng, Tôi Tranh ñÃu
Ti‰ng Nói Cûa Nh»ng NgÜ©i Tù Chính TrÎ Tåi MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam"

Tôi là m¶t SÌ Quan quân l¿c ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa v§i chÙc vø dåi kš Çåi h¶i trÜªng công binh, ti‹u Çoàn 18 b¶ binh, trong các hành quân tiêu diŒt b†n Công Sän, tÙ m¶t khu mây tào, tánh linh, vÕ xu, vÕ Ç¡c thu¶c tÌnh Long Khánh Bình tuy, Ç‰n tân uyên Biên Hoà, b‰n cát lai khê bình dÜÖng, mÆt khu dÜÖng minh châu Tây Ninh. Tam gia trÆn Çánh bäo vŒ Bình Long An L¶c trong mùa hè ÇÕ d»a 1972. Sau Çó hành quân sang Kampuchia Ç‹ yÍm tr® cho sÜ Çoàn Çánh vào cøc R cûa m¥t trÆn giäi phóng miŠn nam là tiŠn thân cûa C¶ng Sän B¡c ViŒt.

Gia Çình tôi lúc Çó g§m v® và ÇÙa con gái m§i sinh nhà tôi là giáo sÜ dåy tåi thành phÓ Sàigòn, bän chÃt nhân tØ, hiŠn lành, chiø khó nên chúng tôi sÓng rÃt hånh phúc.

Vào nh»ng ngày cuÓi tháng tÜ næm 1975, CS Çáng chi‰m các tÌnh miŠn trung, tình hình miŠn nam bÃt °n vì dân chúng chåy vào Nam lánh nån, quân l¿c ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa phäi rút vŠ cÓ thû và bäo vŒ Vùng 3 chi‰n thuÆt, trong Çó có SÜ ñoàn 18 B¶ Binh cûa chúng tôi, trong lúc Çó tòa Çåi sÙ MÏ ª Saìgòn rút Çi kèm theo t°ng thong m¶t sÓ tÜ§ng länh, Ç‹ ÇÃt nÜ§c không còn ai chÌ huy Çi‰n khi‰n nhÜ r¡n mÃt Çàu, càng làm cho lính th‰ càng h°n Ç¶n và rÓi ren them.

Là m¶t Sï Quan quân l¿c ViŒt Nam Công Hoà chÌ huy hÖn 100 binh sÌ, lúc Çó tâm trí tôi bÃt °n, Çàu óc nghÌ quÄn luôn, trong lúc ÇÃt nÜ§c lâm nguy mình không th‹ bÕ m¥c thu¶c hå Çã tØng sát cánh chi‰n ÇÃu v§i mình bäo vŒ mình, bây gi© ra Çi là trÓn tránh trách nhiŒm, trÓn chåy là hèn nhát nhøc nhä vô cùng, thà ª låi cùng chung sÓ phÆn v§i anh em. HÖn n»a nhà tôi m¶t lòng không chøi lìa xa quê nhà và Çã an vÌ tôi "m¶t an eú không tåo ÇÜ®c mùa Xuân" cÙ Ç‹ t¿ nhiên, chÃp nhÆn ÇÎnh mênh an bày. Can Çäm sÓng hiên ngang và làm tròn b°n phÆn mà ThÜ®ng ñ‰ Çã giao phó, dù bÃt cÙ hoàn cänh nào ÇÜa Ç‰n cho chúng ta, Ç©i càng gia chåm nhiŠu nghÎch cänh càng Çau, thì s¿ khôn l§n càng có gía trÎ. Cu¶c sÓng cûa chúng ta m§I có š nghiã và ta m§i dám t¿ hào và xÙng Çáng v§i truyŠn thÓng bÃt khuÃt cûa dân t¶c.

RÒi ngày 24-6-1975, C¶ng Sän ra lŒnh tÃt cä SÌ Quan QLVNCH tÆp trung h†c tÆp caÌ tåo, nhÜng th¿c chÃt Çó là tråi tù kh° sai.

Sau khi tÆp trung ÇÀy Çû tÃt cä Sï Quan QLVNCH b†n C¶ng Sän b¡t anh em chúng tôi kê khai lš lÎch. RÒi chia chúng tôi, kÈ lên tàu hoä ra miŠn B¡c, ngÜ©i Çày lên tÆn rØng sâu nÜ§c Ç¶c, sÓ còn låi tÓng ra häi ÇaÕ xa xÓi, Ç‹ b†n chúng d‹ bŠ Çày äi khûng bÓ chúng tôi tÙ tinh thÀn Ç‰n th‹ xác.

Công Sän b¡c hiŒt ÇÜa m¶t sÓ lính trÈ tu°i Çáng con cháu chúng tôi vaò làm cai tù lên l§p dåy Ç©i chuÌ b§i nhøc må chúng tôi m¶t cách vô liê sÌ, b†n chúng xem anh em chúng tôi còn thua con vÆt.

Con æn uÓng, còn thua con heo cûa b†n chúng nuôi. Gåo chúng phát toàn m†t gåo Ç° ra n°i l‰u bŠu trêm m¥t nÜ§c, h‰t gåo Ç‰n bo bo, b¡p h¶t vàng, khoai mì lát m°i bºa æn chÌ 1 chén, thÙc æn là toàn nÜ§c muÓi (chúng tôi g†i "t‰u" Çó là nÜ§c m¡m Çåi dÜÖng) lâu lâu chúng bÓ thí cho mi‰ng ÇÆu hû tr¡ng (anh em g†i là thÎ/voi) ho¥c con khô cá mÓi. Khi có l‹ l®c l§n thì cho mi‰ng thÎt heo b¢ng ngón tay út, Çó là æn huŒ khoan hÒng cûa C¶ng Sän.

Còn t¡m gi¥t. N‰u muà mÜa thì tÙ t¡m, gi¥t giÛ, nÜ§t uÓng ÇŠu nh© nÜ§c mÜa. Mùa n¡ng chúng tôi phaÌ Çào gi‰ng lÃy nÜ§c. T¡m chÌ 1 lon guigo, tuÀn lÍ gi¥t giÛ 1 lÀn nhÜng nÜ§c Ü§t rÒi Çem phÖi, n‰u Çi làm g¥p ao hÒ vÛng nÜ§c thì t¡m gi¥t tåi ch‡ luôn.

Bau Çêm chúng nh‰t cä træm mång ngÜ©i vào cæn nhà chÜa ÇÀy 100m², không gÜ©ng chi‰u, chÌ có tÃm nylon cá nhân vØa làm aó mÜa vØa traÌ dÜ§I ÇÃt Ç‹ ngû, chæn mŠn thì ai có gì ÇÃp nÃy, anh em chúng tôi t¿ k‰t bao cát väi làm mŠn và Çún b†c nhau 2, 3 ngÜ©i chung 1 tÃm mŠn, hÖn n»a Çông ngÜ©I n¢m khít v§i nhau cÛng Çª lånh.

Ch‰ Ç¶ æn uÓng, ngû nghÌ nhÜ th‰. Ban ngày chúng còn b¡t chúng tôi lao Ç¶ng kh° sai, mà chúng thÜ©ng râu rao là Lao ñ¶ng là vinh quang. CuÓc ÇÃt trÒng khoai mì, khoai lang trÒng rau, ra nh»ng ÇÓn cây tre khiêng vŠ làm cûi, rÈ g°, Çan giÕ, thúng. Ngày làm 8 ti‰ng, Çi b¶ ra rÅy xa 1 ho¥ 2 km là thÜ©ng.

V§i cách æn uÓng nhÜ th‰, kèm theo tinh thÀn bÎ khûng hoäng ngû ÇÃt Äm thÃp, vì th‰ nhiŠu anh em không Çû sÙc Ç‹ kháng nên nhiŠu chÙng bÎnh phát sách phù thÛng, viên gan, viêm ru¶t tiêu chäy, lao ph°i, say dinh dÜÖng, ngô Ç¶c do Çói qúa æn bÆy, låi không có thuÓc men ÇÀy Çû và ch»a chåy kÎp th©i nên nhiŠu anh em Çã qua Ç©i trong tråi, 0 hòm, 0 quách chÌ hó chi‰u Çem chôn.

Trong hoàn cänh tù Çày kh° aÌ nhÜ th‰, anh em chúng tôi vÅn m¶t long kiên trì chiø Ç¿ng gian kh°, m¥c khác ÇÃu tranh v§I b†n cai tù, ÇÜa anh em trÜ§c là Bác Sï, y tá, tr® y, lÆp tram š t‰ Ç‹ chºa bênh cho anh em, ngÜÖì bÎnh ÇÜ®c miÍn lao Ç¶ng, t° chÙc trÒng rau chæn nuôi Ç‹ caÌ thi‰n b»a æn. ThÃy trÜ§c m¡t ÇÀy gian kh° ngày vŠ o bi‰t ÇÜ®c nên anh em chúng tôi càng Çoàn k‰t låi v§i nhau, tình huynh ÇŒ chi binh hÖn bao gi©, thÜÖng yêu Çùn b†c nhau, san sÈ cho nhau tØng h¶t muÓi, c†ng rau, cøc ÇÜ©ng, cái bánh, hay Çi‰u thuÓc hi‰t cä chøc ngÜ©i m‡i ngÜ©i m¶t hÖi cho Ãm long. Ngày nghï tø h†p låi uÓng trà bàn chuyŒn tình hình ÇÃt nÜ§c và th‰ gi§i, Ç‹ anh em v»ng long tin mà cÓ g¡ng phÃn Çãu trong cu¶c sÓng.

Nh»ng v§i chiêu bài xäo trá, l†c lØa, nghi kœ. B†n CS có bao gi© Ç‹ cho chúng tôi yên, vài ba tháng chúng låi, xáo tr¶n di chuy‹n chúng tôi tØ tråi n¢y sang tråi khác và ngÜ®c låi.

Sau gÀn m¶t næm giam cÀm chúng tôi, bÎ th‰ gi§i bên ngoài lêu án, gia Çình than nhân ÇÃu tranh, vì Çói rét bÎnh tÆt anh em chúng tôi qua Ç©i qúa nhiŠu. Nên b†n CS cho gia Çình lên thæm nuôi và chúng Çã chiêu du m¶t sÓ anh em nhe då ÇÜ®c ngû

v§i v® con qua Çêm, rÒi làm tay sai chÌ Çi‹m cho chúng nh»ng ngÜ©i dám ÇÃu tranh, nên m¶t sÓ bÎ sº tù kh° sai cùn chân cho Ç‰n ch‰t, ho¥c Çem ra pháp trÜ©ng xº b¡n.

GÀn 6 næm bÎ giam cÀm không bi‰t ngày vŠ, v§i cu¶c sÓng vÆt chÃt lÄn tinh thÀn tôi cäm thÃy thù h¥n CS chÃt chÒng nhÜ núi, thÃy thÜÖng cho dân t¶c bi‰t bao gi© m§i g†t bÕ h‰t b†n CS gian ác. Chúng tôi Çã trä m¶t giá qúa Ç¡t.

M‡i lÀn lên thæm nuôi, nhà tôi luôn nh¡c nhª Çông viên an ûi, “Các anh cÙ tÜ nhiên vui sÓng, phaÌ, chÃp nhÆn gian kh°, phaÌ hy v†ng và tin tÜªng thÜ®ng Ç‰ ngày mai tr©i låi sáng.

Næm 1975 b†n CS không gi‰t anh, thì bây gi© không dám Çâu thäm h†a nÃy, th‰ gi§i ÇŠu rÕ cái dä tâm vô nhân Çåo, s¿ dÓi trá lØa bÎp, s¿ tham lam ích k› cûa b†n chúng còn m¶t ai trên th‰ gi§i n¢y không hi‹u mà tin tÜªng b†n chúng. Bao næm gian kh° tù Çày cûa các anh cÛng có š nghiã l¡m chÙ.”

Tháng 11 næm 1980 tôi ÇÜ®c trä t¿ do vŠ v§i gia Çình niŠm vui chÜa cån, nhÜ«ng ch° cho s¿ Çau thÜÖng rÃt h©n vì n°i mÃt ÇÙa con thÖ khi không thuÓc men ch»a bŒnh, tài sän bÎ CS chi‰m doåt sau 13 ngày Çi tù, mà gi© Çây tôi m§i rõ vì nhà tôi cÓ giÃu dím, Ç‹ mang trong mình m¶t cæn bÎnh thÀn kinh vào bÎnh viŒn tâm thÀn mÃy lÀn, và Çã mÃt trí nh§ vïnh viÍn.

SuÓt 1 næm quän ch‰ tåi ÇÎa phÜÖng tôi làm m¶c Ç‹ ki‰m sÓng qua ngày.

Næm 1982 tôi bÎ CS b¡t nhÓt vì làm hÒ sÖ ODP gªi qua Thái Lan bÎ chúng b¡t g¥p. Nhà tôi tâm thÀn bÃt °n, la hét lung tung, chúng Çành thä tôi ra.

Nam 1990 tôi làm hÒ sÖ theo chÜÖng trình HO s¿ lià xa quê hÜÖng xÙ sª, Ç‹ tœ nån nÖi ÇÃt ngÜ©i.

Sau khi Ç‰n MÏ, gia Çình tôi ÇÎnh cÜ tåi ti‹u bang Oklahoma, Çã nhÆn thÃy chính sách cûa chính phû M› ÇÓi v§i các c¿u tù nhân chính trÎ ÇÀy lònh nhân tØ. M¥c dÀu khác màu da, ti‰ng nói, n‰p sÓng sinh hoåt, vÅn tÆn tình giúp Ç«, tåo ÇiŠu kiŒn cho gia Çình tôi thích nghi v§i cu¶c sÓng m§i và xây d¿ng Ç©i sÓng m§i.

Vì th‰ chúng tôi cÓ g¡ng mau chóng °n ÇÎnh cu¶c sÓng và hòa Ç¶ng vào sinh hoåt tåi thành phÓ Oklahoma, Ç‹ khÕi phø long kÿ v†ng cûa chính phû và nhân dân MÏ.

Gia Çình chúng tôi luôn luôn nh§ Ön Chính phû và toàn dân MÏ duy chÌ có ÇiŠu bÃt hånh cho chúng tôi là cæn bÎnh tâm thÀn cûa nhà tôi không bao gi© h‰t ÇÜ®c.

HiŒn tôi có Ü§c mÖ là!

- Nhà tôi h‰t bÎnh tÌnh táo nhÜ xÜa.
- ñÃt nÜ§c dân t¶c ViŒt Nam thoát khÕi s¿ cai trÎ cûa b†n CS Ç¶c tài, vô nhân Çåo.
- ñÃt nÜ§c dân t¶c ViŒt Nam giàu månh, có cu¶c sÓng t¿ do, Ãm no, hånh phúc.

- Các c¿u tù nhân chính trÎ m¶t lòng Çoàn k‰t ÇÃu tranh dÍ dành th¡ng l®i tØ tay b†n CS.
- Bän thân tôi và gia Çình luôn luôn ÇÙng trong hang ngÜ cûa C¿u tù nhân chính trÎ tåi Oklahoma.

Xin gªi Ç‰n qúi vÎ l©i kêu g†i cûa m¶t vÎ länh Çåo tÓi cao cûa nÜ§c ViŒt Nam:

“ñùng nghe nh»ng gì C¶ng Sän nói mà hãy nhìn nh»ng gì C¶ng Sän làm.”

Kính chào Çoàn k‰t,

Báo Võ Van

Appendix 5

ñåi Úy PhÜ§c Hoàng NguyÍn

ñ©i SÓng TrÜ§c Tháng 4 Næm 1975

Tôi sinh næm 1945 ª tÌnh Trà Vinh cûa miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam. Tôi sinh ra vào nh»ng ngày chi‰n tranh gi»a Pháp và ViŒt Nam. ViŒt Minh lúc Çó chÜa phäi là ViŒt C¶ng. Chi‰n tranh kh¡p m†i miŠn cûa ÇÃt nÜ§c. Khoäng chØng mÜ©i tu°i, Ba Má tôi di tän lên Sài Gòn vì ª dÜ§i quê làm ru¶ng không Çû sÓng. Chi‰n tranh qúa cho lên không làm æn ÇÜ®c. Lúc Çó là næm 1955.

Lên Sài Gòn rÒi thì tôi ÇÜ®c Çi h†c trÜ©ng ti‹u h†c cûa nhà nÜ§c ª gÀn nhà. Sau h†c ti‹u h†c thì thi vào trÜ©ng trung h†c Patrist TrÜÖng Vïnh Kš. Sau khi thi tÓt nghiŒp trung h†c thì tôi bÎ d¶ng viên Ç‰n tu°i phäi nhÆp ngÛ, theo lŒnh cûa chánh phû miŠn nam ViŒt Nam. N‰u mà không có tình trång chi‰n tranh Çáng lë tôi lên Çåi h†c ÇÜ®c.

ThÆt s¿ lúc Çó tôi không nghï gì Ç‰n chính trÎ. Tôi sÓng ª thành phÓ miŠn Nam tØ nhÕ t§i l§n cho nên ch£ng bi‰t C¶ng Sän là cái gì; không bi‰t C¶ng Sän nhÜ th‰ nào. Tôi không có cái lòng thù hÆn gì h‰t. N‰u tôi ª miŠn B¡c quê mà bÎ C¶ng Sän h† gi‰t ch‰t hay phá h†ai thì có thù hÆn. ñÓng quân ª miŠn nam ViŒt Nam trong suÓt th©i gian Çi lính vì t§i tu°i phäi Çi quân dÎch theo nhiŒm vø cûa ngÜ©i công dân, bäo sao thì mình cÙ làm theo vÆy. ChÌ bi‰t là nhiŒm vø cûa mình là Çi lính rÒi kêu b¡n là b¡n. T§i khi mÃt nÜ§c tôi cÛng không hi‹u rõ ràngvŠ ngÜ©i C¶ng Sän nhÜ th‰ nào.

Khi tôi vào trong quân Ç¶i, tôi theo h†c trÜ©ng trung tâm huÃn luyŒn TrØ BÎ Thû ñÙc và m¶t næm sau thì tÓt nghiŒp. Trong th©i gian theo h†c, h† thÃy tôi có

næng khi‰u vŠ toán thì h† chuy‹n tôi Çi vào binh chûng cûa Pháo Binh. Tôi h†c tru©ng Pháo Binh ª Nha Trang. Sáu tháng sau tôi ra trÜ©ng v§i cÃp bÆc ChuÄn Úy. Lúc Çó là næm 1968, Ông NguyÍn Væn ThiŒu là T°ng ThÓng. Khi ra trÜ©ng tôi ÇÜ®c ÇÜa vŠ quân Çoàn 3 Ti‹u ñoàn 35 Pháo Binh Çóng ª Biên Hòa, h† ÇÜa tôi Çi hành quân chung v§i ti‹u doàn BiŒt ñ¶ng Quân Ç‹ tôi Çi theo ÇÖn vÎ B¶ Binh. Møc Çích cûa tôi là khi nào mà ÇÖn vÎ Çøng trÆn v§i C¶ng Sän thì tôi së kêu Pháo Binh b¡n Ç‹ y‹m tr®. NhiŒm vø cûa tôi lúc Çó là chÌ huy m¶t Pháo ñ¶i súng 105 ly ñåi Bác Ç‹ y‹m tr® cho các cu¶c hành quân trong vùng hoåt Ç¶ng ª Tây Ninh, HÆu Nghïa, Bình DÜÖng. Nh»ng ngu©i lính B¶ Binh hành quân Çi b¶ trong rØng. H† g†i vŠ hÆu cÙ, cÀn Pháo Binh y‹m tr® cho cu¶c hành quân. H† yêu cÀu tôi b¡n ch‡ nào thì tôi b¡n ch‡ Çó. Vì tôi giÕi toán nên nhiŒm vø tôi là phäi tính toán tÓc Ç¶ gió nhÜ th‰ nào, bao nhiêu gÓc Ç¶ m‡i lÀn viên Çån Çi nó cän trª nhÜ th‰ nào. Tôi phäi tính làm sao Ç‹ cho nó b¡n Çúng t†a d¶ m¶t c¡ch chính sát.

Khi tôi m§i ra trÜ©ng là tôi g¥p Çúng ngay cái t‰t MÆu Thân 1968. Lúc Çó tôi Çi hành quân coi nhÜ phÓi h®p v§i binh chûng Không Quân ª trong Ch® L§n. Ÿ Sài Gòn chia ra hai khu, m¶t khu Sài Gòn, m¶t khu Ch® L§n. Trong nh»ng ngày Çó thì ViŒt C¶ng tràn ngÆp vô trong thành phÓ rÒi. H† chi‰m tÃt cä nhà cºa ª trong Ch® L§n. Mình vô Ç‹ Çánh Çu°i h† ra miŒt ngoåi ô khÕi thành phÓ. Lúc Çó là coi nhÜ C¶ng Sän nó tính Çánh chi‰m MiŠn Nam mà bÎ thÃt båi. Nó vô t§i Sài Gòn thì không có bi‰t ÇÜ©ng xá gì mà Çi h‰t thành ra nó cÙ lÄn quÄn trong mÃy cái ÇÜ©ng hÈm rÒi nó bÎ mình gi‰t ch‰t, Çánh Çu°i ra khÕi thành phÓ. Coi nhÜ miŠn Nam Viêt Nam Çã làm chû tình hình næm MÆu Thân. Quân ta Çã chi‰m låi hoàn toàn tØ ngoài Hu‰ vô t§i miŠn Trung rÒi miŠn Nam. Næm 1968 là C¶ng Sän bÎ thÃt båi.

Sau trÆn chi‰n T‰t MÆu Thân, tôi ÇÜ®c tæng lên m¶t chÙc tØ ChuÄn Úy lên Thi‰u Úy. Tôi låi Ç°i nhiŒm vø, và không còn phäi Çi hành quân n»a nhÜ trÜ§c. Tôi vŠ coi m¶t cái ÇÖn vÎ ª hÆu cÙ y‹m tr®. Tôi chÌ huy súng b¡n ra phía ch‡ hành quân. Tôi ch£ng nhìn thÃy C¶ng Säm vì luôn luôn lúc nào t¶i cÛng Çi v§i b¶ chÌ huy, thÜ©ng là Çi sau toán quân. Mình ª trung ÜÖng, chÌ khi nào b¡t ÇÜ®c ViŒt C¶ng làm tù binh và ÇÜa vŠ B¶ ChÌ Huy thì tôi m§i thÃy m¥t ngÜ©i ViŒt C¶ng. NhÜng cÛng chÌ thÃy m¶t hai ngÜ©i thôi k‹ cä nh»ng xát ch‰t.

Sau khi T‰t MÆu Thân khoäng chØng tháng ba tháng tÜ là yên, thì h† m§i thuyên chuy‹n tôi lên tÌnh PhÜ§c Long và Çóng quân ª Çó. NhiŒm vø tôi là coi hai khÄu Çåi bác g†i là trung Ç¶i. M¶t trung Ç¶i gÒm hai khÄu Çåi bác. TÌnh PhÜóc Long nhÕ xíu Çi b¶ m¶t vòng là h‰t. Tôi g¥p v® tôi ª PhÜ§c Long. V® tôi làm viŒc trong môt ÇÖn vÎ cûa MÏ. Bà Ãy là thÜ kš cho væn phòng. Tôi cÜ§i v® tôi ÇÀu næm 1969 và trong næm Çó tôi có ÇÙa con trai. Næm 1971 thì con gái tôi sinh ra Ç©i.

Coi nhÜ cÛng ª PhÜ§c Long næm 1969, tôi làm viŒc gÀn v§i ngÜ©i MÏ. Tôi Çóng quân gÀn bên cånh ch° MÏ Çóng quân. NhiŒm vø tôi là phäi qua liên låc v§i h† Ç‹ mà có th‹ giúp Ç« lÅn nhau trong vÃn ÇŠ hành quân. Lúc Çó MÏ Ç‰n v§i cái danh nghïa là cÓ vÃn tÙc là h† giúp Ç« mà ª cÃp b¿c cao chÙ không phäi ª cÃp thÃp. Tôi là cÃp thÃp nhÕ thì không có làm viŒc chung. Pháo Binh tôi là cÃp ti‹u Çoàn thì có m¶t ông Ti‹u ñoàn TrÜªng. Ông Ãy cÀm ÇÀu cûa m¶t ti‹u Çòan. Bên cånh ông Ti‹u ñoàn TrÜªng là có m¶t ông cÓ vÃn MÏ. Møc Çích cûa ông Ãy là chÌ giúp Ç« trong m†i phÜÖng tiŒn thí dø nhÜ cÀn kêu máy bay, hay cÀn ti‰p t‰ ÇŠn Ç¥n. CÀn cái gì thì nói ông Ãy, ông Ãy g†i mau hÖn. Lâu lâu ông CÓ VÃn MÏ Çi thæm các ÇÖn vÎ và

ông ta Çi chung v§i Ti‹u ñoàn TrÜªng. H† thæm coi mình có g¥p khó khæn gì thì h† giúp Ç«. Lúc Çó h† là ÇÒng minh tÙc là bản mình.

Trong nh»ng næm 1971, 1972, 1973 chi‰n tranh rÃt ác liŒt. Quân ñ¶i ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa ª miŠn nam phäi ÇÜa quân ra các biên gi§i gi»a Cao Miên, Lào Ç‹ ngæn chÆn ÇØng d‹ h† tÃn công qua.

Chi‰n trÜ©ng b¡t ÇÀu sôi Ç¶ng khoäng næm 1972. Lúc Çó C¶ng Sän Çã ÇÜa quân Ò åt vào trong miŠn nam rÃt nhiŠu. H† Çi theo dãi TrÜ©ng SÖn tÙc là dãi núi ª miŠnTrung. H† Çi theo con ÇÜ©ng Çó Ç‹ vô trong miŠn Nam thì quân Ç¶i cûa h† Çã thành lÆp ÇÜ®c rÃt nhiŠu sÜ Çoàn rÒi. Theo tin tình báo nhÜ vÆy. Trong lúc Çó thì lúc ª miŠn nam m§i ra m¶t cái chi‰n dÎch l§n là phäi ngæn ch¥n C¶ng Sän ª tÃt cä các cái biên gi§i Cao Miên v§i Lào d†c theo biên gi§i Viêt Nam. Lúc Çó thì tôi ÇÜ®c tæng lên m¶t cÃp n»a là Trung Úy. Tôi Çi Trung ñoàn B¶ Binh Ç‹ làm quan sát viên cÃp Trung ñoàn Çi qua tÆn Cao Miên Çánh ª bên Ãy. Tôi ª trong b¶ chÌ huy không Çi ra ngoài Çánh trÆn tr¿c ti‰p v§i C¶ng Sän cho nên không thÃy nhiŠu. Tôi ª trong ÇÒn có quân h† bäo vŒ. NhÜng sÓng ch‰t lúc Çó có th‹ xäy ra lúc nào.

Næm 1972 nh»ng trÆn Çánh rÃt là ác liŒt. Tôi qua bên Cambodia Çóng quân ª Çó thì bÎ C¶ng Sän bao vây c¡t h‰t ÇÜ©ng Çi, không còn liên låc ÇÜ®c v§i bên ngoài. Ti‰p t‰ Çản dÜ®c, lÜÖng th¿c, thuÓc men phäi Çi b¢ng tr¿c thæng tØ tÌnh Tây Ninh. Tôi ª mÃy tháng bên Çó cho d‰n khi quân Ç¶i tæng cÜ©ng và ÇÜa quân qua giäi tÕa cà rút quân vŠ. Khoäng næm 1973, chúng tôi rút h‰t vŠ Tây Ninh, cái tÌnh giáp ranh v§i Cambodia.

Næm 1973 MÏ b¡t ÇÀu rút quân ra khÕi Viêt Nam. Tôi chÌ bi‰t h† tÓn rÃt nhiŠu tiŠn và Ç° nhiŠu xÜÖng máu vô miŠn nam ViŒt Nam mà rÒi Çánh hoài không th¡ng ÇÜ®c C¶ng Sän, h† chán nän bÕ Çi. NhÜng cÃp nhÕ ª dÜ§i Çâu có bi‰t gì vŠ tình hình chính trÎ. Tôi chÌ bi‰t là h† gºi nh»ng lŒnh xuÓng báo là Çån dÜ®c rÃt là thi‰u và bÃy gi© phäi b¡n hån ch‰. M‡i ngày phäi b¡n mÜ©i quä ho¥c mÜ©i læm qûa. Mình chÌ bi‰t thi hành theo luÆt. ñån dÜ®c, thuÓc men, th¿c phÄm, thi‰u không ÇÜ®c ti‰p t‰ ÇÀy Çû nhÜ xÜa. TÃt cä nh»ng hoåt Ç¶ng trong quân Ç¶i hÒi xÜa là do MÏ cung cÃp tØ quÀn áo, Çån dÜ®c, thuÓc men, th¿c phÄm. H† c¡t giäm b§t 80-90%. Trong quân Ç¶i th©i gian Çó là th©i gian kh° nhÃt trong nh»ng nam tôi ª trong quân Ç¶i.

Coi nhÜ ÇÒ ti‰p t‰ không có gì, phÜÖng tiŒn rÃt thi‰u thÓn thÆm chí Ç‰n n‡i xæng cÛng không có mà chåy xe n»a. ThÜ©ng thÜ©ng cÃp chÌ huy thì MÏ cho mình xe Jeep Ç‹ mình sº døng Çi liên låc Çây Çó. Trong nh»ng næm 1973 và nh»ng næm vŠ sau, xæng h† cÛng không có cÃp. Thành ra có cái xe cÛng không chåy Çâu ÇÜ®c h‰t. Do Çó tình trång chi‰n ÇÃu lúc Çó rÃt là khó khæn, thi‰u thÓn Çû m†i phÜÖng tiŒn. Mà C¶ng Sän thì h† låi ÇÜ®c ti‰p t‰ Çån dÜ®c rât nhiŠu và h† låi tÃn công mình. Lúc Çó mình chÌ thø Ç¶ng tÙc là mình chÌ ngÒi ª trong ÇÒn mình ch© h† tÃn công mình, rÒi mình b¡n ra thôi.

Nh»ng næm Çó coi nhÜ là trong ÇÖn vÎ có nhiŠu binh sï bÎ ch‰t nhÃt là nh»ng sï quan ÇÜ®c ÇÜa ra ngoài chi‰n ÇÃu m¥t trÆn ª ngoài Çó. H† Çi hành quân ra ngoài rØng ti‰p cÆn v§i ViŒt C¶ng. Coi nhÜ ch‰t rÃt nhiŠu. Nh»ng sï quan trÈ sau này ch‰t rÃt nhiŠu. Ra là Çøng trÆn là ch‰t vì không Çû Çån dÜ®c. Nh»ng næm Çó chi‰n tranh sôi Ç¶ng rÃt nhiŠu.

Næm 1971 t§i næm 1975 tôi Çi hành quân hoài, ít có vŠ nhà. Khi mà tôi Çi Çánh trÆn thì v® tôi vŠ Sài Gòn ª v§i gia Çình. Tôi cÙ phäi bù ÇÀu mà lo công viŒc trong quân Ç¶i. ´t khi vŠ nhà l¡m. M¶t næm ÇÜ®c phép thÜ©ng niên chÌ có bÄy ngày. V® tôi phäi l¥n l¶i Çi thæm. Tôi Çóng quân ª Çâu thì tôi liên låc vŠ cho v® tôi bi‰t, thì m¶t tháng v® con tôi lên thæm m¶t lÀn. Lên thæm thì v® con tôi cÛng ª trong tråi v§i tôi. Tôi ª trên tråi cÛng có Çào hÀm rÒi Ç¡p bao cát g†i là cái hÀm nhÜng ª cÛngÇÜ®c.

Næm 1973, tôi phøc vø trong sÜ Çoàn 25 B¶ Binh có cæn cÙ Çóng quân ª Cû Chi. Tôi lên cÃp b¿c ñåi Uy pháo Ç¶i trÜªng cûa ti‹u Çoàn 253 pháo binh. Ti‹u Çoàn nÀy ÇÜ®c Ç¥t dÜ§i quyŠn chÌ huy cûa sÜ Çoàn 25 B¶ Binh. Tôi chÌ huy sáu khÄu 105 mm. Çåi bác Ç‹ y‹m tr® cho các cu¶c hành quân trong vùng hoåt Ç¶ng Tây Ninh, Hâu Nghïa và Bình DÜÖng.

TØ næm 1973 cho Ç‰n næm 1975 trong vòng hai næm Çó là cÙ ngày nào cÛng có chi‰n tranh ngày nào cÛng có b¡n. Mình rÃt tÙc nhÃt là không ÇÜ®c y‹m tr® cho quân bån cûa mình bªi vì Çån không có. Ÿ ngoài ngÜ©i ta kêu bây gi© Çøng trÆn rÒi, ch‰t rÃt nhiŠu, yêu cÀu b¡n Ç‹ ngæn ch¥n s¿ tÃn công cûa C¶ng Sän. NhÜng mà mình không có Çån dÜ®c Ç‹ b¡n. Mình cÛng b¡n cÀm chØng. NgÜ©i ta xin mÜ©i quä pháo binh thì mình b¡n m¶t quä thôi.

TØ næm 1973 dï nhiên cái tình trång Çào ngÛ nhiŠu. H† s® ch‰t h† bÕ rÃt nhiŠu. Trong ÇÖn vÎ cûa tôi cÛng vÆy. NhiŠu khi cho h† Çi phép rÒi h† vŠ nhà h† ª luôn. Tôi là sï quan, lúc Çó tôi không có š nghï nÀy, không dám làm nhÜ vÆy vì s® Çi ª tù. H† b¡t mình Çi lao công Çào binh tÙc là mình Çi Çánh gi¥c mà mình không có ÇÜ®c quyŠn mang súng mình chÌ ra mình làm Çào hÀm Çào hÓ làm nh»ng công viŒc

lao Ç¶ng ª trong cái ÇÖn vÎ Çó thôi. TÓi h† nhÓt mình vào m¶t cái khu. Coi nhÜ lúc Çó là mình tù t¶i rÒi. Tôi s® Çâu có dám.

CuÓi næm 1974 ÇÀu næm 1975 coi nhÜ mình hoàn toàn ª trong cái th‰ thø Ç¶ng tÙc là mình chÌ Çóng ª nh»ng cái ÇÒn rÒi ViŒt C¶ng ngày này tÃn công ÇÒn này ngày mai tÃn công ÇÒn kia. TÃn công liên tøc rÃt là s® hãi. Mình Çi mình Çâu có bi‰t h† núp ª ch‡ nào. Mình Çi thình hình h† n° súng thì mình m§i bi‰t ª Çó có ViŒt C¶ng rÒi b¡t ÇÀu Çánh nhau.

TØ ÇÀu næm 1975 cho Ç‰n tháng tÜ là tình trảng càng ngày càng gây cÃn. ñÜ©ng xá bÎ c¡t ÇÙt h‰t rÒi. Lúc Çó v® con không th‹ Çi thæm ÇÜ®c. Tôi cÛng không th‹ dám bÕ ÇÖn vÎ mà vŠ thæm nhà n»a. Ng»ng ngày Çó chi‰n tranh rÃt là ác liŒt. ñản thì không có mà b¡n. NhÜng mà rÒi nh»ng qu¶c hành quân ti‰p t‰ súng Çản nào thì b¡n súng Çản Ãy. NhÜng mà thÜ©ng thÜ©ng mình bÎ h† b¡n vô trong ÇÒn nhiŠu l¡m. Ch‰t chóc, thÜÖng tÆt, thÜÖng vong cÛng nhiŠu.

Riêng trong cái tháng tÜ chi‰n tranh d» r¶i. Vào nh»ng ngày cuÓi tháng 4 næm 1975, trong lúc tình hình miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam xôi Ç¶ng, lúc Çó tôi Çang Çóng quân tải quÆn Träng Bàng thu¶c tÌnh Tây Ninh. CÙ nghe tin tÌnh này mÃt, quÆn này mÃt, quÆn kia mÃt liên ti‰p do Çài phát thanh loan tin hay là báo chí thông tin. Lúc Çó thì tôi phäi ª tải ÇÖn vÎ. ñÜ©ng tØ Sài Gòn lên quÆn Träng Bäng bÎ c¡t ÇÙt, xe c¶ không lÜu thông. Quân Ç¶i thì không dÜ®c r©i cæn cÙ.

Dân thÜ©ng thì ViŒt C¶ng còn cho Çi, chÙ quân Ç¶i Çi là nó b¡n cháy xe. Lúc Çó ViŒt C¶ng Çã tràn vào thành phÒ.

Tôi thÃy m†i ngÜ©i bÕ Çi h‰t vào nh»ng ngày 27 và 28 tháng tÜ. Trong nh»ng ngày Ãy là mÃt tØ ÇÒn này, Ç‰n ÇÒn kia. Thì tinh thÀn ÇÒng Ç¶i cÛng h‡n

loån rÒi. Cho Ç‰n ngày 28 thì tôi thÃy các quân bån ª cånh bên, h† rút vô trong rØng. Tôi không có š ÇÎnh di tän bÕ trách nhiŒm chÌ huy cûa m¶t ngÜ©i ÇÖn vÎ trÜªng. Trong lúc h¢ng træm ngÜ©i lính dÜ§i quyŠn chÌ trông cÆy vào m¶t mình tôi. Tôi không th‹ nào bÕ h† trÓn trách nhiŒm cûa mình. Tôi còn nghï sau này tôi còn phäi chÌ huy h† thì n‰u làm nhÜ vÆy lính tráng coi tôi ra cái gì. Làm sao tôi chÌ huy ÇÜ®c n»a?

Ÿ ngoài m¥t trÆn tôi không bi‰t là Ông ThiŒu bÕ Çi, không bi‰t là MÏ rút h‰t Çi. Tôi Çâu có thì gi© nghe radio. Tôi cÛng không tin là ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa có th‹ thua Công Säm m¶t cách d‹ dàng nhÜ vÆy. N‰u mà tôi bi‰t nhÜ vÆy tôi cÛng bÕ ÇÖn vÎ tôi vŠ chÙ tôi còn làm gì khác?

Vì vÆy tôi ª låi thì bÎ C¶ng Säm b¡t giam gi» tåi m¥t trÆn quÆn Cû Chi cùng v§i m¶t sÓ sï quan khác thu¶c SÜ ñoàn 25 B¶ Binh. Tôi liên låc v§i b¶ chÌ huy Ç‹ hÕi š ki‰n bây gi© nhÜ th‰ nào. Ông Ãy nói là thì tùy theo tình hình mà quy‰t ÇÎnh chÙ bây gi© cÛng không bi‰t làm sao mà ra lŒnh ÇÜ®c. Không ai ra lŒnh ÇÜ®c h‰t. Lính thì h† cÛng không dám bÕ Çi bªi vì ra ngoài cÛng g¥p ViŒt C¶ng. H† Çâu dám Çi. H† ª trong ÇÒn cÛng ch© lŒnh cûa tôi. Thì tôi m§i nói là thôi bây gi© tÃt cä m†i ngÜ©i bÕ Çi h‰t rÒi tôi cÛng phäi Çi. TrÜ§c khi Çi tôi m§i ra lŒnh là phäi phá hûy h‰t Çån súng. BÕ l¿u Çån cháy vô trong mÃy cái nòng súng Ç‹ cho cháy h‰t. Cái luÆt lŒ ª trong quân Ç¶i thì khi mà mình bÕ rút chåy là mình phäi phá hûy h‰t Çån dÜ®c súng Óng Ç‹ không thì h† vô h† xë lÃy súng Çån cûa mình b¡n mình. ñiŠu lŒ trong quân Ç¶i nói là trong gi© phút cuÓi cùng mà mình không có th‹ gi» n°i nh»ng cái vÆt døng mà quân Ç¶i giao thì mình phäi phá hûy không Ç‹ C¶ng Säm chi‰m lÃy sº døng. Súng Çån n¥ng l¡m phäi Çi b¢ng xe. Xe Jeep cûa tôi cÛng cho ÇÓt phá luôn theo

Çúng nhÜ lŒnh. Lúc Çó Çâu có Çi xe ÇÜ®c. Ra là bÎ nó b¡n cháy. ChÌ Çi b¶ ÇÜ®c thôi. Phäi bÕ h‰t cä hành trang cûa mình cÛng bÕ Çi b¶ cho nó nhË. Mang Çi Çâu n°i.

RÒi b¡t ÇÀu tôi kéo quân vô trong rØng. Lúc Çó là chåy trÓn bÕ chåy không bi‰t Çi mÃy ngày mÃy Çêm. ñi vô trong cái làng thì møc Çích là rút vŠ tìm ÇÜ©ng vŠ Sài Gòn khoäng chØng hai mÜÖi mÃy mile. Khi vô trong rØng thì g¥p các ÇÖn vÎ bån h† cÛng Çi trên con ÇÜ©ng rút vŠ Sài Gòn. CÛng ch£ng ai bi‰t tình hình lúc Çó C¶ng Sän nhÜ th‰ nào. ChÌ bi‰t là ai Çi Çâu mình Çi theo Çó vÆy thôi. TÃt cä các Ç¶i quân ÇŠu rút vŠ Sài Gòn. CÛng không bi‰t møc Çích mình Çi Ç‹ làm gì.

Khi mà tØ Träng Bàng vŠ t§i Cû Chi thì Çã bÎ C¶ng Sän h† chÆn h‰t rÒi. H† chÆn ngang, h† có xe tæng, h† giàn súng vô trong khu rØng. H† b¡t loa kêu g†i bÕ súng ÇÀu hàng thì h† së cho vŠ sum h†p v§i gia Çình. TÃt cä lính tráng h† nghe theo và bÕ súng ÇÀu hàng. H† Çi ra. Súng nhÕ súng l§n giao cho ViŒt C¶ng thì nó thä h† vŠ v§i gia Çình. NhÜng riêng các sï quan thì h† gi» låi bÎ b¡t h‰t.

Tôi ª trong trÜ©ng h®p nhÛng ngÜ©i sï quan Çó. H† b¡t ÇÜa vŠ cái tråi tÆp chung ª Cû Chi. Ngày Çó là ngày 29 tháng 4 næm 1975. Tôi bÎ b¡t giam giº ª tåi m¥t trÆn quân Cû Chi cùng v§i m¶t sÓ sï quan khác thu¶c SÜ ñoàn 25 B¶ Binh. TØ ngày Çó tôi bÎ b¡t ª tù luôn cho Ç‰n tháng 7 næm 1982.

ñ©i SÓng Trong Tù: Tháng 4 næm 1975 cho Ç‰n tháng 7 næm 1982

LÀn ÇÀu tiên tôi bi‰t ngÜ©i ViŒt C¶ng là ai là lúc tôi bÎ h† b¡t. Nó ÇÜa tôi trong cái trải có m¶t cái hÀm hÒi xÜa Ç‹ khi nào có bÎ pháo kích hay bÎ Çản ngoài b¡n thì mình vô trong cái hÀm Çó mình núp. H† nhÓt tøi tôi ª trong cái hÀm Çó. Lúc Çó tôi cÛng bÎ thÜÖng rÒi. Trên ÇÜ©ng Çi bÎ C¶ng Säm b¡n lÈ tÈ trong ÇÒn quân thì bÃt ng© m¶t viên Çản xiên qua c° tôi tØ bên này qua bên kia rÒi nó ra ngoài. Viên Çản không có trúng xÜÖng tôi. Nh© ñÙc MË thÜÖng chÙ còn không có trÎ. Nó không có bæng bó không cho thuÓc men. Tôi nh© ngÜ©i bản quÆy nÜ§c muÓi Ç° vô cho nó chäy qua Ç‹ diŒt trùng vÆy mà nó lành. ChÙ không có thuÓc men trong mÃy tháng tr©i bÎ giam ª Çó.

H† canh gi» tôi sau này ª cái nhà ª ngoài. H† gác mình b¢ng súng. Mình chÌ ÇÜ®c phép quanh quÄn ª trong cái khu Çó thôi chÙ mình không ÇÜ®c Çi Çâu. HÍ Çi ra ngoài thì h† b¡n. H† nói trÜ§c. CÙ m‡i ngày h† thÄy cho mÃy bao gåo sÃy Ç‹ mình t¿ nÃu. Tôi bÎ giam nhÜ vÆy hai tháng.

Sau ngày 30 tháng tÜ thì lính vŠ v§i gia Çình sum h†p cÛng nhiŠu. V® tôi không thÃy tôi vŠ, bà Ãy tÜªng tôi ch‰t rÒi. Thành ra cÛng Çi lên trong cái vùng Çó, l¶i trong rØng ki‰m tôi. Bà Ãy xuÓng hÕi thæm dân ª Çó ngÜ©i ta bi‰t là quân Ç¶i ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa Çi trong khu nào Çi vào Sài Gòn. NgÜ©i này ngÜ©i kia ÇÒn v§i nhau. Bà Ãy Çi qua Çi låi ki‰m hoài không thÃy. Cä tuÀn lÍ, v® tôi Çi lên Çi xuÓng ki‰m hoài không thÃy. NhiŠu khi thÃy xác ch‰t låi lÆt coi có phäi tôi không. Vài tuÀn sau, v® tôi tìm tôi ª trải Cû Chi.

Hai tháng rÒi thì lúc Çó tôi nghe radio, Ç†c báo chí là h† nói là tÃt cä sï quan ch‰ Ç¶ cÛ Çi h†c tÆp cäi tåo.

H† nói, “Mang theo lÜÖng th¿c mÜ©i ngày.”

Toàn dân miŠn nam ÇŠu bÎ cái l©i tuyên bÓ là Çem theo lÜÖng th¿c Çû dùng trong mÜ©i ngày. TÜªng là Çi h†c tÆp mÜ©i ngày rÒi vŠ. TÃt cä m†i ngÜ©i ÇŠu hi‹u vÆy h‰t. Riêng tôi cÛng nghï là Çem theo lÜÖng th¿c phÄm mÜ©i ngày mình tÜªng Çi h†c tÆp mÜ©i ngày rÒi vŠ. Tôi chÌ nghï bây gi© tôi bÎ thÃt båi rÒi h† cÛng giäi quy‰t mà cho tôi vŠ s§m. Tôi chÜa nghï là nó giam tôi lâu Ç‰n n‡i khi‰p Çäm vÆy. Tôi không nh© là nó giam tôi bÄy næm ba tháng nhÜ vÆy.

Tôi ÇÜ®c ÇÜa vŠ Sài Gòn Ç‹ nó tÆp trung sï quan låi ª cái trÜ©ng trung h†c Çó. Khi tôi vô Çó, Çã có m¶t sÓ ngÜ©i Ç‰n Çó trình diŒn. Nh»ng ngÜ©i mà không có bÎ b¡t vào tháng 4, næm 1975 h† ª nhà ÇÜ®c hai tháng h† cÛng Ç‰n Çó trình diŒn theo nhÜ cái lŒnh cûa ûy ban nhân dân thành phÓ g†i là Quân Ñy Sài Gòn. Tôi thÃy h† vô hoài. Ÿ Çó mÃy ngày. H† kêu mÃy cái nhà hàng nÃu cÖm chª xe låi phân phát cho mình æn. H† ki‹m soát ÇÒ Çåc mang theo nhÜng lúc Çó cÛng buông lÕng chÜa có ki‹m soát g¡t gao, chÌ bình thÜ©ng. Không nghï là mình Çi ª tù. Gia Çình tôi cÛng ÇÜ®c hay và lên thæm. V® tôi và hai ÇÙa con tôi chÌ ÇÜ®c ÇÙng ª ngoài hàng rào thÃy m¥t vÅy tay chÙ không ÇÜ®c thæm. Tôi ª trÜ©ng trung h†c ÇÜ®c mÃy ngày rÒi thì nó ÇÜa tôi lên Biên Hòa. T§i næm 1979, bÓn næm sau tôi v§i ÇÜ®c g¥p v® con.

ViŒt C¶ng làm gì cÛng bí mÆt l¡m. Mình không bao gi© bi‰t ÇÜ®c cái hành Ç¶ng cûa h†. ñùng cái Çêm mÜ©i m¶t mÜ©i hai gi© khuya h† Çánh kèn báo Ç¶ng ra tÆp h†p. TÆp h†p là thÃy xe c¶ ÇÆu s¤n sàng ÇÜa tôi Çi lên xe chª Çi. ñi toàn là Çi tØ 12 gi© Çêm cho Ç‰n sáng. Làm cái gì cÛng vÆy.

H† Çi toàn Çêm không chÙ không có Çi ban ngày thành ra cái gì cÛng bí mÆt l¡m. H† s® Çi ban ngày ngÜ©i thân nhân Çón ÇÜ©ng chÆn ÇÜ©ng làm khó khæn trª ngåi cho h†. HÒi Çó thì tôi không nghï ra nhÜng bây gi© tôi nghï låi là h† quen cái ki‹u mà lÃy Çêm làm ngày rÒi. HÒi sÜa Çánh gi¥c v§i nhau cÛng vÆy, ban ngày thì h† ngû, ban Çêm thì h† thÙc. H† quen cái ki‹u làm viŒc vÆy rÒi thành thº ra bây gi© vô g†i là “giäi phóng” Sài Gòn h† cÛng làm vÆy. TØ 12 gi© Çêm t§i sáng là h† làm viŒc. BÃt ng© l¡m. Không ai Çoán ÇÜ®c cái gì. ñêm thì h† áp täi b¢ng súng. M‡i cái xe có hai ngÜ©i cÀm súng Çi phía sau hai ngÜ©i phía trÜ§c. Nó dùng mÃy chi‰c xe quân Ç¶i lÃy cûa MÏ.

T§i tråi Biên Hòa, trÜ§c là cûa quân Ç¶I, thì nó m§i kh¡m xét ÇÒ Ç¥c cûa mình. Nó phát nh»ng b¶ quÀn áo ÇÒng phøc mÀu xanh dÜÖng cho mình bÆn. Dép thì nó phát mÃy Çôi dép b¢ng vÕ xe hÖi, ÇÒ cûa b¶ Ç¶i mang. M‡i ngày nó tÆp trung låi rÒi phát giÃy b¡t mình khai hoài. M¶t tháng có mÃy ngày nó không cho mình Çi ra ngoài làm lao Ç¶ng. Mà ª nhà phäi vi‰t ra mình ª trong quân Ç¶i tØ ngày nào t§i ngày nào, mình làm gì trong quân Ç¶i. Nó kêu mình khai låi trong cái khóa trình mà mình làm viŒc trong quân Ç¶i. Mình khai mình làm t¶i l‡i cûa mình nhÜ th‰ nào. Mình phäi nhÆn cái ÇiŠu mình làm là t¶i l‡i. Nó nói khai thÆt thì Çi vŠ s§m.

M‡i lÀn mình vi‰t, nó Ç†c cho m†i ngÜ©i nghe. Tôi cÙ thÆt thà tôi khai là tôi ª trong quÆn Pháo Binh. Ông trÜÕng tù kêu tôi lên.

TrÜ§c m¥t m†i ngÜ©i ông Ãy hô, "NgÜ©i lính thÜ©ng cÀm cây súng h† b¡n chúng tôi m¶t viên Çån chÌ ch‰t có m¶t ngÜ©i thôi. NhÜng mà riêng ông là b¡n vÕ Çån, t§i mÃy chøc ngÜ©i ch‰t vì Çån ông Çån l§n mà. Thành thº ra trong vòng mÜ©i

næm trong quân Ç¶i, ông b¡n bi‰t bao nhiêu nhàn vÕ Çản thì bi‰t bao nhiêu nhàn ngÜ©i ch‰t.”

Ông Ãy nói là t¶i ác cûa tôi là chÌ huy ti‹u Çoàn Pháo Binh. Tôi nghï trong lòng buÒn cÜ©i vì hÒi nào Ç‰n gi© tôi Çâu thÃy ViŒt C¶ng Çâu. Tôi Çâu bi‰t có gi‰t ViŒt C¶ng hay không. Nó hÕi tôi nghï làm sao.

Tôi trä l©i, “Tôi làm theo phÆn s¿ ngÜ©i ta kêu tôi b¡n thì tôi b¡n. Tôi Çâu bi‰t gì h‰t.”

Nó nói, “Anh không bi‰t nhÜng chúng tôi bi‰t là m‡i lÀn anh b¡n vÆy là mÃy chøc ngÜ©i ch‰t. M¶t quä Çản cûa anh làm cho bao nhiêu ngÜ©i ch‰t. Mà bây gi© trong mÜ©i næm anh b¡n bao nhiêu quä Çản thì nhân lên coi bao nhiêu ngÜ©i ch‰t.”

Tháng này nó nói tháng kia nó nói. Nó nói ri‰t rÒi nhiŠu khi tôi giÆn qúa tôi nói thÀm trong bøng thôi mày muÓn nói gì mày nói, kŒ tao gi‰t vÆy Çó. Tôi không dám nói ra s® nó Çánh mình. N‰u mình nói cái gì không phäi mà không vØa š, nó Çánh mình. Nó không Çánh trÜ§c m¥t Ç¡m Çông. Khi vŠ trên trải rÒi nó g†i ngÜ©i mà phän ÇÓi ra m¥t.

Nó nói, “M©i anh Çi làm viŒc.” Vô trong cái phòng kín m¶t mình v§i nó, thì nó Çánh. Tôi không thÃy ai bÎ gi‰t.

Ch‰t thì có vì h† trÓn trải leo ra ngoài hàng rào thì bÎ b¡n ch‰t, ho¥c trÓn ra ÇÜ®c khÕi hàng rào Çi ra ngoài thì bÎ dân h† b¡t lải h† báo cáo. HÒi ª trong Nam nh»ng cái næm ÇÀu thì còn chÓn. Nh»ng næm ÇÀu là tinh thÀn bÎ giao Ç¶ng nhiŠu l¡m cho nên h† trÓn. Cái tháng Çó có vài ngÜ©i bÎ ch‰t. H† tÆp h†p lải h† báo tên ngÜ©i mà bÎ b¡n ch‰t. H† rành mãnh mình Ç‹ mình s®. H† nói vÆy nhÜng mình Çâu thÃy ÇÜ®c tải vì nó nhÓt mình tØng khu tØng khu m¶t. M¶t khu 30 ngÜ©i m¶t khu 50

ngÜ©i cách nhau cái hàng rào. Nó không cho mình nói chuyŒn v§i ngÜ©i ª khu khác. MÃy tháng sau nó tuy‹n l¿a.

Nó l†c l¿a ra nh»ng sï quan mà nó kêu b¢ng ác ôn tÙc là nh»ng ngÜ©i cÀm ÇÀu m¶t cái ÇÖn vÎ. M¶t Çêm cÛng 12 gi© nó tÆp trung låi, nó Ç†c tên, nó chia sÓ ngÜ©i qua m¶t bên. Nó cho lên xe chª mình Çi Çâu không ai bi‰t Çi Çâu. Tôi thÃy nó låi Çi vŠ hÜ§ng Sài Gòn. Ÿ Sài Gòn có cái b‰n tàu ª ngoåi ô thì nó tÆp trúng tøi tôi ª Çó. ñông ngÜ©i l¡m. Có cä chøc xe. H† ÇÜa xuÓng tàu. H† không cho ª trên tàu mà Çi xuÓng cái hÀm tàu ch‡ Ç‹ chÙa ÇÒ gia døng. Tôi không dòm rõ vì Çêm tÓi. NgÒi dÜ§i hÀm tàu chÆt mà n¿c n¶i, ghê l¡m. Nó thä dây c¶t ÇÒ æn xuÓng rÒi kêu phân phát ra. Mình không bi‰t tàu chåy Çâu. NgÜ©i Çoán là ra Çäo Côn SÖn, cái Çäo hÒi xÜa Üa Çày nh»ng ngÜ©i tù n¥ng. ViŒt Nam thÜ©ng nói nh»ng ngÜ©i tù n¥ng Çày ra côn Çäo. Ÿ dÜ§i hÀm tàu 3 ngày 3 Çêm thì tàu cÆp b‰n.

CÛng 12 gi© Çêm thì bÜ§c lên dòm thÃy lå. Tôi không nhÆn ÇÎnh ra ÇÜ®c. Nhìn thÃy lå. T§i vùng thì nghe nói ti‰ng B¡c thì m§i bi‰t là nó ÇÜa mình ra Häi Phòng, c£ng l§n cûa Hà N¶i. miŠn B¡c. ñåi Úy, Thi‰u Tá, Trung Tá, ñåi Tá, nh»ng ngÜ©i cÃp b¿c l§n phäi Çi tù ª miŠn B¡c. ñåi úy thì rÃt ít. Tôi sui là tôi dính trong cái toán mà bÎ b¡t tåi m¥t trÆn, chÙ thÜ©ng thÜ©ng ñåi úy ra trình diŒn thì cÛng còn trong Nam chÙ không ra B¡c. Nó giam tôi chung v§i cÃp b¿c l§n.

Nó Çem xe låi chª ra ch‡ xe lºa ÇÆu. Nh»ng ngày ÇÀu cûa 30 tháng 4 næm 1975, v§i s¿ tuyên truyŠn cûa C¶ng Sän, nh»ng ngÜ©i tù chính trÎ miŠn Nam khi bÎ ÇÜa xuÓng tàu ra B¡c và khi chuy‹n lên xe lºa tØ Häi Phóng Çi SÖn La vùng núi phía B¡c giáp ranh v§i Trung QuÓc, thì khi Çi d†c ÇÜ©ng Công Sän Çã t° chÙc cho ngÜ©i dân hai bên ÇÜ©ng ném Çá vào Çoàn xe chª tù.

Trong xe lºa kín mít nhÜ cái hÀm tàu. Nó nhÓt trong mÃy cái hÀm không gh‰ không bàn. Vô rÒi nó Çóng cºa khóa cºa ª ngoài. Tôi thÃy có m¶t ông ch‰t. ñi xe lºa mÃy ngày mÃy Çêm t§i cái vùng tÌnh Y‰n Bái, tÌnh gÀn giáp ranh v§i Trung QuÓc tuÓt trên ÇÌnh.

XuÓng xe lºa thì Çi qua phà qua Sông HÒng Hà, sông l§n cûa B¡c. Khi mà trên phà rÒi m¶t ngÜ©i làm viŒc nói Çùa hay nói thÆt thì mình không bi‰t. Ông Ãy nói là tØ xÜa Ç‰n gi© ông Ãy làm Çây mÃy chøc næm rÒi cÙ ÇÜa tù qua Çây thì không có ngày vŠ. Lúc Çó cÛng rÀu thÓi ru¶t, không còn nghï gì, buÒn l¡m rÒi. NgÜ©i nào cÛng im l¥ng.

TØ phà lên xe nó chª Çi. Lúc Çó gÀn sáng. Ÿ ngoài B¡c thì nó cho Çi ban ngày. ñi d†c ÇÜ©ng là bÎ dân hai bên ÇÜ©ng ch†i Çá. H† Çi làm ru¶ng làm rÅy h† Çi d†c d†c Çi b¶. Ch‡ Çó không có xe Çåp không có xe hÖi. PhuÖng tiŒn cûa h† là Çi b¶ không. H† thÃy là h† lÃy Çá h† ch†i lên.

H† chª t§i cái khu mà thÃy toàn là núi không thÃy gì h‰t chÌ núi. Nh»ng cái khu Çó khoäng v¡ng chung quanh không có nhà dân. Nhà lÜa thÜa. Xa thÆt xa m§i có cæn nhà. Leo lét nhÜ là ª rØng khoäng.

NhiŠu mÃy Çoàn xe chª tøi tôi Çi tråi. H† phân tán Çi h‰t chÙ Çâu phäi tÆp trung. H† dØng låi thì thÃy cái nhà xây gåch ª trong thì trÓng, không có gì h‰t. Cái nhà hình ch» nhÆt dài l§n thÆt l§n. Nóc thì không có, trÓng trÖn. ChÌ có bÓn bÙc tÜ©ng Çi quanh thôi. NŠn xi mæng thì lâu ngày, cÕ bám rêu, dÖ l¡m. H† bÕ Çó. Ch° cûa tôi khoäng trên m¶t træm ngÜ©i.

Tråi SÖn Lai Bái

Cu¶c sÓng trong tù rÃt là cÖ c¿c mà không có bút m¿c nào có th‹ diÍn tä h‰t ÇÜ®c. CÛng không ai có th‹ tÜªng tÜ®ng n°i n‰u không phäi chính bän thân mình bÎ ª tù. Bõi vì phäi ví nhÜ Çó là m¶t cái cänh ÇÎa ngøc ª th‰ gian. Tôi ª tù 7 næm 3 tháng. Ÿ SÖn Lai Bái ch‡ ÇÀu tiên là kh° nhÃt. Tôi tÜªng tôi së ch‰t vì tôi Çói, không có thuÓc men, không Çû quÀn aó cho mùa lånh, mà làm viŒc rÃt vÃt vä.

Vì tråi chÌ có bÓn bÙc tÜ©ng trÓng không lóc, ngÜ©i tù phäi xây lên thành m¶t cái tråi có hàng rào chung quanh, có nhà riêng cho b¶ Ç¶i, nhà riêng cho ngÜ©i tù, có nhà gác Ç‹ b¶ Ç¶c gác tøi tôi Çêm ngày, phäi xây b‰p và cÀu tiêu. Phäi phá rØng Ç‹ làm rÅy cuÓc cÕ cuÓc ÇÃt rÒi gieo h¶t trÒng b¡p, trÒng lúa, trÒng khoai. ñÒ æn phäi t¿ trÒng lÃy. T¿ mình phäi làm lÃy h‰t. M‡i ngày m‡i xây d¿ng xây d¿ng ri‰t rÒi mình làm thành m¶t cái tråi có hàng rào chung quanh. H† nói n‰u mình bÜ§c ra khÕi hàng rào h† b¡n ch‰t bÕ. ñâu có ai dám. CÙ ª trong hàng rào. Ra ngoài B¡c h‰t trÓn n°i. Nó bÕ mình ª cái khu Çó nó bi‰t mình không Çi Çâu ÇÜ®c. Ra ngoài rØng cÛng không. ñÜ©ng xá mình cÛng không bi‰t. Không ai dám trÓn.

M‡i ngày tøi tôi phäi Çi lên núi cao thÆt cao ÇÓncây mang vŠ cÃt nhà. Phäi leo lên tØ núi tØ núi nÀy bæng qua núi khác Ç‹ tìm nh»ng thân cây rØng thÆt th£ng ÇÓn vŠ làm c¶t nhà. ñÓn m¶t cây rÒi phäi phóng cây xuÓng trÜ§c vì lúc xuÓng Çâu có d¡t cây mà Çi xuÓng ÇÜ®c. Nó cÙ lao xuÓng rÒi mình m§i lÀn mò vÎn cây tøt xuÓng ki‰m cây Çó ª dÜ§i chân núi. Ai cÛng Çi chân không vì Çi núi không có th‹ nào mæng dép ÇÜ®c. Gai nó Çâm chäy máu chân. VØa lånh, vØa Çói, v¡t n¥ng Çi vŠ.

Mùa Çông ª miŠn B¡c lånh rét. Khí hÆu t§i tháng 11 tháng 12 lånh giÓng nhÜ ª Çæy. NÜ§c nó cÛng Çông váng låi thành Çá. Không có tuy‰t nhÜng mà lånh l¡m. QuÀn aó thì Çâu Çû Ãm vì mình chÌ m¥c hai ba cái áo Çi làm. Trong nh»ng ngày lånh

rét, mÜa tÀm tã, hay hè nóng n¿c, bÃt cÙ khí hÆu gì cÛng phäi làm lao Ç¶ng rÃt vÃt vä. Thº tÜªng tÜ®ng nhiŒt Ç¶ 0° C mà phäi l¶i xuÓng ru¶ng Ç‹ cÃy lúa thì cái lånh nó Çi t§i Çâu. Nó không hành hå tøi tôi nhÜng nó b¡t làm khi mình Çói bøng mà làm viŒc qúa sÙc thì mình té xÌu.

Cái kh° nhÃt là cái Çói. Trong cái th©i gian mà nó bÕ Çói khát tôi thì tôi m§i nhÆn ra C¶ng Sän là ai. H† ác qúa. H† ác m¶t cách rÃt khéo léo. B†n C¶ng Sän chÌ có m¶t phÜÖng pháp duy nhÃt là bÕ Çói nh»ng ngÜ©i tù chÓng Çói. ChÌ th¡t cái bao tº mình rÒi là h† bäo cái gì mình cÛng theo. KhÕi cÀn Çánh ÇÆp, Çày Ç†a, tra tÃn mình. M¶t ngày h† phát cho mình hai cû khoai mì nhÕ chút xíu ho¥c m¶t chén b¡p nÃu æn vô không thÃy thÃm tháp gì mà Çi làm rÃt c¿c. Bao nhiêu Çó cÛng Çû gi‰t mòn con ngÜ©i.

Nó nói, “Bây gi© nhà nÜ§c Çang trong tình trång không có Çû lÜÖng th¿c cho các anh. N‰u các anh trÒng nhiŠu thì no, trÓng ít thì Çói rán chÎu.”

M°i tháng mình Çi lãnh lÜÖng th¿c thÜ©ng là cÖm gåo theo nó c¡t cho mình b¢ng m‡i ÇÀu ngÜ©i m¶t træm gram. Trong nhóm tù cº ra trong m¶t tråi bÓn næm ngÜ©i lo chuyên nÃu æn. Có nh»ng ngÜ©i không chÎu Ç¿ng n°i v§i cái Çói cÒn cào tØ ngày nÀy qua ngày kia, nên khi vào rØng Çã phäi tìm thêm rau rØng, nÃm hoåc, và bÃt cÙ thÙ gì có th‹ æn ÇÜ®c. ThÆm chí cä cào cào ho¥c bÃt cÙ con gì b¡t ÇÜ®c æn cho Çª Çói. Có ngÜ©i vì không bi‰t rÕ æn phäi nh»ng thÙ có chÃt Ç¶c Çã phäi ch‰t trong tù.

Trong tråi tôi có khoäng næm ngÜ©i ch‰t. Do bÎ bŒnh mà không có thuÓc men ch‰t là m¶t. Có Bác sï ngÜ©i tù mà là bác sï trong quân Ç¶i khám bŒnh nhÜng không có thuÓc. Do æn phäi nh»ng cái ÇÒ Ç¶c ÇÎa, Çói qúa vô trong rØng thÃy cái gì

cÛng lÃy æn. ˆn phäi trúng Ç¶c ch‰t. Có m¶t ngÜ©i æn phäi nÃm không bi‰t là có chÃt Ç¶c vŠ nÃu nÜ§ng rÒi ch‰t. Có m¶t ông trung tá ông Ãy Çói qúa ông š b¡t ÇÜ®c con cóc nÃu æn rÒi ch‰t. Khi ông Ãy ch‰t, lÃy chi‰u quÃn låi, làm cái võng. Hai ngÜ©i khiêng ông Ãy ÇÜa lên núi Çào l‡ chôn. Chôn rÒi th©i gian sau cây cÕ m†c tÙ tung bi‰n mÃt ki‰m không ra. NgÜ©i ch‰t thì ÇÜ®c quÃn m¶t manh chi‰u và khiêng lên núi chôn m¶t cách sÖ sài. Tråi tôi chôn næm ngÜ©i.

Con ngÜ©i khi Çã Çói không còn sÙc Ç‹ chÓng Çói phän kháng n»a. N‰u ngoan ngoãn thì cho æn cÀm chØng Çû sÓng qua ngày. Ai chÎu Ç¿ng Çói không n°i chÎu làm tay sai cho chúng thì ÇÜ®c æn thêm. C¶ng Sän nó hay l¡m. Nó bi‰t bÎ Çói. Nó thÃy ngÜ©i nào ham æn ham uÓng qúa. Nó nhìn ra. Nó kêu lên làm viŒc nó dø d‡. Nó nói bây gi© anh báo cho tôi bi‰t trong này có ai chÓng ÇÓi, anh së ÇÜ®c æn no hÖn nh»ng ngÜ©i khác hay làm viŒc nhË hÖn. H† có nh»ng cái Üu Çãi vÆy. Có ngÜ©i h† mŠm lòng y‰u ÇuÓi h† làm nhÜng h† Çâu có cho mình bi‰t. H† lén lút, báo cáo, nhét giÃy cho C¶ng Sän mình Çâu bi‰t ÇÜ®c. Trong tråi cÛng có nhiŠu ngÜ©i nhÜ vÆy.

Sau này có m¶t th©i gian phong trào n‡i dÆy ª kh¡p nÖi lòi m¥t h† ra. Tråi này cÛng có ngÜ©i chÓng ÇÓi tråi kia chÓng ÇÓi rÀn rÀn ra m§i bi‰t m¥t. Vì thÃy tåi sao mình có m¶t chén cÖm mà nó ÇÜ®c ba chén cÖm thì là bi‰t ông Çó làm tay sai cho C¶ng Sän. Sau này có cái phong trào cÙ mÃy ngÜ©i Çó là h† lÃy mŠn h† chùm låi h† Çánh. Tôi không làm gì cho ai mét, nhÜng có m¶t lÀn tôi bÎ mét. Tôi làm viŒc rÒi tôi bÕ Çi xa ch‡ khu làm viŒc chút xíu Ç‹ Çi cÀu. Nó kêu tôi låi nó cÛng hæm he nó nói b¶ anh tính chÓn tråi hay sao. Nó tính Çánh tôi mÃy lÀn. NhÜng tôi khéo nói. Tôi

nói tôi Çâu có làm gì Çâu. Tôi chÌ m¡c cÀu tôi Çi ra ngoài Çó rÒi tôi vŠ thôi. Tôi bi‰t có ngÜ©i mét tôi nhÜng tôi không bi‰t ai.

Tôi không nghï làm sao tôi có th‹ sÓng qua ÇÜ®c nh»ng ngày Çó. Có lë nh© Ön Chúa thôi chÙ mình không bi‰t cái gì h‰t. Lúc Çó tôi có ba mÜÖi mÃy tu°i cÛng còn trÈ còn sÙc. Kh° qúa. VŠ t¡m rªa suy nghï không bi‰t chØng nào ÇÜ®c vŠ thæm gia Çình hay là mình ch‰t bÕ xác ª trong tù này. Mình Çâu bi‰t ÇÜ®c.

Ÿ trong tù phäi nuôi m¶t hy v†ng mong manh là së có m¶t ngày nào Çó, tình hình chính trÎ thay Ç°i thì ÇÜ®c trª vŠ sum h†p v§i gia Çình. Vì vÆy cÙ phäi cÓ g¡ng mà sÓng, mà thÀm l¥ng lao Ç¶ng m°i ngày. Kiên nhÅn và chÎu Ç¿ng không có cách nào khác. Ÿ Çó cÙ nghe phong phanh ba næm ÇÜ®c vŠ. Mình cÛng hy v†ng g¡ng sÓng Ç‹ Çi vŠ v§i gia Çình. V® tôi bi‰t là tôi ª ngoài B¡c và bi‰t là tôi còn sÓng. Nó chÌ cho vi‰t vŠ thæm thôi. Nó không cho mình nói là mình ª Çâu. Nó nói là vi‰t rÒi nó Çem gªi. NhÜng có cái nó gªi có cái không mình Çâu bi‰t ÇÜ®c. BÓn næm sau nó m§i cho gia Çình Çi thæm nuôi.

Trải Hà Næm Ninh

CuÓi næm 1979 nó m§i cho thæm nuôi. V® tôi và hai ÇÙa con tôi lên thæm tôi. BÓn næm rÒi chÜa g¥p. Gia Çình tôi nhÆn không ra vì tôi Óm nhom Óm nhách. Con trai tôi mÜ©i m¶t tu°i còn con gái tôi chín tu°i. Lâu qúa không g¥p rÒi lúc g¥p cÛng ch£ng nói ÇÜ®c chuyŒn nhiŠu vì xúc Ç¶ng. Tôi nói v® tôi tải sao lúc Çó không chÎu Çi mà ª Çây làm chi. Tải sao không d¤n hai ÇÙa con Çi. Bà Ãy nói còn tôi bà Ãy Çâu có Çi ÇÜ®c. Lúc Çó ngÜ©i x‰p cûa bà Ãy kêu bà Ãy Çi mà bà Ãy không có Çi tải vì kËt không có liên l¥c ÇÜ®c v§i tôi. Lúc Çó chi‰n tranh tùm lum rÒi không có g†i ÇiŒn thoải lên ÇÜ®c mà cÛng không có lên thæm ÇÜ®c Ç‹ mà báo cho bi‰t. Lúc Çó tôi cÛng không bi‰t tôi nên khuyên làm sao. Khi mà tôi vô tù thì tôi v§i nghï là n‰u mình Ç‹ cho v® con mình Çi thì tÓt hÖn. NhÜng mà hÒi Çó thì không bi‰t làm sao. S® hÒi Çó tôi không cho Çi không chØng. Không bi‰t Çi ra làm sao n»a.

Lên thæm c¿c l¡m. Qua miŠn B¡c ÇÜ©ng xá xa xôi Çi vô trong rØng núi Çâu có xe c¶. T§i cái tÌnh rÒi phäi Çi b¶ vô vì Çâu ai bi‰t gì. Lúc nó cho gia Çình thæm nuôi thì tôi ª trải cänh sát rÒi.

CuÓi næm 1979 là Trung QuÓc Çánh ViŒt C¶ng sang biên gi§i không bi‰t do hiŒn tình gì? Trung QuÓc Çánh sang qua giäi tÕa m¶t cái trải sát biên gi§i rÒi nó b¡t mÃy ngÜ©i tù. Sau Çó nó không còn cho quân Ç¶i coi n»a mà giao lải cho công æn cänh sát coi. Nó m§i chuy‹n mÃy cái trải khác rút vŠ sâu trong này. Tôi chuy‹n tØ trải khu SÖn Lai t§i Hà Næm Ninh cÛng ª miŠn B¡c.

Trải Hà Næm Ninh là chính thÙc ª tù vì nó giao cho cänh sát coi lúc trÜ§c là nhà tù s¤n. TrÜ§c ª trải quân Ç¶i có nhiŒm vø coi tù thì h† chÌ gi» mình thôi. H† rào

chung quanh cho mình ª. Mình ÇØng có ra khÕi hàng rào thôi chÙ h† không cho vô phòng khóa cºa. TrÜóc ª trải quân Ç¶i thì nó là cái nhà mà t¿ mình ÇÓn cây mình cÃt. RÒi mình ÇÓn tre mình làm giÜ©ng lÃy. M‡i ngÜ©i có cái giÜ©ng tre riêng. Ban Çêm mình có th‹ thÙc dÆy mình Çi ra ngoài khÕi nhà Ç‹ Çi ti‹u. H† không bao gi© khóa cºa ban Çêm. Cänh sát áp døng theo cái ch‰ Ç¶ tù cûa ngành h†.

Ban ngày làm viŒc song tÓi nó cho vŠ cái phòng rÒi nó khóa cºa ª ngoài låi. Nhà tù xây b¡ng gåch xi mæng. Ÿ nhà tù này nó xây luôn cái cÀu tiêu cÀu ti‹u ª trong phòng luôn. M¶t cái phòng có con ÇÜ©ng Çi ª gi»a còn hai bên là giÅy xi mæng xây cao lên chút xíu Ç‹ träi chi‰u Ç‹ ngû. Cái giÜ©ng b¢ng xi mæng dài dài bên Çây khu xi mæng bên kia khu xi mæng n¢m x‰p l§p nhau. Nó cho m‡i ngÜ©i khoäng ba thÜ§c Ç‹ ngû. M¶t cái phòng chÙa bÓn næm chøc ngÜ©i.

TÓi chiŠu khi Çi làm vŠ æn cÖm song rÒi nó Çi‹m danh rÒi nó nhÓt vô trong phòng khoá cºa låi khoäng chØng næm sáu gi© chiŠu. TÓi mình không ÇÜ®c Çi ra khÕi phòng. ñêm chÌ nói chuyŒn. Hai ba ngÜòi låi nói chuyŒn, k‹ chuyŒn Ç©i xÜa. Nh»ng cái gì mà nó thÃy không nhuy hi‹m nó cho gi». Có ngÜ©i tÆp h†p låi Ç†c kinh cÀu nguyŒn. Có ngÜ©i ngÒi Çánh c© ca rô nói dóc, Çánh Çàn cÛng có. Song t§i gi© nó quy‰t ÇÎnh Çi ngû thì nó Çánh kÈn rÒi là t¡t Çèn h‰t. Không ÇÜ®c nói chuyŒn không ÇÜ®c Çi t§i Çi lui chÌ m¡c ti‹u là Çi thôi. Ngoài có cºa s° song s¡t Ç¥ng ª ngoài nó dòm vô Ç‹ ki‹m soát mình. Cºa s° cho gió th°i vô cÛng Ç« hôi. Sáng nó Çánh kÈn nó m§i mª cºa cho mình ra. Trải này ghê hÖn trải trÜ§c là tÓi nó nhÓt mình còn ban ngày nó cÛng b¡t mình ra ru¶ng làm nhÜ trải trÜ§c.

Khi mà ÇÜ®c thæm nuôi rÒi thì không có ngÜ©i ch‰t vì có thuÓc men ÇÀy Çû. Ai cÛng vÆy. Thæm là cho thuÓc men. ThuÓc Çi cÀu tháo då, thuÓc cäm.

NgÜ©i nào cÛng có thuÓc. Thí dø mình không có gia Çình thæm nuôi thì nh»ng ngÜ©i khác h† có thæm nuôi h† cho mình. Lúc Çó không có ngÜ©i ch‰t n»a. K‹ tØ khi có gia Çình thæm nuôi rÒi thì coi nhÜ là ngÜ©i nào cÛng tæng lên ki lô. Không còn Óm n»a. NgÜ©i nào cÛng Óm nhom Óm nhách nhìn không ra.

Gi© Çây nghï låi nh»ng næm tháng ª trong tù miŠn B¡c, tôi vÄn còn phäi rùng mình và thÌnh thoäng trong giÃc ngû vÄn còn mÖ thÃy nh»ng cänh hãi hung mà tôi Çã phäi träi qua. Tôi ª cái tråi Hà Næm Ninh tØ næm 1979 t§i 1981. Næm 1981, tôi chuy‹n tØ Hà Næm Ninh vŠ Long Khánh, ª trên tÌnh Biên Hòa. Sài Gòn Çi Biên Hòa t§i Long Khánh. Tôi không bi‰t cái tình hình lúc Çó ViŒt C¶ng nói v§i MÏ kš k‰t h®p ÇÒng làm sao thì lúc Çó h† m§i cho lên xe lºa chª vŠ bên Nam. ThÖ tØ ª ngoài h† gºi vô ngÜ©i ta cÛng nói là ch¡c có lë có chuyŒn gì Çó thành thº ra h† m§i d¿ ÇÎnh chª vŠ trong Nam Ç‹ thä ra.

Trại Long Khánh Trên Biên Hòa

Phäi công nhÆn là cái ngày lên xe lºa mà vŠ miŠn Nam rÒi vui l¡m m¥c dù là cÙ hai ngÜ©i thì nó còng tay chung v§i nhau lên xe lºa ngÒi. Trên chuy‰n xe lºa tØ miŠn B¡c vào Nam, d†c ÇÜ©ng nh»ng ngÜ©i dân tìm cách Ç‰n gÀn Ç‹ nhìn m¥t, Ç‹ ti‰p t‰ thÙc æn và Ç‹ hÕi thæm sÙc khÕe. ThÆt không có gì cäm Ç¶ng b¢ng ngÜ©i dân sau bao nhiêu næm k‹ tØ cái ngày g†i là “giäi phóng miŠn Nam,” ngÜ©i dân Çã hi‹u ra là mình bÎ tuyên truyŠn sai s¿ thÆt. Nh»ng ngÜ©i lính trong quân Ç¶i ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa rÃt là hiŠn và tº t‰ chÙ không hŠ “uÓng máu æn thÎt ngÜ©i” nhÜ nh»ng ngÜ©i C¶ng Sän Çã tuyên truyŠn. Khác hänh cái næm 1976 mà khi vô B¡c cÙ Çi ngang ch‡ nào mà có ngÜ©i Çông ngÜ©i chen chúc là bÎ h† ch†i Çá.

TØ ngoài B¡c vô t§i Nam trên xuÓt khoäng ÇÜ©ng Çi mÃy ngày mÃy Çêm là xe lºa ngØng ch‡ nào là h† thÄy ÇÒ æn cho mình. Dân chúng bán ÇÒ, nhiŠu khi có nh»ng ngÜ©i nghèo h† chÌ bán cái thúng sôi, hay chuÓi, hay khoai, chúc ÇÌnh gì thôi, h† thÃy lên xe lºa. NgØng là h† quæng qua cºa x° cho mình æn, không bi‰t ngày Ço h† cho mình h‰t h† lÃy cái gì h† sÓng? NhÜng mà h† cho h‰t. ñ‰n n‡i ri‰t rÒi hÍ ngØng m¶t cái là công æn phäi ÇÙng hai bên xe lºa chÆn h‰t không cho ai gÀn xe lºa h‰t. NiŠm vui là ª cái Çi‹m Ço.

Coi nhÜ là ª SÖn Lai trong chØng m¶t næm hai næm qua t§i næm thÙ ba là khi mình Çi ra ngoài làm mình g¥p nh»ng ngÜ©i dân Ço thì h† lén cho mình æn. Thí dø nhÜ h† cÛng nghèo h† cÛng Çi vô rØng ÇÓn cûi Çem vŠ sài hay h† bán. H† cÛng d¡t cÖm n¡m bÕ trong cái túi Çeo vai Çi làm Ç‹ æn trÜa. ThÜ©ng thÜ©ng ª ngoài B¡c h† Çi làm vô rØng là Çi tØ sáng t§i chiŠu h† m§i vŠ. TrÜa h† æn cÖm. Thì mình cÛng Çi làm vô trong cÛng g¥p nh»ng ngÜ©i Çi làm trong rØng vÆy. Lúc Ço h† rÃt thÜÖng mình không bi‰t tåi sao. H† cÙ g¥p là hÕi mình có Çói không, æn cÖm không, h† cho. Có lë là h† thÃy m¶t hai næm Ço mình Çi làm tù Çi vô trong rØng làm rÒi vŠ. G¥p cÛng chào hÕi vui cÜ©i vÆy thôi. Có lë là ngÜ©i dân cÛng nghe radio hay Ç†c báo chí h† thÃy sao mà nh»ng ngÜ©i B¡c mà vô trong Nam trª nên giÀu có cu¶c sÓng ª ngoài làm sao. H† nghï gì làm sao mình bi‰t ÇÜ®c. ChÌ bi‰t là trong hai næm ÇÀu thì b¡t ÇÀu là mình thân thiŒn v§i ngÜ©i dân rÒi. NgÜ©i dân g¥p h† cÛng chào hÕi, Bác lúc này có khÕe không. RÒi nhìn qua không thÃy b¶ Ç¶i Çâu h‰t, thì h† lén cho mình gói cÖm rÒi h† Çi vÆy thôi.

Trong Nam thì cái nhà cºa làm ÇËp hÖn B¡c. Thay vì xi mæng thì h† l§p gåch bông, l®p men. Såch së hÖn mà nhà cºa ÇÒ cao ráo rÒi quét vôi, Çèn nê ôn sáng. Vô Çó lá có s¤n rÒi. Trong Çó khoäng 1000 ngÜ©i.

Lúc nào cÛng vÆy cái chính sách cûa C¶ng Sän là cÙ b¡t khai báo hoài. CÙ vài ba tháng låi phát cho t© giÃy kêu khai, báo khai báo hoài ch¡n l¡m. Thành ra tôi vi‰t m¶t cái bän s¤n rÒi nó ÇÜa m¶t cái là chép y nguyên væn vÆy rÒi thÄy cho nó xong chuyŒn cho rÒi. CÙ vi‰t t© nào cÛng giÓng t© nào. Mà ngÜ©i nào cÛng vÆy h‰t. H† làm vÆy cho mau chÙ ai mà ngÒi suy nghï hoài mŒt l¡m. NhiŠu khi nó Ç†c, nhiŠu khi nó b¡t mình ÇÙng lên cÀm cái t© mình Ç†c cho ngÜ©i ta nghe. Ri‰t rÒi ai cÛng chán h† nói thÀm trong miŒng r¢ng tao có t¶i gì cÛng ÇÜ®c, kŒ nó tao chap nhÆn t¶i l‡i tao.

Trong suÓt mÃy næm ª ngoài B¡c và trong Nam thì ai vi phåm k› luÆt gì thì nó cho nhÓt vô trong phòng riêng rÒi nó cùm hai chân låi có khi b¢ng s¡t có khi b¢ng g‡ rÒi nó khóa låi nhÜ là mình bÎ kŠm cÙng nh¡c chÌ có ngÒi lên n¢m xuÓng vÆy thôi không có c¿a quÆy gì ÇÜ®c h‰t. T¶i phän Ç¶ng, t¶i chÓng ÇÓi, t¶i hát nh¥c vàng tÙc là nh¥c trÜ§c næm 1975, ho¥c là giÃu nh»ng cái ÇÒ nó cÃm nhÜ dao hay là kŠm c¡t giÃu nó khám xét thÃy ÇÜ®c nó cÛng phåt. Coi nhÜ là phåm k› luÆt vÆy ho¥c Çi làm mà làm bi‰ng không chÎu Çi làm nó b¡t nó phåt vÆy.

TØ næm 1979 lúc mà h† cho gia Çình thæm nuôi ª cái trải thÙ nhì và sau này thì tôi không thÃy ngÜ©i nào ch‰t. CÙ m¶t trải là khoäng 500-600 ngÜ©i. Trải vô trong miŠn Nam này thì dÍ rÒi. Gia Çình lên thæm nuôi thÜ©ng xuyên. Ngày nào cÛng có gia Çình này thæm gia Çình kia thæm cÛng vui rÒi.

T¿ Do Tháng 7 Næm 1982

Tháng 7 næm 1982 sau khi có s¿ can thiŒp cûa chính phû MÏ tôi cÛng nhÜ bao nhiêu ngÜ©i khác lÀn lÜ®t ÇÜ®c trä låi t¿ do. CÙ m‡i tháng nó Ç†c danh sách chØng vài chøc ngÜ©i thä vŠ thì nó Ç†c danh sách có tên tôi Ç‹ cho vŠ. Cái ngày Çó qúa vui. Coi nhÜ là xúc Ç¶ng Çâu có ngû ÇÜ®c Çâu. Trong m¶t tuÀn lÍ khi mà nó Ç†c ÇÜ®c cái tên cho ra vŠ thì Çâu có ngû ÇÜ®c Çâu. ñêm cÙ thÙc nôn nóng ch© cho nó phát cái giÃy ra tråi rÒi Çi vŠ. TrÜ§c ngày ÇÜ®c vŠ tôi ÇÜ®c m¶t tuÀn lÍ ª m¶t khu t¿ do không bÎ nhÓt. MuÓn Çi Çâu thì Çi, muÓn Çi vòng vòng chÖi cÛng ÇÜ®c. Không có phäi làm viŒc gì h‰t. RÒi trong tuÀn lÍ Çó nó làm thû tøc giÃy t© rÒi trä mình låi ÇÒng hÒ, nhÅn, cà rá, tiŠn b¥c gì mình gªi cho nó lúc ÇÜ®c gia Çình thæm nuôi, nhÜng mà nó thû Çoån l¡m. Khi mà nó phát t© giÃy cho ra tråi Çó thì nó së trä ÇÒ Ç¥c cho mình luôn. Nó chÌ trä m¶t ít thôi rÒi nói là thÃt låc chÜa tìm ÇÜ®c phäi ch©. Có ngÜ©i thì ÇÜ®c, có ngÜ©i thì nó hô là bây gi© chÜa tìm ÇÜ®c. Bây gi© phát cái giÃy ra tråi thôi rÒi ª ÇÃy ngû ch©, ch© chØng nào ki‰m ra ÇÜ®c thì trä låi rÒi vŠ. Mà mình ÇÜ®c vŠ thì nôn qúa rÒi bây gi© nó phát cho t© giÃy rÒi mình Çâu có muÓn ch© låi n»a. NhÜng mà mình hãy nhÆn ÇÜ®c t© giÃy ra tråi mình bye bye liŠn, vŠ liŠn.

Ra khÕi tråi tù Çón xe Çò vŠ Sài Gòn mà long bÒi hÒi v§i m¶t cäm giác khó tä. Vui vì s¡p g¥p låi nh»ng ngÜ©i thân yêu nhÙt trong Ç©i. BuÒn vì lo không bi‰t trª vŠ Sài Gòn làm viŒc gì Ç‹ có th‹ ki‰m tiŠn lo cho gia Çình. BÜ§c vô cæn nhà trÓng träi nhìn thÃy v® và hai con tôi Çã thÃy ngay cu¶c sÓng m§i khó khæn b¡t ÇÀu trong cu¶c Ç©i tôi. Tôi Çã phäi phÃn ÇÃu rÃt nhiŠu Ç‹ có th‹ h¶i nhÆp vào m¶t xã h¶i m§i. Tôi thÃy rõ xã h¶i rÃt phân biŒt ÇÓi xº ÇÓi v§i nh»ng ngÜ©i tù nhÜ tôi. ñi Ç‰n Çâu xin

viŒc làm cÛng bÎ tØ chÓi. M‡i tuÒn lÍ phäi Ç‰n ÇÒn công an trình diŒn m¶t lÀn. RÒi vi‰t giÃy ki‹m Çi‹m, cÛng låi vi‰t giÃy ki‹m Çi‹m mình vŠ làm caí gì ª nhà.

Lúc tôi vŠ thÃy gia Çình tiŠn b¥c trong nhà không có c¡c nào h‰t, rÒi hai ÇÙa con h†c hành giª qúa rÒi, v® tôi thì sáng låi ra ngÒi ª ch® Ç‹ cái bàn nhÕ Ç‹ lên mÃy cái gói ÇÜ©ng gói ÇÆu nhÕ nhÕ ngÒi bán ª ngoài ch®. Tôi thÃy xót ru¶t tôi m§i Çi mÜ§n m¶t xe xích lô Çåp. Sáng s§m tôi d†n hàng phø v§i v® tôi ª ch® cho v® tôi bán rÒi tôi vŠ tôi lÃy xe Çåp tôi Çi chåy t§i chiŠu tÓi m§i vŠ ki‹m sát sách vª tøi nó h†c rÒi m§i b¡t ÇÀu ngÒi dÆy hai ÇÙa nó h†c. Lúc Çó tôi vŠ cái viŒc ÇÀu tiên là tôi giª nh»ng cái tÆp sách cûa nó Çi h†c ra.

Lúc tôi vŠ thì con trai l§n tôi Çã mÜ©i ba tu°i còn con gái tôi mÜ©i tu°i. Tôi coi thì tôi thÃy là nh‰u mà ª cái tu°i Çó ª cái l§p Çó mà theo nhÜ tôi nghï nó phäi giªi l¡m, nhÜng Çàng này mà thÃy này tôi hÕi nó không bi‰t gì vŠ toán, vŠ anh væn. Toán c¶ng toán trØ mà cÛng không rành n»a mà Çã mÜ©i mÃy tu°i rÒi. Bài vª trong trÜ©ng giª ra nó không bi‰t gì h‰t trÖn. H†c dÓt l¡m. Ròi tôi m§i dÆy nó h†c ban Çêm. NhÜng mà sáng s§m rÒi không bi‰t là nó có vô trÜ©ng h†c hay là Çi chÖi thì tôi Çâu bi‰t bªi vì tôi phäi lo Çi làm chåy xe xích lô tÓi m§i vŠ. Con tôi vŠ k‹ là bây gi© ª trong trÜ©ng h† ÇÓi xº cách biŒt, nghïa là con sï quan ngøy khác v§i con c¡n b¶ thành thº ra nó h†c nó chán. Tôi thÃy nän qúa vì nó h†c dª qúa. RÒi sau vài tháng thì thÃy giÃy ª trÜ©ng báo vŠ th¢ng con trai nó trÓn, nó bÕ nó chÖi không vô trÜ©ng. Låi phäi nghÌ chåy xích lô, chåy vô trong trÜ©ng hÕi thÀy cô giáo làm sao mà dÆy nó. NhÜng nó chán vô trÜ©ng vì bÎ phân biŒt. Cô giáo ÇÜa cho nó ngÒi tuÓt phía sau bàn chót. Nó h†c ch£ng ÇÜ®c gì nên nó bÕ không chÎu h†c. Tôi buÒn, tÙc giÆn, tôi lÃy roi tôi quÃt mà rÒi nó nän nó bÕ h†c nó chÓn hoài rít rÒi tôi cÛng nän luôn. Tôi vŠ ÇÜ®c m¶t hai

næm sau rÒi con tôi bÕ h†c h‰t. Cä con gái tôi. Tåi vì nó h†c dª nó chán. Lúc Çó tôi buÒn l¡m. Nó cÙ Çi chÖi vÆy thôi. Tôi v§i v® tôi phäi Çi làm nuôi tøi nó. Hai ÇÙa nó bÕ h†c s§m l¡m. Tôi buÒn nhÃt là cái chuyŒn Çó.

Tôi nói là n‰u tôi không Çi tù có lë là tôi dÆy d‡ tøi nó h†c Çàng hoàng chÙ không Ç‰n n‡i mà bÕ ngang. Tôi cÛng h†c xong trung h†c rÒi n‰u mà không có tình trång chi‰n tranh Çáng lë tôi lên Çåi h†c ÇÜ®c. Th¢ng con trai tôi lên l§p bäy, con gái tôi lên l§p næm vài næm rÒi bÕ.

Tám næm tr©i, tám næm tr©i Çó là coi nhÜ không có dÆy d‡ con cái gì ÇÜ®c h‰t mà cái tu°i Çó là cÀn phäi có cha mË kèm theo m‡i ngày theo sát s¿ h†c tÆp cûa nó thì tám næm Çó låi hoàn toàn buông thä nó cho xã h¶i. MË thì lo lao vào viŒc mà ki‰m tiŠn Ç‹ nuôi con nuôi chÒng. Cha thì ª trong tù. Hai ÇÙa con thì cÙ m¥c nó. Nó suy nghï gì? Nó cÃp sách Ç‰n trÜ©ng m¥c nó thôi, nó t¿ lo quy‰t không có ai dÆy d‡ h‰t. Ông bà vì con cháu Çông qúa Çâu có lo n°i.

Khi mà tôi bÎ b¡t vô tù rÒi v® tôi mua ÇÜ®c cái cæn nhà nhÕ, nhÕ b¢ng cái phòng khách. Thì cÛng ª ÇÜ®c nhÜng cái nhà cÛng kh° l¡m. Nhà cÙ tr©i mÜa là nÜ§c ngÆp vô låi phäi t¡t nÜ§c ra. ñi làm hãng sª nào cÛng Çâu có l¶p ÇÖn xin làm ÇÜ®c vì sï quan ngøy nó Çâu có cho làm.

Ÿ ViŒt Nam ra ngoài ch® ngÒi bán nó Çi ngang nó nói, “Sï quan ngøy hÒi sÜa mà bây gi© buôn bán.”

Mà làm không Çúng là bÎ b¡t. Nó hæm d†a Çû thÙ h‰t. Thí dø bán qúa giá. NhÜng mà nó Ç¶c l¡m. Thí dø mình mua m¶t tram ÇÒng mà mình bán m¶t tram lÈ m¶t thì l©i m¶t ÇÒng nó hô bán qúa giá nó phåt. Nó Ãn ÇÎnh mình phäi bán chín chøc ÇÒng. Làm sao mình bán ÇÜ®c Ç‹ mà sÓng. Mà lên ti‰ng nói ti‰ng trÜ§c ti‰ng

sau nó hô, “Sï quan ngøy chÓng ÇÓi hay sao.” Thành ra nó làm khó khæn. RÒi thu‰ má cÙ nó hô nó tính toán làm sao thu‰ thu nhÜ vÆy là chÜa có vØa h®p lš phäi tæng lên. Tæng lên tæng lên ri‰t rÒi buôn bán c¿c kh° qúa mà không có tiŠn. Thành ra không có còn ÇÜ©ng sÓng, Çành phäi Çi.

Mãi cho Ç‰n næm 1993 thì tôi nhÆn ÇÜ®c giÃy Çi phÕng vÃn trÜÖng trình H.O. Khi mà Çi phÕng vÃn thì vØa Çúng lúc th¢ng con trai tôi Çi chÖi v§i bån bè rÒi æn c¡p xe Çåp làm sao Çó khai ra nó phäi Çi tù, coi nhÜ là ÇÜa Çi cäi tåo thanh thi‰u nhi hÜ hÕng. Lúc Çó nó mÜ©i sáu mÜ©i bäy tu°i gì Çó chÜa Ç‰n tu°i ngÜ©i l§n. Khi tôi nhÆn ÇÜ®c giÃy Çi phÕng vÃn thì nó Çæng ª tù. Ban ÇÀu tôi quy‰t ÇÎnh thôi kŒ bÕ nó ª låi Çi rÒi qua b‰n mình tính sau. Tôi nghï là nó Çæng ª tù làm sao nó ÇÜ®c Çi. Mà v® tôi nói có m¶t mình nó là con trai bÕ nó låi t¶i qúa nó sÓng làm sao. BÃy gi© tôi không bi‰t làm sao Çi mà bÕ nó ª låi thì không Çành mà muÓn Çem nó theo thì phäi làm sao. Lúc Çó tôi bÕ ra khoäng m¶t cây vàng chåy ch†t xin cho nó ra Ç‹ phÕng vÃn. Tôi nghï là dùng cái sÓ tiŠn Çó có th‹ cho nó Çi luôn. Khi vô phÕng vÃn thì nó hÕi th¢ng con trai thì tôi Çâu có dám nói nó Çæng ª tù. Tôi nói láo là bây gi© nó vÅn ª nhà nó không Çi h†c. Tôi không ng© là trong cái giÃy t© cûa C¶ng Sän nó ÇÜa cho phái Çoàn MÏ nó báo cáo ÇÀy Çû h‰t. Ÿ tråi ngÜ©i ta báo cáo th¢ng này nó trÓn Çi Çâu rÒi. Thành thº ra phái Çoàn phÕng vÃn nói là tôi nói láo không có thành thÆt h† không cho Çi. Lúc Çó tôi Çã bán cæn nhà rÒi, cæn nhà bán Ç‹ mà Çi. Bán lo trä n® xong xuôi h‰t u Ç‹ mà Çi MÏ thì không ÇÜ®c Çi. VÆy vŠ không có nhà ª phäi Çi mÜ§n nhà ª tåm. ThÃt v†ng l¡m rÒi.

Tôi m§i làm m¶t cái ÇÖn gªi qua Thái Lan khi‰u nåi. Tôi nói tình trång tôi là hai ÇÙa con tôi không ÇÜ®c giáo døc trong vòng tám næm tr©i tôi ª tù. Thành thº ra nó

bÎ thÃt h†c rÒi làm nh»ng chuyŒn bÆy bå. Không phäi l‡i hoàn toàn cûa tôi mà phÀn l‡i ª hoàn cänh. Xin phái Çoàn cÙu xét låi cho Çi. Ba næm sau h† m§i cÙu xét låi. Næm 1996 cho tøi tôi Çi.

Næm 1996 tôi làm hÒ sÖ låi tåi vì nó có cái hÒ sÖ Çi ª tù vÆy tôi s® vô nó có vÃn ÇŠ gì n»a tôi s®. Thành ra lúc Çó tôi bÕ nó ra. Tôi khai gia Çình chÌ có v® tôi v§i con gái tôi. Tôi tính qua bên Çây rÒi Ç‹ coi nó ngoan ngoãn rÒi tôi bäo lãnh cho nó qua. Con gái tôi nó ngoan l¡m, nó ª nhà phø v§i má nó buôn bán nÃu cÖm nÃu nÜ§c giúp viŒc nhà. Lúc Çó thì có lë con trai tôi giÆn tôi. Lúc Çó nó có bÒ bÎch cÛng không muÓn Çi n»a.

Thì cÛng bàn thäo v§i nó, “Thôi bây gi© hÒ sÖ cûa con vô s® MÏ b¡t n»a bây gi© con nghï th‰ nào con muÓn Çi hay không.”

Thì nó nói, “Thôi bây gi© Ba Má v§i em Çi Çi. RÒi gºi tiŠn vŠ cho con xài cÛng ÇÜ®c.” Nó nói vÆy. Khi mà tôi khai nhÜ vÆy thì phái Çoàn h† cÛng ch£ng hÕi gì h† cho Çi liŠn.

Tôi Çang bäo lãnh ÇÙa con trai tôi. Phái Çoàn Çã kêu Çi phÕng vÃn rÒi mà không bi‰t quy‰t ÇÎnh nhÜ th‰ nào. CÛng mong r¢ng nó qua bên Çây nó Çi làm c¿c kh° rÒi nó m§i bi‰t qúy ÇÒng tiŠn sài tiŒn t¥n låi v§i låi càng ngày càng l§n tu°i nó bi‰t suy nghï låi thì hy v†ng vÆy. Nó dÓt nát qúa không có h†c hành gì h‰t. Cu¶c sÓng nó cÛng không ra gì Çâu. Nó ª bên ViŒt Nam xa xôi qúa thì cÛng m¶t tháng nói chuyŒn nó ÇÜ®c vài ba phút cÛng ch£ng có hi‹u dành l¡m. Nó cÛng cÙ Çi theo bån bè nó mà bÎ hÜ hÕng vÆy. Cháu n¶i tôi sinh næm 1999. Có chøp hình gºi qua. M§i hôm t‰t næm vØa rÒi tháng 12 næm 2001 tôi g¥p cháu tôi lÀn ÇÀu tiên. Nó hai tu°i mÃy.

ñ©i SÓng NÜ§c MÏ 1996

Khi mà tôi ÇÜ®c bäo lãnh Çi qua MÏ tôi Çi theo cái diŒn H.O. Tôi nghï là mình qua Çây mình së có m¶t Ç©i sÓng tÜÖng ÇÓi khá hÖn không còn c¿c kh° n»a. Thì cÛng do nh»ng ngÜ©i bån h† Çi qua trÜ§c h† nói vÆy h† qua bên Çây có tiŠn gºi vŠ ViŒt Nam thì Çó ª ViŒt Nam ai cÛng nghï qua bên MÏ này có tiŠn gºi vŠ là khá gÌa.

Khi phái Çoàn hÕi bên này có ngÜ©i thân nào Ç‹ bäo lãnh không thì h† xë cho vŠ ti‹u bang Çó. Thì tôi nói là tôi không có ai thân thu¶c ª bên MÏ h‰t. Thì tùy theo muÓn cho tôi ª ti‹u bang nào cÛng ÇÜ®c h‰t. Ngày 4 tháng 3 næm 1996 tôi Ç¥t chân Ç‰n ÇÃt MÏ ÇÜ®c USCC Çón ti‰p và ÇÜa vŠ cæn nhà ª ÇÜ©ng NW 28th. Tôi rÃt là vui mØng và thª phào nhË nhòm nhÜ trút h‰t nh»ng n°i buÒn khi còn ª ViŒt Nam. LÀn ÇÀu thì ª bên ViŒt Nam sÓng kh° sª không có nhà cºa gì h‰t. Qua có ÇÜ®c cái mái nhà Ãm thÃy cÛng thoäi mái. MÃy ngày ÇÀu rÃt là thoäi mái, thÃy cu¶c sÓng mình có ë tÜÖi hÖn rÒi.

T§i bây gi© thì tôi không cäm thÃy nhÜ vÆy n»a. ChÌ ª ÇÜ®c m¶t tháng thì tôi Çã nhÆn ra cu¶c sÓng m§i nÀy cÛng không phäi dÍ dàng vì ngôn ng», vì cu¶c sÓng khác biŒt vŠ tinh thÀn lÅn vÆt chÃt th©i ti‰t, phong tøc tÆp quán, thÙc æn, ngôn ng». B°ng nhiën cu¶c sÓng m§i bi‰n Ç°i tôi trª thành mù ch» vì không bi‰t ti‰ng Anh, “Çi‰c” vì không nghe hi‹u ÇÜ®c ngÜ©i khác nói, “câm” vì không trä l©i ÇÜ®c khi ngÜ©i khác hÕi mình. Tôi Çã cÓ g¡ng h†c hÕi nhÜng tu°i Çã cao, trí nh§ kém cÕi tôi Çã không h†c hÕi ÇÜ®c nhiŠu.

Qua bên Çây thì bÎ bó bu¶c rÃt nhiŠu. Làm lãnh ra lÜÖng nhiŠu vŠ trä tiŠn bill, tiŠn nhà, tiŠn xe h‰t trÖn không có dÜ ÇÜ®c cái gì h‰t. Bây gi© thÃy sÙc khÕe thì c¢ng ngày c¢ng y‰u Çi mà Çi làm c¿c qúa. NhiŠu khi bŒnh qúa tr©i mà cÛng không có nghÌ phép ÇÜ®c Ç‹ mà ª nhà. Theo cái luÆt lŒ ª sª làm nghÌ là bÎ Çi‹m. NhiŠu

Çi‹m thì bÎ trØ lÜÖng. Mà t§i mÜ©i Çi‹m thì bÎ Çu°i. Nó gò bó b¡t bu¶c nhÜ vÆy thành thº ra nhiŠu khi ngû sáng thÙc dÆy Çau nhÙc mình mÄy h‰t mà cÛng phäi ráng Çi làm. Mà vô làm c¿c qúa Çi cÛng phäi ráng thôi. Bây gi© tôi làm sáu ti‰ng ÇÒng hÒ là thÃy nó mŒt ÇØ rÒi. Làm tám ti‰ng ÇÒng hÒ là kÈng reo m¶t cái läo Çäo Çi không n°i. MŒt l¡m. Bây gi© l§n tu°i rÒi mà bÕ cái hãng Çi ch‡ khác thì cÛng khó xin. Mà cái lÜÖng thì cÛng Çâu ki‰m ÇÜ®c b¢ng cái hãng này. N‰u tôi còn trÈ thì có lë là thích h®p sÓng ª Çây hÖn vì mình có sÙc khÕe Çi làm mình không có mŒt. Qua Çây cái kh° nhÃt cûa tôi có lë là vì sÙc khÕe kém mà phäi Çi làm c¿c. ChÙ n‰u mà tôi có sÙc khÕe thì tôi không s® Çi làm vì tôi Çã quen c¿c rÒi. NhÜng vì cái viŒc làm cûa mình nó qúa Çáng v§i sÙc khÕe cûa mình. Thay vì ª cái tu°i tôi, tôi có th‹ làm cái viŒc nhË hÖn chút síu nhÜng mà vô hãng làm phäi ôm cái cøc rÃt n¥ng. CÛng phäi làm thôi! Næm nay tôi næm mÜÖi bÄy tu°i. Còn phäi làm mÜ©i næm n»a. Tôi phäi ráng làm mÜ©i næm n»a thì ÇÜ®c vŠ hÜu. R§t cu¶c rÒi thÃy cu¶c sÓng không có cái gì thoäi mái h‰t.

Ÿ Çây tÓi ngày cÙ vô Çóng cºa kín mít vÆy. CÙ Çi làm rÒi vŠ nhà rÒi mª ti vi coi, coi Çã rÒi ngû sáng Çi làm cÙ vÆy ngày này qua ngày kia trong khung nhà chán qúa không có gì vui h‰t. Còn ª ViŒt Nam kh° mà vui. BuÒn Çi ki‰m bản bè ngÒi nói chuyŒn uÓng cà phê ra quán uÓng cà phê ngÒi nói chuyŒn này n† nó giäi khuây ÇÜ®c tinh thÀn. Cái æn, cái m¥c là không phäi lo. ˆn, uÓng, quÀn áo không phäi lo. Phäi lo tiŠn bill m‡i tháng, sÙc khÕe, v§i tinh thÀn.

M§i cách Çây hai ngày t¿ nhiên mÃt cái bolt ª ngoài cái máy lảnh. Tr©i Öi nó nóng khûng khi‰p. Tôi không bi‰t làm cách nào mà g†i Çiên thoải kêu ngÜ©i ta lải liŠn ÇÜ®c. Phäi ch© h‰t m¶t ngày m¶t Çêm. Tr©i Öi nó lóng trong phòng nó lóng

qúa. Tám mÜÖi mÃy chín chøc Ç¶. Ti‰ng MÏ thì không có nói rành. CÛng ch£ng gíup Ç« Ç¿c mình t¿ làm lÃy h‰t. MÏ nó song phäng tÙc là ÇÜa anh qua bên Çây rÒi thì anh phäi t¿ Çi làm lÃy rÒi anh phäi Çóng thu‰. Thì có bao nhêu thì anh sài bÃy nhiêu. Gi© Çây sau gÀn 5 næm sÓng ª Oklahoma. Tôi Çã Çi làm ª Công Ty Unit Parts. Cu¶c sÓng m§i Çã tÜÖng Çói °n ÇÎnh.

Con gái tôi thì có nhiŠu cÖ h¶i nhÜng nó không có cái trí Ç‹ nó h†c tâp. NhÜng mà bây gi© nó cÛng bÎ cái ÇÒng tiŠn nó lôi kéo nó. Cu¶c sÓng cûa nó có Çû Çâu. Nó cÙ vØa phäi Çi làm vØa vŠ làm bánh bÕ mÓi ª ch® cÛng rÃt là c¿c kh°. CÛng ch£ng thÃy sung sÜ§ng gì h‰t. Phäi chi mà nó chÎu khó mà ÇÜ®c qua Çây lúc còn nhÕ chúc síu rÒi nó Çi h†c thì có lë là có tÜÖng lai hÖn. Nó có b¢ng cÃp thì cu¶c sÓng nó Ç« hÖn. Còn Ç¢ng này nó cÛng không có hÖn gì ÇÜ®c tôi h‰t. Mà nhiŠu khi nó còn thua.

NhÜng tôi bi‰t vÆy tôi cÛng phäi Çi tåi vì ª ViŒt Nam không có xin ÇÜ®c viŒc làm mà bÎ Çói xº rÃt là kh° l¡m. Cái chuyŒn mà Çi tØ ViŒt Nam qua bên Çây là vŠ phÜÖng diŒn kinh t‰ thôi. ChÙ còn mình không có con ÇÜ©ng nào sÓng h‰t thành ra r§t cu¶c rÒi bi‰t là kh° cÛng phäi Çi thôi. Mình phäi qua MÏ Ç‹ sÓng tåi mình cÙ hy v†ng là mình Çi Ç‹ mình qua bên Çây ÇÜ®c ÇÓi xº cho nó công b¢ng không có thành ki‰n cûa m¶t ngÜ©i Sï Quan. Cái thÙ hai n»a qua Çây mình ÇÜ®c t¿ do. Làm không có ai nói næng t§i mình h‰t, cÙ cái gì cÛng hô Sï Quan ngøy Sï Quan ngøy. CÛng nh© qua Çây mà m‡i tháng tôi gªi tiŠn vŠ gíup cho Ba tôi ª bên nhà sÓng qua ngày ÇÜ®c. NhÜ vØa rÒi Ba tôi bŒnh ÇÜa ra nhà thÜÖng và tôi cÛng gºi tiŠn vŠ mua thuÓc men. N‰u mà không ÇÜ®c qua bên Çây mà ª ViŒt Nam thì ch¡c không bi‰t làm sao có tiŠn Çó.

Tải vì C¶ng Sän chi‰m miŠn Nam làm cho gia Çình tôi tan nát nhÜ vÆy. ChÙ n‰u mà không có C¶ng Sän qua miŠn Nam, thì cu¶c sÓng cûa tôi không có tŒ nhÜ vÆy. Tôi nghï là trÜ§c næm 1975 thì sÓng ª ViŒt Nam sÜ§ng hÖn ª Çây. Là mình ÇÜ®c làm viŒc cÛng thoäi mái mà sÓng cÛng thoäi mái. Tôi Çã phÃn ÇÃu rÃt nhiŠu Ç‹ Çi làm tåo cho gia Çình m¶t cu¶c sÓng tÜÖng ÇÓi °n ÇÎnh. Tôi bÎ stress và shock. Tôi tìm ra m¶t cái niŠm vui là tôi h†c máy vi tính. Vô internet rÒi mình có th‹ ghé vŠ ViŒt Nam Ç†c nh»ng bài báo tình hình kinh t‰ chính trÎ ª ViŒt Nam, thÃy cÛng thoäi mãi ÇÜ®c.

MiŠn Nam ViŒt Nam coi nhÜ bây gi© tan rã h‰t rÒi Çâu còn gì. Nh»ng ngÜ©i l§n tu°i lÀn lÜ®t ch‰t h‰t rÒi. Nh»ng ngÜ©i lãnh Çåo nh»ng vÎ tÜ§ng lÀn lÜ®t qua Ç©i h‰t. ñÓi v§i riêng bän thân tôi, tôi thÃy träi qua m¶t qu¶c sÓng sóng gío nhÜ vÆy rÒi thì bây gi© còn låi nh»ng ngày cuÓi Ç©i này thì mình không có khä næng gì làm ÇÜ®c cho ÇÃt nÜ§c h‰t. Theo cái tu°i già cûa tôi không còn sÙc nào Ç‹ làm chuyŒn gì khác hÖn h‰t ngoài cái chuyŒn nghï còn låi vài næm cuÓi Ç©i ráng sÓng Ç‹ mà nhìn con cái trÜªng thành rÒi ch‰t Çi là ÇÜ®c rÒi. Tôi ráng cÓ g¡ng Ç‹ mà xây d¿ng ÇÜ®c m¶t cái gia Çình cho êm Ãm hånh phúc ª cái ÇÃt nÜ§c xa lå này Ç‹ mà mong sau này khi ÇÜ®c vŠ hÜu rÒi mà còn sÓng sót thì quay trª låi ÇÃt nÜ§c sÓng ch‰t ª nÜ§c ViŒt Nam. VÆy thôi.

Tôi nghï ch‰ Ç¶ C¶ng Sän không có søp Ç° vì mÃy chøc næm nay rÒi. Bây gi© c¢ng ngày nó c¢ng gi» ch¡c hÖn mà c¢ng ngày nó có nhiŠu tiŠn hÖn thì ch¡c cÛng khó søp Ç° l¡m. Tôi thÃy cái tu°i tôi gìa rÒi không còn cái š trí mà phân ÇÃu n»a. Lúc trÜ§c thì låi không bi‰t. NhÜng mà sau khi ª tù bi‰t ÇÜ®c C¶ng Sän rÒi thì bây gi©

Ç‰n cái tu°i mŒt mÕi không còn m¶t chút sinh l¿c nào Ç‹ nghï vŠ C¶ng Sän bây gi© nó có tan rã thì cu¶c sÓng cÛng ch£ng có gì thay Ç°i khác hÖn ÇÜ®c n»a.

Tôi Çi vŠ thæm ViŒt Nam tháng 12 næm 2001. Có m¶t ÇiŠu buÒn nhÃt là hÒi vØa rÒi tôi Çi vŠ ViŒt Nam thÃy cái tình trång chíng sì ke ma túy qúa nhiŠu. NhiŠu hÖn hÒi trÜ§c gÌa phóng 75 n»a, qúa xá. ñi d†c ÇÜ©ng cÙ thÃy mÃy Óng chích thÄy ÇÀy ÇÜ©ng không có ai d†n dËp. Tôi chÌ s® con trai tôi dung vô cái chuyŒn Çó tåi vì thanh niên ª ViŒt Nam bây gi© dùng nhiŠu qúa nhÃt là nh»ng gia Çình nghèo kh°. Kh° qúa rÒi h† tìm nh»ng cái gì lãng quên. UÓng rÜ®u là m¶t chÃt sì ke ma túy thÙ hai. Cái Çó nhiŠu ngÜ©i thÃy chính m¡t tôi thÃy. CÙ chiŠu tÓi là d†c theo ngoài ÇÜ©ng, nh»ng cái quán uÓng rÜ®u uÓng bier ngÒi ÇÀy ÇÜ©ng h‰t mà toàn thanh niên nhÕ không. Bây gi© hình nhÜ là chính quyŠn h† dËp không n°i n»a rÒi, càng ngày càng nhiŠu qúa sÙc. HÒi xÜa cÛng có nhÜng mà lén lút thôi. Không có Ç‰n n‡i qúa sÙc nhÜ bây gi©. Có nh»ng khu Çi ngoài ÇÜ©ng mình thÃy mÃy cái Óng kim chích mình s® l¡m rûi mình Ç¥p mà nó Çâm lûng vô c£ng mình không bi‰t có gì không n»a. Ghê vÆy Çó. Ngay ª Sài Gòn có nh»ng khu, nh»ng cái khu mà thí dø nhÜ ban Çêm thi‰u bóng Çèn ÇiŒn tÓi là nh»ng cái khu trÓng trÓng này n†. nhiŠu l¡m. HÒi xÜa Çâu có nhÜ vÆy. HÒi xÜa làm nhÜ vÆy nó cÛng kín Çáo Çâu có quæng tùm lum vÆy Çâu. Lúc tôi Çi næm 1996 cÛng có khá nhiŠu nhÜng mà cÛng chÌ nghe thôi chÙ không Ç‰n n‡i Çi ÇÜ©ng mà thÃy nhÜ vÆy.

Con cûa cán b¶ thì h† có ÇiŠu kiŒn h† låi lên. H† cho Çi du h†c nÜ§c ngoài. H† tìm nh»ng cái trÜ©ng l§n h† h†c. Thì con cán b¶ càng ngày càng khá. Bây gi© coi nhÜ là cái tu°i 18, 19, 20 là nó sº døng máy vi tính giÕi l¡m rÒi. Nó có ÇiŠu kiŒn mua máy vi tính, có ÇiŠu kiŒn vô internet có ÇiŠu kiŒn h†c hành khá l¡m. NhÜng mà con

dân thì nghèo lải không có ÇÜ®c h†c hành thì càng ngày càng Çi xuÓng. Nh»ng sinh viên mà qua bên MÏ này vô các trÜ©ng Çải h†c Çi‹m lải 80-90% là con cán b¶. Ch¡c ch¡n m¶t træm phÀn là nhÜ vÆy. Còn dân thÜ©ng là không có th‹ nào có tiŠn qua Çây h†c. N‰u mà h† qua Çây rÒi h† sÓng ª ngoải quÓc nhÜ th‰ này h† nhìn lải cái nÜ§c ViŒt Nam Ç‹ có cái dÎp mà h† so sánh Ç‹ ch†n m¶t con ÇÜ©ng Çúng cho dân t¶c cho ÇÃt nÜ§c cûa mình.

Appendix 6

PhÕng VÃn Lš Hånh

Tôi sinh ngày 10/16/1947 tåi Sài Gòn Nam ViŒt Nam. Quê quán cha mË ª miŠn B¡c ViŒt Nam träi qua cu¶c hành trình rÃt dài th©I gian. TØ Cam bÓt, Lào, Thái Lan và sau cùng cha mË ÇÎnh cÜ tåi miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam. Cha tôi mÃt næm 2001 tháng 1 lúc ông Ãy 86 tu°i. HiŒn nay mË tôi 79 tu°I Çang sinh sÓng tåi miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam.

Tôi là con cä trong gia Çình gÒm 11 ngÜ©I con (4 gái, 7 trai). Ba mË tôi phäi làm long vÃt vä m§I có th‹ chæm sóc 11 ngÜ©I con. Vì th‰ cu¶c sÓng kinh t‰ trong gia Çình luôn g¥p nhiŠu khó khæn. Tuy nhiên nh»ng ngÜòi con ai cÛng tÓt nhiŒp cÃp Trung H†c. Tôi g¥p Phúc, chÒng tôi vào T‰t MÆu Thân næm 1968 lúc anh Ãy phøc vø trong quân Ç¶I ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa mang cÃp bÆc thi‰u úy. Chúng tôi k‰t hôn vào ngày 2/2/1969. Chúng tôi có ÇÜ®c 2 con (1 trai, Hi‰u sinh næm 1969 và 1 gái Thäo sinh 1971.

CÛng nhÜ Ça sÓ gia Çình quân nhân khác, cu¶c sÓng cûa gia Çình cûa gia Çình tôi cÛng rÃt khó khæn. Nhà ª cûa v® chÒng tôi luôn thay Ç°i. Vì anh Ãy phäi Çóng quân ª nhiŠu nÖi khác: Sông Bé, L¶c Ninh, Biên Hòa, Long An v.v. . .

Tháng 4/1975 m¶t bi‰n c§ l§n Çã xäy ra. ñÀu næm 1975 ViŒt C¶ng tØ miŠn B¡c ViŒt Nam tÃn công vào miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam. ñÀu tiên chúng tÃn công tÌnh ñÒng Hà, Quäng TrÎ. Sau Çó ViŒt C¶ng tÃn công Hu‰ và ñà Næng. Tháng 3/1975 ViŒt C¶ng tÃn công Ban Mê Thu¶c, ñà Låt, Nha Trang sau Çó ViŒt C¶ng tÃn công Phan Rang và Long Khánh. Quân cán chính và ngÜ©I dân phäi di chuy‹n vào Thù ñô Sài Gòn và các vùng phø cÆn.

CÛng vào th©I gian này chính phû MÏ tuyên bÓ cúp viŒn tr® quân s¿ và rút quân Ç¶I MÏ ra khÕi nÜ§c ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa. T°ng ThÓng NguyÍn Væn ThiŒu xin tØ chÙc thay th‰ là Ông TrÀn Væn HÜÖng. Sau 3 ngày t°ng thÓng HÜÖng xin nhÜ©ng chÙc vø t°ng thÓng cho ñåi TÜ§ng DÜÖng Væn Minh. ViŒt C¶ng vÄn liên ti‰p tÃn công vào các vùng phø cÆn Thû ñô Sài Gòn. Thành phÓ Sài Gòn bÎ pháo kích liên tøc. NhÆn thÃy không th‹ chÓng trä v§I ViŒt C¶ng ÇÜ®c. 7 gi© sáng ngày 4/30/1975, T°ng ThÓng Minh tuyên bÓ trên Çài phát thanh Sài Gòn, Yêu cÀu quân Ç¶I bÕ súng và ÇÀu hàng vô ÇiŠu kiŒn. Sau Ço chi‰n xa ViŒt C¶ng tràn ngÆp kh¡p ÇÜ©ng phÓ Thû ñÙc Sài Gòn chi‰n xa ViŒt C¶ng g¥p xe quán Ç®I ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa thì chúng bán Çån B40 Ç‹ ÇÓt cháy, xác lính và xác ngÜòi dân ch‰t rÃt nhiŠu. Có nh»ng xác ch‰t không còn nguyên vËn thân th‹ và chó nh»ng xác ch‰t n¢m ngoài ÇÜòng t§I hai ngày. ViŒt C¶ng chi‰m các cÖ quan quan s¿, dân s¿, sÙ quán MÏ, dinh ñ¶c LÆp. Sau khi MÏ tuyên bÓ rút quân Ç¶i và khÕi nÜ§c ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa thì phong trào di tän n°I lên. NhiŠu gia Çình, Ça sÓ gia Çình di cÜ næm 1954, vì h† hi‹u r¢ng sÓng v§I ViŒt C¶ng thì tài sän cûa h† së bÎ tÎch thu và có th‹ bÎ ÇÃu tÓ di tòa án. H† có th‹ bÎ Çi tù ho¥c bÎ xº tÜ hình ch¥t ÇÀu. TÃt cä m†I ngÜò có tài sän l§n ho¥c nhÕ ÇŠu muÓn bÕ tÃt cä: nhà, ÇÃt, cûa cäi, tiŠn vàng Ç‹ ÇÜ®c Çi Ç‰n m¶t nÖi có cu¶c sÓng Ç‹ ÇÜ®c Çi Ç‰n m¶t nÖi có cu¶c sÓng t¿ do. CÖ quan DAO cûa chính phû Ç‹ h† ÇÜ®c di tän b¢ng máy bay ho¥c tÀu thûy. SÓ ngÜ©I này ÇÜ®c ÇÜa Ç‰n Çäo Guam.

Vào nh»ng ngày cuÓi tháng 4/1975 chÒng tôi chÌ huy m¶t Çåi ñ¶I Pháo Binh 155 Ly Çóng quân täi Träng Bàn, Tây Ninh. Th©I gian này tôi ª Thû ñÙc Sài Gòn v§I hai con và làm viŒc cho cÖ quan ch‰ xuÃt thu¶c b¶ kinh t‰. Tôi cÛng có š muÓn di tän

nhÜ m†I ngÜ©I khác. Tôi có th©I gian 10 næm làm viŒc cho cÖ quan USAID cûa MÏ bên tôi có Üu trong danh sách DAO. Tôi g†I ÇiŒn thoải cho chÒng tôi Ç‹ anh Ãy vŠ Sài Gòn cùng di tän v§I v® con. ÑÜ©ng ÇiŒn thoải xÃu tôi chÌ nghe anh Ãy nói Hello. Hello. NhÜng anh Ãy thì không nghe ÇÜ®c ti‰ng nói cûa tôi. Vì vÆy tôi bÕ š ÇÎnh di tän. Sau ngày mÃt nÜ§c, nh»ng ngÜ©I lính ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa Çóng quân ª các nÖi ÇŠu lÀn lÜ®c vŠ sum h†p v§I gia Çình. Hai ngÜ©I em tôi cÛng Çã vŠ ÇÜ®c Sài Gòn v§I gia Çình. Sau hÖn m¶t tuÀn lÍ chÒng tôi vÅn không vŠ v§I gia Çình. Tôi lo s® anh Ãy mÃt tích ho¥c Çã ch‰t trÆn. Tôi lái xe g¡n mÃy Çi Träng Bán, nÖi anh Ãy Çóng quân lÀn cuÓi. NgÜòi dân ª Träng Bán chÌ tôi t§I khu ViŒt C¶ng B©I L©I, Tam Giác S¡c, Tây Ninh, Ç‹ hÕi thæm tin tÙc chÒng. NÖi Çây tôi g¥p m¶t chÎ du kích. ChÎ Ãy ÇÜa cho tôi xem m¶t sÓ cæn cÜ§c quân nhân Ç‹ tôi nhân diŒn chÒng tôi. NhÜng tôi không th‹ tìm thÃy hình änh chÒng tôi trong sÓ nh»ng cæn cÜ§c quân nhân Ãy. ChÎ Ãy chÌ tôi t§I Catum, gÀn bi‰n gi§i Cam BÓt. NÖi Çây tôi g¥p m¶t toán tù binh ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa bÎ ViŒt C¶ng b¡t gi». Tôi vÃn chÜa tìm ra anh Ãy. Trên ÇÜ©ng Çi tìm chÒng tôi ÇÜ®c bi‰t có vài chÎ em Çi ÇÜ©ng g¥p xác ch‰t bÎ ViŒt C¶ng bán n¢m ngoài ÇÜ©ng chÎ Ãy lÆt xác ch‰t lên Ç‹ nhìn m¥t xem ngÜ©I ch‰t có phäi là ngÜ©I thân cûa mình không. Sau cùng b¡ng m¶t lá thÜ vi‰t tay tôi ÇÜ®c bi‰t chÒng tôi bÎ b¡t gi» tải Cæn cÙ ñÒng Dù, cæn cÙ Cû Chi n¶I SÜ ñoàn 25 B¶ Bianh Çóng quân cÛ.

Sáng ngày 5/8/1975 tôi Çi Cû Chi và vào Cæn CÙ ÇÒng dù hÕ thæm tin tÙc chÒng tôi. NÖi Çây có nhiŠu chÎ em v® lính ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa cùnh hoàn cänh nhÜ tôi. Chúng tôi hÕi thæm tin tÙc chÒng thì ViŒt C¶ng trä l©i là NÖi Çây không b¡t gi» ai h‰t. Các bà Çi vŠ Çi. Chúng tôi thì ViŒt C¶ng ch© t§i chiŠu và chán nän ra vŠ.

Trên ÇÜ©ng Çi b¶ tØ Cæn CÙ ñÒng Dù ra b‰n xe Cû Chi chúng tôi g¥p m¶t du kích. Chúng tôi nói cho anh Ãy bi‰t m†I s¿ viŒc. Anh Ãy hÙa së giúp Ç« chúng tôi g¥p m¥t chÒng. Anh Ãy dÅn chúng tôi t§i c°ng phía sau Cän CÜ ñÒng Dù và xin giÃy phép cho chúng tôi ÇÜ®c vào trải thæm chÒng. ChÒng tôi nói là trong lúc ViŒt C¶ng tÃn công anh Ãy và quân lính cûa Çải Ç¶i anh không chÓng trä ÇÜ®c nên phäi phá súng, xe, máy móc rÒi rút quân vô rØng. Trên ÇÜ©ng trÓn chåy anh Ãy bÎ Çån ViŒt C¶ng b¡n trúng sát c¢m. Viên Çån xuyên qua da thÎt nhÜng không trúng xÜÖng c¢m. Máu ra rÃt nhiŠu. Lúc Ãy thuÓc men không có chÌ có nÜ§c lånh pha muÓi rÒi rºa såch v‰t thÜÖng nhiŠu lÀn m§i ÇÜ®c lành h£n.

ñ‰n 6/1/1975, ViŒt C¶ng thông tin trên Çài phát thanh, Yêu cÀu nh»ng quân nhân ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa nh»ng sï quan mang cÃp bÆc tØ thi‰u úy, Çåi tÜ§ng phäi trình diŒn Ç‹ Çi h†c tÆp cäi tåo. LÜÖng th¿c mang theo æn Çû 1 tháng. ChÒng tôi tù binh vi‰t thÜ tay nh© du kích mang vŠ cho tôi bi‰t là anh Ãy muÓn tôi bi‰t là anh Ãy hiŒn bÎ tÆp trung tåi trÜ©ng trung h†c DON BOSCO tåi Gò VÃp. Anh Ãy muÓn tôi mang lÜÖng th¿c gªi cho anh Ãy æn Çû m¶t tháng. Tôi gªi lÜong th¿c cho anh Ãy nhÜng không ÇÜ®c g¥p m¥t. Tôi và các chÎ em chÒng Çi h†c tÆp cäi tåo ÇŠu có chung m¶t suy nghï là chÒng chúng tôì các anh Ãy chÌ Çi tù m¶t tháng rÒi ÇÜ®c thä vŠ v§i gia Çình. Vì theo l©i ViŒt C¶ng nói Nh»ng ngÜ©I h†c tÆp cäi tåo phäi mang lÜÖng th¿c æn Çû m¶t tháng. Có nghïa là trong th©i gian h†c tÆp cäi tåo ViŒt C¶ng phäi mang lÜÖng th¿c æn Çû m¶t tháng. Có nghïa là trong th©I gian h†c tÆp cäi tåo ViŒt C¶ng không cung cÃp lÜÖng th¿c. LÜÖng th¿c mang theo æn Çû m¶t tháng thì các anh Ãy chÌ h†c tÆp cäi tåo m¶t tháng. NhÜng không phäi nhÜ th‰.

Sau này chúng tôi ÇÜ®c bi‰t là sÓ ngÜ©i trình diŒn h†c tÆp cäi tåo ÇÜ®c ViŒt C¶ng phân loåi h† thành nhiŠu thành phÀn khác nhau tùy theo cÃp bÆc và nghành nghŠ. Sau Çó ViŒt C¶ng Ç¥t tên cho nh»ng thành phÀn Çó: Thành phÀn ác ôn , thành phÀn gi‰t ngÜ©i, thành phàn æn thÎt ngÜ©i, thành phÀn uÓng máu ngÜ©i, thành phÀn c® n®i máu nhân dân v.v... ViŒt C¶ng di chuy‹n nh»ng thành phÀn này t§i nhiŠu tråi tù khác nhau räi rác tØ Lång SÖn t§i Cà Mau. M†i liên låc v§i nh»ng ngÜ©I h†c tÆp cäi tåo bÎ c¡t Çi‰t th©i gain là 5 næm. Tôi và chÒng tôi mÃt liên låc 5 næm. Trong 5 næm này tôi vÅn ti‰p tøc làm cho xÜÖng may Bình LÖi, giám ÇÓc là cán b¶ ViŒt C¶ng. Vì là v® sï quan ngøy nên viŒc làm cûa tôi g¥p nhiŠu khó khæn. ViŒt C¶ng không tin tÜªng tôi nên chÌ cho tôi làm nh»ng viŒc nhÜ m¶t la công. Tôi là thÜ kš hành chánh/dánh máy væn phòng. Tôi không ÇÜ®c lên lÜÖng nhÜ nh»ng chÎ em khác. Kinh t‰ gia Çình không Çû nên sau th©I gian làm viŒc tôi phäi Çi buôn bán. ViŒc h†c cûa hai con tôi g¥p trª ngåi. Chúng chÌ h†c xong cÃp Trung H†c thì phäi có lš lÎch tÓt. Phäi là con cûa cán b¶ C¶ng Sän ho¥c con nh»ng ngÜ©I có công v§I cánh mång. Lš lÎch cûa hai con tôi xÃu vì là con cûa gia Çình sï quan ngøy. Vì vÆy chúng không có cÖ h¶I ti‰p tøc h†c Çåi h†c.

Tháng 1/1980, chÒng tôi gªI thÜ vŠ tôi ÇÜ®c bi‰t hiŒn anh Ãy bÎ giam ª tråi HAZ25 miŠn B¡c ViŒt Nam. Anh Ãy cho bi‰t sÙc khÕe anh Ãy bình thÜ©ng và khuyên tôi cÓ g¡ng sæn sóc hai ÇÙa con ch© ngày anh Ãy h†c tÆp cäi tåo tÓt ViŒt C¶ng thä anh Ãy ÇÜ®c sum h†p gia Çình.

Tháng 3/1980, tôi và hai con tôi, Hi‰u 10 tu°I, Thäo 8 tu°I, ra B¡c thæm anh Ãy b¢ng phÜÖng tiŒn tÀu hÕa. Trong cu¶c hành trính này tôi g¥p nhiŠu chÎ em cÛng Çi thæm chÒng nhÜ tôi. Th‰ là chúng tôi k‰t bån v§I nhau. Chúng tôi mang rÃt nhiŠu

lÜÖng th¿c cho các anh Ãy. Có ngÜ©I mang t§I 100 kš lÜÖng th¿c Ç‹ thæm nuôi chÒng cûa h†.

Sau hai Çêm m¶t ngày tÀu hÕa Ç° chúng tôi tåi Phû Lš. Vì tr©I tÓi chúng tôi phäi ª nhà tr† m¶t Çêm. Ngày sau chúng tôi Çi xe Çò t§I Tam Ha và Ba Sao. Chúng tôi phäi Çi b¶ theo sÜ©I núi Ç‹ t§i tråi giam các anh Ãy. Vì hành lš qúa nhiŠu và rÃt n¥ng chúng tôi phäi nh© dân ÇÎa phÜÖng mang dùm và trä tiŠn công cho h†. Lên ÇŠn tråi thì Çã tÓi. Chúng tôi phäi ngû ª nhà khách cûa tråi 1 Çêm Ç‹ sáng ngày mai m§I ÇÜ®c g¥p m¥t chÒng.

Sau 5 næm h†c tÆp cäi tåo, sÙc khÕe cûa các ngÜ©i nay rÃt là xÃu. ña sÓ Óm y‰u có ngÜ©i thành tàn tÆt phäi chÓng gÆy mà Çi. NhiŠu ngÜ©i vô khi g¥p chÒng không nhÆn ra ngÜ©I Ãy là chÒng cûa mình. Vì h† rÃt Óm y‰u và bŒnh tÆt. . ChÒnt tôi nói Cu¶c sÓng cûa nh»ng ngØÖi tù rÃt c¿c kh° tØ tinh thÀn cho t§i vÆt chat. NhiŠu ngÜ©i bÎ ch‰t vì Çói. ñó là chính sách chung cûa b†n ViŒt C¶ng.

LÀn thÙ hai tôi Çi thæm chÒng là 10/1980. Tôi và hai con và ba tôi ra miŠn B¡c thæm chÒng lÀn n»a. Trong lÀn thæm này sÙc khÕe cûa anh Ãy khá hÖn m¶t chút nh© lÜÖng th¿c thæm nuôi lÀn ÇÀu. LÀn này tôi cÛng ÇÜ®c vŠ thæm quê quán cûa ba tôi. NÖi Çây ba tôi Çã bÕ ra Çi cách nay 50 næm. Ba tôi nói sau 50 næm vŠ thæm quê nhà m†I cÖ cÃy ki‰n trúc không có gì thay Ç°i. NhÜng tàn tích chi‰n tranh vì bom Çån MÏ vÅn không ÇÜ®c xay Çúng låi.

Tháng 3/1981 tôi, hai con, và em chÒng tôi låi ra miŠn B¡c thæm chÒng. Khi vŠ chúng tôi có thæm Hà N¶i 1 ngày. Hà N¶i cÛng không có gì thay Ç°i. ñÜ©ng xá, c¶t dèn, ÇÜ©ng giao thông, nhà cºa, nhà tù hÕa ló, cÖ quan v. v. . . rÃt xÜa và låc hÆu. Nh»ng thÙ này ª th©i Pháp thu¶c Ç‹ låi nhÜ th‰ nào thì vÅn nhÜ th‰ không thay Ç°i.

Không nhÜ Thû ñô Sài Gòn sau 30 næm ÇÜ®c MÏ tái thiŒt rÃt ÇËp và Ç°i m§i hoàn toàn.

Tháng 12/1981 chÒng tôi và m¶t sÓ bản tù ÇÜ®c ÇÜa vào miŠn Nam ViŒt Nam. ChÒng tôi bÎ giam ª trải T4 Long Khánh. Vì th‰ nên 3 tháng tôi ÇÜ®c Çi thæm nuôi chÒng m¶t lÀn. Tháng 7/1982 chÒng tôi ÇÜ®c thä t¿ do. Nh»ng ngÜ©i h†c tÆp cäi tảo ÇÜ®c thä vŠ thì không có công viŒc Ç‹ Çi làm. Tôi Çã nghÌ viŒc và v® chÒng tôi lúc Çó ÇŠu thÃt nhiŒp. Tôi phäi Çi buôn bán ª ch®. ChÒng tôi thuê xe xích lô Çåp và chª thuê cho khách. Kinh t‰ gia Çình xuÓng thÃp. TÜÖng lai cûa v® chÒng tôi rÃt Çen tÓi.

Tháng 1/1990 chÜÖng trình H.O. thì gia Çình tôi làm hÒ sÖ Ç‹ ÇÜ®c lên danh sách H.O.

Tháng 7/1995 gia Çình tôi ÇÜ®c kêu phÕng vÃn. Sau Çó chính phû MÏ chÃp thuÆn cho nhÆp cÜ sang MÏ và tháng 3/1996 gia Çình tôi ÇÜ®c dinh cÜ tải My. Nh© h¶i U.S.C.C. gíup Ç« trong th©i gian ÇÀu. Chúng tôi thuê ÇÜ®c m¶t cæn nhà ª ÇÜ©ng N.W. 29. TÃt cä vÆt døng trong nhà tØ quÀn aó, thÙc æn, t.v., tiŠn tr® cÃp Ùng trÜ§c ÇŠu ÇÜ®c USCC giúp Ç«. CÛng nh© h¶i USCC giúp Ç« tháng 4/1996 chúng tôi ÇÜ®c vào làm viŒc cho công ty Unit Parts. Bây gi© làm ÇÜ®c 8 næm 3 tháng.

ñ‰n tháng 7/1997, chúng tôi chúng tôi di chuy‹n t§i ÇÜ©ng S.W. 68 vì chúng tôi mua ÇÜ®c nhà trä góp ª khu v¿c này.

Nh© có viŒc lam và có bäo hi‹m sÙc khÕe chÒng tôi anh Ãy Çã ch»a trÎ ÇÜ®c bŒnh khó khæn, bŒnh trÌ. BŒnh này anh Ãy m¡c phäi khi bÎ Çi tù. Anh Ãy phäi mang bŒnh này Ç‰n 10 næm ª ViŒt Nam vì chúng tôi không có tiŠn Ç‹ ch»a trÎ bŒnh này.

Cu¶c sÓng cûa gia Çình chúng tôi hiŒn gi© rÃt hånh phúc va sung sÜ§ng. Chúng tôi ÇÜ®c m¶t cháu ngoåi Betty. Cháu rÃt ngoan, thông minh, và xinh ÇËp.

Ÿ MÏ có nh»ng qÛy hÜu b°ng, ngÜ©i gìa, thÃt nhiŒp. B¶ y t‰ MÏ có chÜÖng trình tr® cÃp sÙc khÕe cho nh»ng ngÜ©I có thu nhÆp thÃp ho¥c thÃt nhiŒp. Vì th‰ chúng tôi luôn s¤n sàng làm viŒc và Çóng thu‰ Çày Çû Ç‹ khi vŠ giá ho¥c khi bÎ mÃt viŒc chúng tôi có Çu®c nh»ng quyŠn l®i này.

Chúng tôi có ÇÜ®c 21 næm tØ 1975-1996 sÓng dÜ§i ch‰ Ç¶ C¶n Sän. Sau Çây là nh»ng gì tôi Çã nghe và Çã thÃy ª ch‰ Ç¶ C¶ng Sän trong nh»ng bu°i h†c tÆp chính trÎ nÖi tôi làm viŒc. H† nói miŠn B¡c không có nhà lá mà chÌ có nhà xây cement. LÀn ÇÀu ra B¡c thæm chÒng tôi chÌ thÃy rÃt nhiŠu nhà lá, mái nhà b¢ng lá, vách nhà b¢ng ÇÃt sình tr¶n rÈ tranh. Tôi không tìm ra ÇÜ®c nhà xây cement nhÜ l©I b†n chúng nói. ViŒt C¶ng nói láo. MiŠn B¡c rÃt nghèo nhÜng b†n chúng nói là rÃt giÀu.

ViŒt C¶ng nói cä th‰ gi§ khäm phøc ViŒt Nam vì ViŒt C¶ng Çã Çánh th¡ng cu§ng quÓc MÏ. H† Çã Çánh ÇÜªi ÇÜ®c xæm læng MÏ ra khÕi ÇÃt nÜ§c ViŒt Nam. Cái Çó là láo.

ViŒt C¶ng nói Gåo ª miŠn B¡c ViŒt Nam tÓn kho rÃt nhiŠu. NgÜ©I dân sÓng no Ãm. Không phäi æn Ç¶n. NhÜng tôi ÇÜ®c thÃy là sau ngày 4/30/1975 nhiŠu Çoàn xe vân täi chª gåo tØ miŠn Nam ra B¡c. Trong th©i gian này dân ª miŠn Nam phäi æn Ç¶n vì không Çû gåo æn. ViŒt C¶ng låi nói láo.

ViŒt C¶ng rÃt ¡c ôn và Çã man. Chúng tôi k‹ låi B†n chúng xº tº hình nh»ng tù binh mà b†n chúng cho là có n® máu nhân dân. Nh»ng ngÜ©i lính ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa thu¶c nh»ng nghành nhÜ an ninh quân Ç¶i, cänh sát Ç¥c biŒt, tính báo, phÜÖng

hoáng, tác chi‰n. Nh»ng ngÜ©i này ÇÜ®c b†n ViŒt C¶ng cho là có n® máu nhân dân. Khi b†n chúng nhìn ra ai thì b†n chúng Çem Çi xº b¡n tải ch‡.

Bây gi© chúng ta häy cùng suy nghï câu nói cûa T°ng ThÓng ViŒt Nam C¶ng Hòa NguyÍn Væn ThiŒu ñØng nghe nh»ng gì C¶ng Sän nói mà hãy nhìn kÏ nh»ng gì C¶ng Sän làm.

Mrs. Ly Hanh

I was born in October 16, 1947 in Saigon. My father and mother were from North Vietnam. They endured a long hard journey to migrate to South Vietnam traversing through Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. My father died in January 2001 when he was eighty six years old. My mother is now seventy nine years old and lives in South Vietnam.

I am the oldest daughter of eleven children (four girls and seven boys). My parents worked so hard to care for eleven of us. We were poor, but all of us graduated from high school. I met Phuc Duc, my husband, during Tet 1968 when he was a captain. We married on February 2, 1969 and had two children: Hieu was born in 1969, and Thao was born in 1971.

Like many army families, we had our share of hardship since we moved around according to wherever my husband was stationed. He was transferred to many places like: Song Be, Loc Ninh, Bien Hoa, Long An etc.

April 1975, an awful event took place. At the beginning of 1975, the Communists invaded South Vietnam beginning in Dong Ha. They moved to Quang Tri then to Hue and Da Nang. On March 1975, they were overran us in Ban Me Thuot, Da Lat, and Nha Trang then finally to Phan Rang and Long Khanh. People escaped their homes and flooded to Sai Gon and in other areas.

It was at this time that the U.S. government cut all funding and military support to the Republic of South Vietnam. President Nguyen Van Thieu resigned and was replaced by Vice President Tran Van Huong. After just three days, President Huong resigned and was replaced by Commander Duong Van Minh.

The North Vietnamese troops kept pouring in all over Saigon which was bombed incessantly. The people of Saigon knew they had no chance whatsoever to stand up to the Viet Cong. In the early morning of April 30, 1975, President Minh announced on the Saigon radio a complete surrender asking his men to put down their arms. Viet Cong troops appeared everywhere in the streets of Saigon. When they saw South Vietnamese army jeeps, they shot at them with their B40s until they blow them up. Dead corpses of army men and ordinary people scattered everywhere. Many corpses were disfigured and unrecognizable; they were left to rot for days. The Viet Congs took over office buildings, the American embassy, the Presidential Palace. When the Vietnamese saw Americans pulling out, they began a mass migration out of Vietnam. Families who migrated from the North in 1954 knew firsthand what it was like to live under Communism. They knew that they would either lose their home and properties and be tried for whatever crime no without cause or merit. They believed that they would either be imprisoned or beheaded. Rich and poor, they left everything—their home, land, gold, money—for freedom.

People who worked for the Defense Attache Office (DAO), a U.S. mission, left Vietnam by planes or by ships. Many of them landed in Guam.

In the final days of April 1975, my husband commanded Division 155 stationed at Trang Ban in Tay Ninh. I was in Thu Duc in Saigon with my two children working for an export company. Like other people, I wanted to escape from Vietnam. I had worked for ten years for USAID, therefore I was given priority with the DAO.

I kept calling my husband for him to come home so we could all leave together, but the phone line was bad. I heard him say, “Hello. Hello.” But he could not hear me. So I decided not to go.

After the day we lost our country, South Vietnamese Republican troops came home to their families. Both of my brothers came home, but my husband did not. After waiting for one week, I feared that he must have died. I drove my Honda to Trang Ban, the last place where his troops and he fought. People at Trang Ban told me to go to Boi Loi to ask for my husband's whereabouts. I saw a female cadre dressed in black pajamas. She handed me a stack of military ID cards with pictures, but my husband's ID was not among them. She told me to go to Kontum which bordered Cambodia. There I saw a group of prisoners guarded by the Communists, but I did not see my husband. On the way, I met women like me who were also searching for their husbands. One woman turned over dead corpses to see if they were her husband.

I finally got a letter from him informing me that he was held in Cu Chi, a place where the Division 25 was stationed.

On the morning of May 8, 1975, I went to Cu Chi to ask about my husband. Many wives of army soldiers gathered in search of our husbands. The guard told us, "You women go home. We are not holding anyone captive here." We waited to evening, and many got frustrated and went home. On the way to catch the bus home, a Communist sympathizer asked us what we came for, so we told him. He promised to help us and led us to the back entrance of the base. He also got permission for us to go in.

I saw my husband. He was bleeding at the throat. He told me that a bullet went through his throat, but it did not hit any bone. It happened when, knowing that they would lose, his men stayed back to destroy all their weapons. He got caught in the

crossfire. They would not treat him for the wound; he washed it clean and kept rubbing salt to it. It healed miraculously.

June 1, 1975, the Communists broadcast on the radios, "We request that all officers of the Republic of South Vietnam from lieutenant on up need to present themselves for reeducation. Bring enough provisions for one month." My husband sent a letter home with a help of a sympathizer telling me that he was held at the Don Bosco High School and to send him food and clothing for one month. I went to the school, but I did not see him. His sisters, my friends, and I believed that all the men would return home in one month. We thought that bringing enough provisions for month meant that they would come home after that one month. But indeed it was not like that at all.

We found out afterwards that those who presented themselves for reeducation camps were categorized according to their rank and position in the military. They were ranked according to their wicknedness, how many they murdered, and how they ate human flesh and drank human blood. Then they were transported to different camps where communications with the outside world was cut.

I lost contact with my husband for five years. In those five years, I continued to work for an export company run by the cadres. Because I was an officer's wife, I was treated differently. The cadres did not trust me, therefore I was not given much responsibilities though I was the head secretary. I did not get raises as the others, so I had to earn more money by trading goods on the markets. My children's education was disrupted. If they finished high school and wanted to advance, they could not do so because of their family background. Students advancing to college must be sons and

daughters of those belonging to the Party. My children's family background was deemed as bad, therefore they did not go on to college.

On January 1980, my husband sent a letter home and told me that he was being held in camp HAZ25 in north Vietnam. He said that he was fine. He told me to do my best for the children and wait for his return.

On March 1980, my two children, Hieu, who was then ten, and Thao, who was eight, and I went by boat to visit my husband, their father. We spent two nights and one day on the boat which dropped us off at Phu Ly. Because it was dark, we spent the night in a very small house. The next day, we took the bus to Tam Ha. We walked along the mountain slope for quite sometime before we reached the prison camp. Our load was so heavy, we had to hire the local people to help us carry. It was nighttime when we got to the camp, so we had to sleep at the guesthouse with other families who were visiting. I quickly befriended other women who like me loaded as much as we could to go visit our husbands. One woman brought 100 kilogram of food to feed her husband.

The next morning, we got up early and started to walk to the camp. After five years in the reeducation camps, I could not recognize who he was at first. It was like that for all of us the first time. They were so thin and sickly. My husband told me he was starving physically and emotionally. He told me many people starved to death. That was the Communist legacy.

I saved up more money and went to visit him again in October 1980. Always, I brought my two children, and the second time my father came along. He said that he wanted to visit my husband and also visit his native village where he grew up fifty years

ago. He said that after fifty years, not much has changed. Places that were bombed by the U.S. were still in ruins. Nothing was being rebuilt.

On the third visit, my husband's sister went with my two children and me. On our way back, we visited Hanoi. The streets, street lamps, houses, prisons, offices were old and dilapidated from the days of the French occupation. Things were left as they were unlike the streets of Saigon that were completely rebuilt by Americans.

On December 1981, my husband, along with other prisoners, was transferred to South Vietnam in Camp T4 in Long Khanh. Every three month, my children and I would go visit him. He was released in July 1982.

We were both unemployed when he was released. I quit my job and worked the market full-time while my husband hired himself on the rickshaw. Our future looked black.

On January 1990, we applied for the H.O. Program, and we were called for an interview on July 1995. We were accepted to come to America on March 1996.

Catholic Charities helped us greatly at the beginning. They paid for all our clothes, food, and rent for several months. They also helped us find work at Unit Parts after being in America for one month. We have worked at Unit Parts for eight years and three months. We were blessed to have a good job with health insurance because my husband suffered for ten years from digestive problems, incurred duing his imprisonment.

We rented a house on N.W. 29th and later bought our own house on S.W. 68th on July 1997.

We have a peaceful life in America. Our granddaughter, Betty, is sweet, pretty, and smart. There are many programs for the poor, the unemployed, and the old. I do not mind working to pay taxes for those times that I may need those services.

We lived under Communism for twenty-one years. They held reeducation classes for us at the work place. They told us that in north Vietnam, they did not have houses built of straws but of cement. The first time I went to visit north Vietnam, I saw houses straw houses built on mud. I did not see one home built on cement. The north was poor, but they said that it was rich. They said that no one in the north suffered from poverty or malnutrition because they had loads of rice in storage. That was a lie. I saw saw cars loaded with rice from the south driven to north Vietnam.

They said that the world admires them because they defeated America and forced them out of Vietnam. What a lie.

The Communists were wicked and barbaric. My husband told me that they executed former security guards, special forces, news journalists, members of the Phoenix operations, and combat units were deemed as those who owed blood to the people.

Living through all that, I remember President Thieu's words, "Do not listen to what the Communists say, but only look at what they do."

Appendix 7

PhÕng vÃn 9/29/02 Em NguyÍn ThÎ Lan

Em sinh næm 1971. Lúc mÃt nÜ§c em m§i bÓn tu°i cho nên nhÕ qua không nh§ gì. Bây gi© em chÌ nh§ mang máng vŠ dï vãng chÙ không nh§ rõ vì cÛng Çã mÃy chøc næm rÒi. Lúc Çi thæm ba em thì em giÙi 10 tu°i. ñi tÀu ra Hà N¶i thì g¥p mÃy ngÜ© xe Ç¥p thÒ ngÜÖì ta chª ÇÒ cho mình Çi rÒi mình trä tiŠn cho ngÜ© ta Ç¥p mình.

Lúc nhÕ thì chÌ bi‰t chÖi thôi. ñi h†c em thÃy bình thÜ©ng chÜa có suy nghï vŠ chính trÎ cho nên không bi‰t là giáo viên có ÇÓi sº v§i mình nhÜ th‰ nào. Em h†c t§i l®p chín xong l§p tám thì nghÌ Ç‹ Çi vÜ®t biên. Không Çi ÇÜ®c rÒi phäi trª låi h†c ti‰p. Lúc trª låi thì không theo bài kiŒp cho nên em phäi ª låi l§p tám.

ñi vÜ®t biên ba bÓn lÀn thì cái lÀn cuÓi bÎ b¡t. Nó ÇÜa ra cái tråi nó nhÓt. ñàn bà con gái thì nhÓt riêng. NhÓt trong vòng næm ti‰ng m¶t ngày. Vì anh em còn nhÕ cho nên nó nhÓt anh em chung v§i má em v§ em ª tråi ngoài. L® døng tøi nó không Ç‹ š rÒi bÕ chÓn, quang h‰t quÀn aó ÇÒ Çåc gÀy gép. Quang h‰t. ChÌ sách cái ngÜ©i rÒi chåy ra ngoài ÇÜòng rÒi ki‰m xe Çi trª vŠ Sài Gòn.

M¶t lúc Çi vÜ®t biên thì chi‰c xe ch¥t lích chª ngÜ©i Çi vÜ®t. Trong cái rØng tÓi tæm thì bÎ tøi æn c¡p chÌa súng hæm doåi là nó xë bán. Nó lÃy cÛ khoai nó nói là Çây là lÜu Çån nó xë l° n‰u không cho nó tiŠn. Mãy ngÜ©I Çi vÜ®t biên låi phäi Ç®I có cái t° chÙc n»a rÒi Çi n»a. M‡I lÀn Çi vÆy tÓn tiŠn l¡m.

VŠ thì mË em bán chª låi rÒi em Çi h†c. MË em Çi bán cä ngày. Em và anh em ª chung v§i bên ngoåi. Ÿ Çó Çû æn uÓn nhÜng không ai san sóc cho nên ông anh thành

hÜ. ñi troi v§I bản rÒi trª thành hÜ hÕng. Ông Ãy quÆy l¡m. TrÜ§c khi ba em ra tù ông Ãy Çã vÆy rÒi. Lúc ba em ra thì ông Ãy 13 tu°i là Çã hÜ rÒi.

Em bi‰t ba em Çi h†c tÆp bÎ hành hå vì ba em vŠ k‹. Ba em ra tù thì buÓn l¡m. Nói là ª trong tù c¿c kh° l¡m. ˆn uÓng thi‰u thÓn. NhiŠu ngÜ©i bản tù chÎu nhiŒn Çói không ÇÜ®c thì b¡t con càu càu châu chÃu æn rÒi bÎ bŒnh ch‰t. Ba em nhìn còn tŒ hÖn bây gi©. Ông Ãy nhìn già nhÜ ngÜ©i sáu bäy chøc tu°i mà lúc ra thì chÌ 45 tu°i. Nhìn Çen ÇuÓi cành cà, không ÇÜ®c nhÜ bây gi©. ChÎ Ç‹ š mÃy ngÜ©i m§ ª ViŒt Nam qua không có ai mà nhìn ÇËp. ThÙ nhÃt là Çen thÙ hai là nhìn già. Ba em không có gách gong, nhÜng nhiêm kách. Cái gì cÛng phäi theo gi© gÃc tåi ª tù æn phäi có gi©, ngû phäi có gi©.

HÒi em ª v§I ba em ngû chÍ nhÃt là 9 gi©. Còn em thì có khi 11 gi©i m§i ngû. Con em tØ ngày nó vŠ v§i em nó ngû không Çúng gi© thì nó låi Ç§ chÖi thì quên dÃc rÒi thÙc khuya thì em bÎ la mÃy lÀn.

Sau ba em ra thì làm giÃy t© Çi qua MÏ. Cái lÀn ÇÀu tiên hy v†ng Çi thì nhà cºa bán rÒi d®n qua bên ngoåi ª tåm. Cái lúc lên phÕng vÃn Çâu có Çi ÇÜ®c thì bên ngoåi Çu°i Çi rÒi phäi Çi mÜ§n nhà. Mà Çi mÜ§n Çâu ÇÜ®c ª riêng nhÜ Çây. Lúc Çó ông anh Çæng ª tù Çâu Çi ÇÜ®c. Phäi ª chung v§i ngÜ©i ta rÃt là chÆt ch¶i. Không ÇÜ®c Çi vŠ buÒn lám. Em låi Çi làm sí nhiŒp may. May máy công nhiŒp dÍ vì máy moc tang ti‰ng. Sau Çó cái sí nhiŒp may bÎ bankruptcy nó Çóng cûa thì em lên Thû ñÙc em may cho tói ngày Çi MÏ. Lúc Çó em làm tÜÖng ÇÓi $50 m¶t tháng.

Ÿ ViŒt Nam em có bÒ mà Çã làm Çám hÕi rÒi. Em làm Çám hÕi tháng 9, tháng 3 næm sau là em Çi. Em cÛng không hi‹u tåi sao em không thÜÖng ông Ãy Ç‹ cho bây gi© cÛng không có hånh phúc. T¿ nhiên em h‰t thÜÖng ông Ãy. SÓ em phäi

c¿c kh° nhÜ vÆy. ñó là cái sÓ riêng n®. N‰u em lÃy ngÜ©i Çó thì bây gi© Çâu c¿c kh° nhÜ bây gi©. Nó là cái duyên sÓ, cái n®. Ông Ãy cÛng Çi ÇÜ®c bây gi© Çæng ª bên Seattle, Washington, có v® có con rÒi. Ông Ãy qua rÒi vŠ ViŒt Nam cÜ§i v®. ñó là cÛng cái duyên cái n®. Lúc m§i lÃy ông KiŒt thì Çâu bi‰t, lÃy nhau thì m§i bi‰t. C¿c nhÜng em có Sandi thì nó cÛng æn ûi

NhiŠu ngÜ©i qua MÏ lâu thì h† g¥p em h† nghï là h† hÖn vì ti‰ng anh ngÜ©I ta dÕi v§I h† có tiŠn hÖn em. Em chÜa có nhà mà không bi‰t bao gi© ÇÜ®c Çû tiŠn Ç‹ mua. Bây gi© em giáng trä h‰t tiŠn xe. Em tính Çi h†c nail. Ÿ MÏ cái dì h† cÛng làm rÒi. Cái gì cÛng phäi nói ti‰ng anh giª. Em không h†c ti‰ng anh n°i. Bây gi© phäi ráng Çi làm Ç‹ trä tiŠn xe.

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