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The Impact of War on Identity Creation in First-Generation Vietnamese Americans

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Abstract

Following the Vietnam War, over 140,000 Vietnamese refugees sought safety in the United States, carrying with them the invisible scars of war. However, survival did not mark the end of their struggles; rather, it introduced new challenges of assimilation, financial instability, and fractured family relationships. Through a comparative analysis of Thi Bùi's The Best We Could Do and the oral history of Dương Trương, this paper explores how the trauma of war is inherited and reshaped across generations, influencing identity formation in first-generation Vietnamese Americans. Furthermore, it examines how the tension between cultural preservation and adaptation creates a complex, ongoing negotiation of selfhood, a central aspect of the Vietnamese refugee experience in America.

"*Má*, to speak in our mother tongue is to speak only partially in Vietnamese, but entirely in war."[1] Vietnamese heritage is deeply entwined with the scars of conflict and the memories of war. This profound rhetoric echoes in the stories of Vietnamese refugees, whose lives are marked by memories of their perilous boat journey; treading between life and death, and driven only by hope of a better future. Among these refugees are author Thi Bùi and my own mother, Dương Trương. As immigrants to the United States, they shared similar journeys of balancing their Vietnamese roots and freshly minted American lives. Both Bùi and Trương's stories recount how the instability of a post-war life shaped their adolescence and continues to reverberate in future generations through strained family dynamics, financial instability, and cultural misunderstandings.

In her graphic memoir, *The Best We Could Do,* Thi Bùi weaves her family tree to illustrate her story. She begins her narrative striving for a connection with her mother, Ma, as she herself is about to become one. She then revisits her childhood and contemplates her family's struggle to assimilate into the American way of life. Going further back in time, she explores how her father's traumas from war shaped his paranoia and jaded mannerisms. She discovers how Ma strove for independence through her career and education, Bùi and her siblings' birth, and their journey to Pulau Besar refugee camp. As they all join Ma's sister in the United States, she recounts the intricacies of her family dynamics, her own identity struggles, and ultimately the sacrifices made for personal freedoms.

Another survivor, my mother Dương Trương, embarked on the perilous journey to flee in hopes of going to college in the United States. Poor and unable to attend school to take care of her siblings, Trương saw a despondent future in Vietnam and chose to leave her family behind. From refugee camps in Hong Kong, to foster homes in Minnesota, to escaping teen marriage, Trương recounts her lonesome journey to find belonging and a sense of community after

[1] Vuong, Ocean. *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*. New York: Penguin Press, 2019.

escaping Vietnam.

Through a comparative analysis of Thi Bùi's *The Best We Could Do* and the oral history of Dương Trương, this paper argues that the trauma of the Vietnam War extends far beyond displacement and shapes identity across generations through survival-driven resilience. Both women's experiences demonstrate how children internalize the violence of war, the evolution of these traumas, and ultimately, the effect on the multicultural identities of both themselves and their children.

Beginning in the 1950s, the brutal civil war for control of Vietnam lasted for three decades. For the United States and the Soviet Union, the conflict was not a civil war, but merely a theater of the Cold War in a volatile and strategic region. In short, the United States supported South Vietnam and its efforts to align the country with Western capitalist ideology, while the Soviet Union and China supported North Vietnam and its pursuit to unify the country under a single communist regime. However, as the Vietnam War and other Indochina wars progressed and intensified, the costs and domestic pressures compelled the US to withdraw combat units in 1973. By 1975, in an event known as the fall of Saigon, South Vietnam officially fell to a full-scale invasion by the North. Vietnamese who did not accept life in the newly unified country (and had the ability to escape) fled; many of whom desperately resorted to illegal means to escape. While the first wave that departed during the fall of Saigon amassed 140,000 refugees, this only continued to grow, as several fled in small boats and sought asylum in neighboring countries.[2] The concomitant dangers of these passages, such as drowning, pirate attacks, poor weather conditions, disease, and food and water scarcity, caused many to die. Eventually, as reconciliation for war damages, some survivors were granted entry into the United States under President Jimmy Carter's Refugee Act of 1980.



For many of these refugees, especially children, resettlement did not mark the end of their trauma. Instead, the violence of the war continued to live within them through confusing, fragmented memories. In The *Best We Could Do,* Thi Bùi recounts her father Bo's traumatic childhood, marked by the devastation of the French colonial invasion. As the French raided his village and slaughtered his community, Bo was forced to hide underground, trapped in silence and fear. Through her illustrations, Bùi amplifies the darkness and hopelessness he endured, bringing his memories to life with haunting depth. They depict a small child engulfed in darkness, the only sign of hope, a speck of light in his large eyes, only focusing on waiting for someone's return.[3] And again, as Bo's family is displaced to another village, Bùi illustrates a tiny, forlorn boy in the foreground immigration lines, and large faceless men.[4] Bùi conveys

[2] Yen Le Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 15.

[3] Thi Bùi, *The Best We Could Do: An Illustrated Memoir* (New York: Harry N. Abrams ComicArts, 2017), 122.
[4] Bùi, *The Best We Could Do,* 128.

through this dark and murky imagery how young children such as Bo struggled to conceptualize the war, instilling in them a deep sense of confusion and hopelessness, tinged with an uncertainty about life. This confusion persists throughout Bo's life as Bùi states, "I grew up with the terrified boy who became my father."[5] This haunting continuity is visualized through Bo sitting in a dark apartment, mirroring the same posture of fear and isolation he held as a child, suggesting that while the war ends, its emotional grip does not. Bùi brings the reader through the eyes of a child and argues that although fragmented, the memories of war are a permanent stamp on one's emotional development, and perhaps even one's sense of self.



These experiences of confusion and turmoil are also evident in Trương's oral history. She notes that she lived day by day, not knowing what the next day held. Some days school was canceled due to bombings; others, her family would travel on foot from town to town, sleeping on the street. However, during her interview, she describes these experiences with disturbing casualness.[6] It was as if the instability and constant upheaval were as routine as brushing her teeth or walking to school. This detachment mirrors how children often process war through an altered, surreal perception of reality.

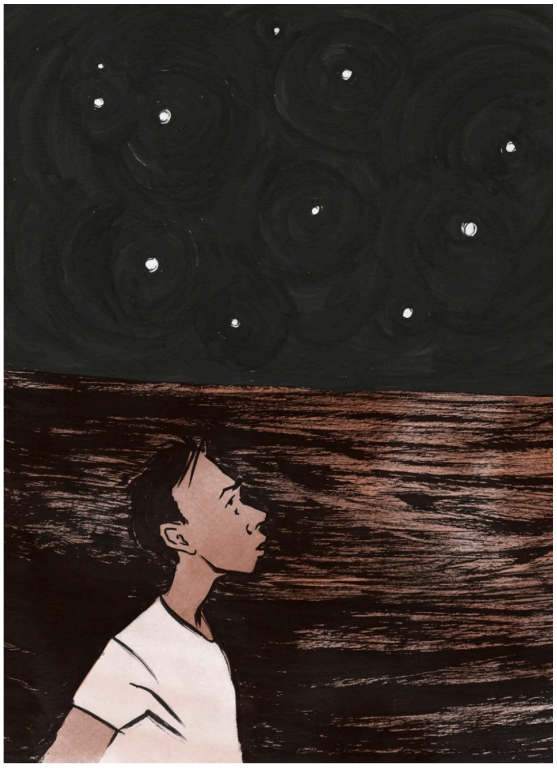
Children's experiences of war are often filtered through a lens of innocence and confusion, leading to fragmented or surreal memories that obscure the true horrors they witness. As another refugee recounts, "[s]tanding on the boat's deck, we saw many dead bodies floating on the water. Through my seven-year-old eyes, I could not understand why there were so many bodies of adults as well. I thought those people must be swimming, and I secretly envied them; I wanted to go swimming, too."[7] Like Bo's hazy recollections of war and Trương's emotionless retelling of her childhood, this account further underscores how children's minds attempt to rationalize the incomprehensible. The stark contrast between the horrors of war and the child's innocent misinterpretation highlights the extent to which trauma distorts memory, turning violence into something almost mundane. Whether through detached

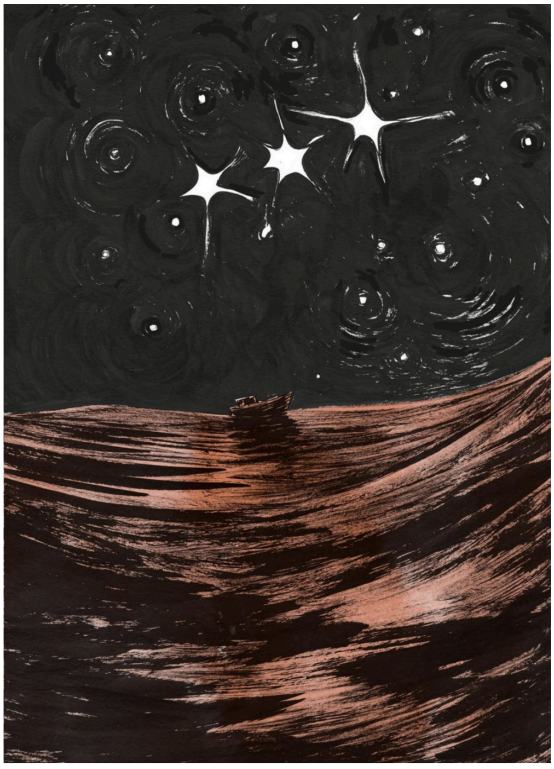


[5] Bùi, *The Best We Could Do*, 128.
[6] Dương Trương, interview by Emma Lê, transcript, Fall 2024.
[7] "A Journey Called Freedom," in *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight, and New Beginnings*, ed. Sucheng Chan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), 121.

narration or surreal imagery, these testimonies reveal how children unconsciously reshape reality as a means of survival, their memories forever shaped by the violence of the war lingering within them.

As the post-war, refugee, and immigration journeys of Bùi, Trương, and other Vietnamese children continued, their traumas changed with time and age. Their traumas evolved from confusion to desperation, as the concern for survival and forced self-reliance became central to their lives. The trauma Bo suffered as a child was reanimated in post-war Vietnam, as he was branded "Nguy," or "false, lying, and deceitful." This label subjected him to constant surveillance and jeopardized his family's safety. Again, Bùi illustrates an adult Bo shrouded in a looming dark abyss.[8] As a child, the abyss consumes Bo with confusion. However, as an adult, it suffocates adult Bo with the socioeconomic hardships and hopelessness of a father and provider. Later, Bùi paints Bo alone yet again, in the vast sea, single-handedly steering the boat to lead his family to escape.[9] This again mirrors the illustrations of Bo's childhood, yet with deepened gravity and urgency to take action.





Likewise, in Trương's oral history, she narrates how her childhood hopelessness evolved into desperation and urgency through her desire to flee.[10] Before the war, the South was seen as a place where young women could pursue their intellectual and professional dreams. It

[8] Bùi, *The Best We Could Do*, 221–22.
[9] Bùi, *The Best We Could Do*, 248–49.
[10] Trương, interview.

"represent[ed] an era of abundant consumer goods and relative freedom."[11] However, in post-war Vietnam, the new regime shut down universities, squashing dreams of educational and professional advancement. Pursuing education was not possible for many women like Trương. With her mother working and her father killed during the war, Trương had to quit school and babysit her neighbors to support her family. Seeing that there was no future in Vietnam, she fled on her own, boarding a small boat with forty people. She states that her "desire to go to college saved [her]" from poverty in Vietnam, the desolate post-war conditions, and from marrying young. Then, as she spent time in refugee camps and foster homes in the United States, she notes that the biggest challenge was overcoming homesickness and navigating adolescence alone. Her wounds from the war and her desire to leave morphed into forced independence and loneliness. This isolation is best exemplified when she recounts a living situation in which she was almost pressured into a forced marriage, stating that "no one protected me," and "no one spoke up on my behalf."[12] She recalls how scared and alone she felt as a young girl. As the desolation she experienced during her childhood forced her to leave home, she was propelled into seclusion and an adolescence in which she had to fend for herself. Both Bo and Trương's experiences illustrate how the violence of the war does not simply end with physical escape but instead transforms into new struggles in adulthood. For Bo, the trauma of war manifests in an unrelenting sense of burden—the responsibility of protecting his family, navigating oppression, and ultimately making the desperate choice to flee. Similarly, Trương's journey reveals how war strips children of their innocence, forcing them into adulthood long before they are ready. Her desperate flight from Vietnam was not just an escape from immediate danger but from a future that had already been stolen from her. Her longing for education and autonomy became the only means to reclaim control over a life shaped by the war. In both narratives, trauma is not left behind but rather reshaped—what began as childhood confusion and fear matures into an urgent, lifelong struggle for survival and agency.

Amidst these lifelong struggles, the multicultural identity of refugees and their children comes into question. While first-generation refugees often cling to their Vietnamese roots for stability, their children often have to balance their heritage with their American identity. In Bùi's memoir, she details the joys of her American childhood—her first time playing in the snow in Indiana, traditional American Christmas, and the "bubble" her parents built around them in America. Further, she mentions how her parents taught her and her siblings to "be respectful," "to take care of one another," and "to do well in school." Yet, these were only the "intended lessons," while unintentional ones came from their "unexorcised demons" and "the habits they formed over so many years of trying to survive."[13] The juxtaposition between Bùi's peaceful, mundane American upbringing and the undertones of trauma encapsulates the struggle between her Vietnamese and American identities. She attempts to balance and understand both her family's "bubble" and the "gray stillness" of her parents' trauma to better articulate her own identity.[14] This internal conflict reflects a broader struggle among second-generation refugees, who inherit their parents' survival-driven mentalities while also trying to integrate into an American society that does not fully understand their histories. The "bubble" that Bùi's parents created was meant to protect their children from the hardships they endured, yet it also distanced

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[11] Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, *Memory Is Another Country: Women of the Vietnamese Diaspora* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2009), 134.
[12] Trương, interview.
[13] Bùi, *The Best We Could Do*, 295.
[14] Bùi, *The Best We Could Do*, 294.

them from fully engaging with their Vietnamese heritage. The weight of their trauma, though unspoken, seeps into Bùi's consciousness, shaping her understanding of identity as something fractured—caught between the safety of American normalcy and the haunting remnants of a past she did not directly experience. Her memoir serves as an attempt to bridge this gap, to reconcile the unspoken pain of her parents with her own experience of growing up.

As a first generation immigrant, Troung notes that the isolation felt in her childhood and adolescence led her to cling to Vietnamese communities and identify more with her Vietnamese identity. She states that due to the language barriers and cultural differences, she lacked the confidence to reach out to other Asian ethnic groups, let alone other racial groups. She states that all of her close friends were Vietnamese, as it helped her feel "less homesick." Further, the increase in the population of Vietnamese immigrant communities in Stockton and Anaheim influenced her move from her foster homes in Minnesota, and her decision to attend Sacramento State University. However, similar to Bùi, Trương states that it was when she had children that she gravitated towards more American ideals. She states that "maintaining a Vietnamese identity for you guys wasn't as important to me" and that we were first and foremost "American-born."[15] This rationale rested upon her feeling like she had to catch up financially and socially because of her immigrant status. Because of her struggles and trauma, she pushed for me and my siblings to be fully American. Like Bùi's parents, the hardships of their journey compelled them to undermine their Vietnamese heritage in order to hopefully provide a more stable environment for their children. As a result, the children and grandchildren of Vietnamese refugees often struggle with balancing their identities, losing their Vietnamese identity because of its association with their parents' traumas.

Ultimately, Bùi and Trương demonstrate how the traumas of war extend far beyond the moment of displacement, shaping not only their own identities but also those of future generations. Whether through Bùi's struggle to understand her parents' silent suffering or Trương's shifting relationship with her cultural identity, their experiences reveal that identity for Vietnamese refugees and their descendants is not fixed but a constant negotiation between past and present, survival and belonging. The narratives of Thi Bùi, Dương Trương, and others in the Vietnamese diaspora highlight the profound impact of war on identity, resilience, and intergenerational relationships. From the fragmented memories of childhood to the evolving traumas of adulthood, their stories reveal the enduring scars of conflict and displacement. Yet, they also testify to the strength of the human spirit and the capacity for adaptation and growth. As we reflect on their experiences, may we strive for greater empathy and understanding, recognizing the universal struggles of those who seek refuge and belonging in the face of unimaginable loss.

[15] Trương, interview.


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and to do well in school.
Those were the intended lessons.
The unintentional ones came from their unexorcised demons...
...and from the habits they formed over so many years of trying to survive.

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Appendix

Transcript of Interview
Interviewer: Emma Lê
Interviewee: Dương Trương

Emma:
Can you describe your childhood in Vietnam?

Dương:
As far as my memory started, I was about 5 or 6…preschool or kindergarten. Well, when I was in first grade, we lived around…our schedule our life depends on the war. Our school schedule was based on the war and where the fight is. You know, day by day, we wake up the next morning and no school because theres bombings near by so we had to stay home. That was around 1975. Yeah so, poverty because most men were enlisted in the war and most women stayed home with their kids, and we had very limited resources. We were very poor. Because of the war, a lot of supplies, food and clothes didn't go to civilians they went towards the war. Food was very basic, rice and vegetables that we grew. The things that were cheap, nuts. Very limited fish. The only time that we had chicken, we raised them. On special occasions we would kill one chicken and that was our feast for the whole family. Things like that. I didn't have a father. My father died in the war. My mom was a single mom, dating here and there. Not very stable. Like I said, I had no idea what tomorrow was because the war and because I lived in central Vietnam.

Emma:
Did you have to move around a lot?

Dương:
We only had to move around once. In April, close to 1975 when North Vietnam was advancing and occupied territory and the South retreated. As they advanced closer to Hue, we had to escape because we didn't want to be in the middle of bombing. But that was the one time we had to escape, pack up everything, left the cat at home. And then we went toward Da Nang towards the South. We stayed as a relatives house. As the North troops advanced, we had to move on foot towards the South, day and night just walking. At night we found a spot on the street and slept on the road. Just lay down rest and sleep. No blanket no clothes, we just carried all of our valuable stuff on our back. I remember I just wear one outfit and a sweater in case it gets cold at night. When we were in Da Nang, my mom wanted to go towards the ocean where the Americans were leaving and loading up their people and whoever wanted to leave they would just take them on. Like what happened in Afghanistan recently. A huge shipped was docked way out in the water. People would pay a small boat to take us out there. Some people flipped over and died right there. And Me wanted to go to the US but my older siblings refused to get on the boat so we stayed. So after everything was settled, we went back to our home.

Emma:
How did you feel as a child, and how do you remember this affecting you as you grew up?

Dương:
As I got older, I didn't see there was a future. I didn't see my future getting better. Because we were getting even more poor as the Communists took over. Money wasn't worth anything so we lost everything. Mom just peeled the roof and sell it. Sell whatever we could to eat. Everything was very uncertain. I didn't see that I had a future. I needed to escape and leave Vietnam.

Emma:
Can you describe that decision to escape, and how you left?

Dương:
I see people left Vietnam and go to Hong Kong from pictures they sent. Friends, neighbors send pictures from America and they look nice, they have a job, they make money. They send money back to support their family. And I want a life like that. And after the war we were so poor. And Me had to go to work to support us. I had 2 younger siblings so I had to not go to school and stay home and take care of them. I was really sad. Everyday, there was a small neighborhood school right next door to my house. I stood outside of the classroom everyday and just learned what they learned. I just wanted to be in school. That's what motivated me to go. I want to go to school. I want to go to college. At home, I couldn't. I cried. Everyday when my siblings came home from school, I took everything out of their backpacks and read everything. I loved to take textbooks out of their backpacks and read them. And I could barely read. But I think that's how I read better because I read whatevers was available. When my siblings were older, I went to babysit for someone else's kids. And they worked in the city for business but they had a home in Dong Anh, a coastal city near the ocean. So I got to back and forth and babysit. When they would come home for the holidays they would take me with them and I would make friends in those neighborhoods. So I was very familiar with the community near the ocean. So one day, the people I worked for sent me down there for chores or something. I happened to down the street, saw my friend, and she said that they were leaving tonight. And I said, okay I want to go. But I told me mom ahead of time, that I want to go and live in America like those people who went to Hong Kong. And Me said, yes. If you want a future then go, so that's what I did. And we didn't have money to pay people to take us. Whoever leave I just followed them. My desire to go to college saved me from marrying young, and have someone take care of me. I was determined. I almost died coming here, to go to college. And I wasn't the best student because I was struggling.

Emma:
Can you describe your journey out of Vietnam, and your experiences in refugee camps?

Dương:
The journey was horrific. I had no idea. I had never thought about what the journey would be like. All I wanted to do was go. I did know that it took 2 nights and 3 days to get to Hong Kong. I had no idea what the ocean was like, what to pack, no preparation whatsoever. Everything was a surprise. The boat was tiny. 30-40 people sitting packed. No room to crouch down the whole

time. I got seasick because I've never been on a boat before. We almost died. We left in December when the weather was bad so we caught a few storms. We floated back to the shore a few times. So we met people, we stayed in China for a month. We were floating around town, begging for food. We stayed along the shore. We used fishnets that the fishermen left along the shore as blankets because it was really cold in China in December. We just survived. Begging for food, digging for sweet potatoes. Wild leaves, berries, whatever we could find. Some people were really nice, they gave us their leftovers. Luckily Chinese New Year was is January, so they were really generous and gave us extra food. Sometimes, the best place I get to sleep in China on my journey was on someone's front door outside. They gave me a rice bag as a blanket. Communists don't allow people to host strangers, so they would be arrested if they let us go into their home. That was the nicest because that was the warmest. So yeah, we almost died a few times. It took us a month and 10 days to get to the refugee camp. My experience in the refugee camp was just homesick. They provided you with food, I got separated because I was an unaccompanied minor. So I got separated from the whole boat for my safety. But people were nice, people who had relatives sent them clothes and they would share with me. The worst part was homesick. Being alone. Not knowing where you were gonna go next. Uncertain. My hope was always to go to the US. Because my dad fought for the US, so I was hoping that they would take me. So they took me. I left the refugee camp and lived with my foster parents for a few years.

Emma:
How did you feel when you first arrived in the United States?

Dương:
I felt awesome. In a way, lonely, very lonely and scared. But, I was out of the refugee camp and I could start my future. For some reason, I believed that the US would give me the option to go to school and fulfill my dreams. No one told me that, but that's what I believed. Very lonely, homesick, but I'm there. I arrived to where I wanted to be. Just unreal. Just wow. How the hell did I get here. I'm here. So, awesome, but mixed feelings but I was ready to start my new life.

Emma:
What barriers did you face while adjusting to life in the United States?

Dương:
In the beginning was language, and different culture but it didn't bother me that much. But I didn't really feel like it was an obstacle at all. Just moving along part of the journey. The people were nice. They always wanted to hear my story. So I told them my story, with very limited English but it didn't bother me at all. I didn't get bullied. Even if I did, I didn't know. People were all nice to me. They gave me Christmas gifts. But living with foster parents is hard. Learning their expectations, and different cultures. They're not my family, and seeing them made me feel homesick. I thought why can't my family be here with me. Why can't I have a normal family like this. I know why, but I was sad I didn't get to grow up with my family. Kind of bittersweet. A part of you wished your family was here. But they treated me nice. And I thought I would never see my family again. At the time, the countries were not friendly. So that made it even more sad. I learned a lot.

Emma:
While you were adjusting to life in the US, how did you feel your Vietnamese identity changed, and how did you try to hold on to your Vietnamese identity?

Dương:
I tried to hold on to my childhood by writing to my parents and family, and told them what's going on over here. Stay connected though letters.

Emma:
You also had a foster sister who was also Vietnamese right?

Dương:
Yes. She also had a brother. I connected with her. We had social services in the community that had other kids in the same situation. Social services set up meetings once a month to connect. They had New Year's celebrations. We made friends. We played games and hung out. We really valued each other. If someone just arrived, we would make sure we met them and bring them to be a part of our group. There were very few of us. We would cook our food. I got to speak Vietnamese with my foster sister. That's how we stayed connected to our roots. At that time we wanted to be with our people.

Emma:
Did this influence your move to California?

Dương:
Yes. One summer, I had a friend who lived in Stockton and I saved enough money to visit her. In Stockton, they had a huge neighborhood, all Vietnamese lived in the same neighborhood. It was so fun, and as soon as I came I felt at home. After I came back, and school started I felt like I was missing something. When I first came to Duluth, I thought that this was it, I didn't know that there were other options, that I could live somewhere else. I felt I needed to be in Stockton. I told my parents I wanted to move and go to college in California. I moved and stayed with a friend and finished high school. I'm glad I did it. In Minnesota, I felt lost. I felt like a big part of me was missing.

Emma:
I remember you saying you also went to school in Anaheim. What influenced that change, and what were those years like?

Dương:
I lived with these people who wanted me to get married to this guy to be on welfare and settled. And, I didn't want to. I wanted to go to college. That was my dream. People tried to talk me into it and persuade me. I was afraid that if I stayed there, I would give in and skip college. I needed to get out of there and out of the city.

Emma:
Do you think that situation was affected by the fact that you were alone, and didn't really have family around?

Dương:
One hundred percent. I felt that no one protected me. No one was there for my own good. No one spoke up on my behalf. I was young, a girl and had no money. They let me live in that house rent-free. I didn't eat much. I couldn't get a job. I didn't have a car. They let me live there and I felt like I might have to return the favor and listen to them because they helped me. Oh I did have a job at this coffee shop. I saved up some money. I know a friend who lived in Anaheim from refugee camp. I contacted them and told them my situation and asked if I could live with them. They said yes. I also knew a friend who said they knew someone who would drive from Stockton to LA. And so he gave me a ride there. I lived with them for a year. I contacted social services and finished high school and found a job. They had a job training program at Long's Drugs. The social services paid for my salary while I was training. They hired me and I worked to support myself. I paid $300 a month to pay for rent and food. I got away from that situation because I didn't want to be trapped and miss my opportunity to go to college. That's why I came here. I applied to Sac State because Di Thao was my friend and was going to go there. I met her in Stockton. I moved to Stockton to live with Di Thao and transferred to the Long's Drugs there. By fall, I moved to Sacramento and went to college.

Emma:
You talked about a lot of Vietnamese friends that you had in high school and college, what was your relationship like with those communities?

Dương:
During high school, I mostly had Vietnamese friends. All my close friends were Vietnamese, from the choir, church. I don't remember having friends other than Vietnamese. Having Vietnamese friends in college, being in the Vietnamese club helped me feel less homesick.

Emma:
As you've gotten older, how has the relationship between your Vietnamese and American identities changed?

Dương:
I clinged to the Vietnamese group because at that time, the language barrier and I didn't feel confident. Outside of my foster family, I didn't understand them and I felt less than them as an immigrant and poor. I never tried to make friends with people other than Vietnamese. They were easier, we had the same background, same journey, we struggled. We had a lot in common. When I got a real job at MCI, I got to know other immigrants because it was a bilingual speaking department. I also worked with white people. That helped a lot. You start to talk to them at work. You just know each other about work. You feel connected to them as immigrants too. After that, I felt confident being friends with anyone.

Emma:
What was it like raising Vietnamese children born in the US?

Dương:
Maintaining a Vietnamese identity for you guys wasn't as important as me. You were American born. I went through having to catch up, missing school in Vietnam. I felt like I had to catch up and barely maintain enough to go to college. I had to support myself. Academically, I was just average. But for you guys, I didn't want you to have to do that. I didn't want you to have to catch up like I did. I wanted to raise you to speak English first. The food, the traditions, things that we do at home would be Vietnamese. But I want you to grow up American first and foremost. I embraced and celebrated all holidays. The holidays here are like culture. Like Christmas. The stores, TV shows, movies. I want you to have to absorb all of that. To stay connected with our culture, through food. You are going to compete as Americans, not immigrants. We had to work twice as hard to catch up. To compete. That's how I feel. So I want you to be ready. I decided to raise you guys full of Americans.

Emma:
Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. Is there anything else, last things you want to add?

Dương:
No.