

April 1, 1940

Saigon, Viet Nam

Home was one room. It had wooden walls, a brick floor and roof, and was located in a poor neighborhood just a fifteen minute bike ride outside of Saigon City. Like the homes of many poor families in the suburbs surrounding Saigon, our furnishings were few. A charcoal stove sat on a small table at one end of the room that served as a kitchen. The only other furnishings were my father's desk, one chair, and three beds; one for my parents, one for my brothers and one for my sisters and me. It was home to Le Van So, Le Nguyen and their nine children; there were four boys and five girls. I was the seventh.

My father worked as an accountant for the ministry that provided water and electricity for Saigon City; my mother sold vegetables in the local market. We children helped at home and went to school because education was important to my parents.

Viet Nam was a colony of China for approximately 1,000 years ending in 938 AD. There were also several subsequent periods when China attempted to control the area we now know as Viet Nam. Under the Chinese, the people suffered greatly. Stories were told of Chinese soldiers who would spit on the ground and tell an elderly Vietnamese person to pick up the spit and eat it. If the person refused to comply; the soldiers would beat the elderly person with their guns. The soldiers also raped young women and then would shove a stalk of sugar cane in the women's vaginas. As a result, many of these women died.

Viet Nam was also heavily influenced by the French between the years of 1859 and 1954, first as a protectorate and later as a colony. These were difficult times for the people of Viet Nam. To amuse themselves, French soldiers were known to rape and beat people. Under the French, people were forced to work on rubber plantations without food or payment. The fumes from the sap of the rubber trees were damaging to the workers' lungs. To supervise the

workers, the French hired Vietnamese men who were willing to be cruel taskmasters over their countrymen in exchange for privilege and financial advantage. My parents met while working on one such plantation. They were paid very little; only enough money to buy a little rice and they were given very poor accommodations. The deprivation and brutal treatment of the workers bred in my father a deep hatred of the French people. My parents managed to escape the plantation. They fled to Saigon where they were married. It was their experiences during this period that led my father to become involved in activities that would ultimately cost him his life and would negatively impact our family forever.

When I was eight years old, my life changed. The French army in conjunction with the Vietnamese security police had collaborated to make Viet Nam a French colony. My father, Le Van So, was part of a resistance movement that hoped to overthrow the French and gain independence for Vietnam. The Vietnamese Secret Police knew that leaders of this movement met from time to time in our home. One night, the secret police broke into our home and arrested my father and five other men. They were taken to the police station for questioning. The investigation lasted for two days and nights during which they were beaten repeatedly in an attempt to get them to confess to the crimes of which they were accused.

The day after my father's arrest, my mother and I went to the police station where my father was being held near the Saigon Airport. We could not actually go to the police station; we stayed back at a distance, careful to be sure we were not seen. As we watched, we saw my father and the others as they were led out of the station to a truck. Their hands were handcuffed behind their backs and the guards shoved them along with fists and the barrels of their guns. They were loaded in to the back of a waiting truck. When the truck drove away, we followed as quickly as we could run behind, but trying to avoid being seen. The truck went to my father's office building.

The soldiers tore his office apart looking for evidence of his activities as part of the resistance movement. When they were finished, they loaded the men back into the truck and drove away. We followed on foot and then in a pedi-cab, trying not to lose track of the truck and yet not be noticed. The truck finally stopped at a restaurant/bar. The soldiers and guards went in to drink beer, leaving only a couple of security police on guard. The guards were unhappy to have been left outside on duty while their comrades relaxed and drank inside. One of the soldiers brought beers out to them and soon they, too, were talking and laughing as they enjoyed their beer.

While the guards were distracted, my father jumped down from the back of the truck and started to run. One of the guards saw my father jump down and the guards ran after him. They had little difficulty in catching him and returning him to the truck. They were angry at having been disturbed and inconvenienced and treated him harshly as they dragged him back to the truck.

I never saw my father again.

Some time later, another man who had been in that prison at the same time, told his family that he had heard my father's screams as he was tortured. A member of that man's family came to see my mother. He told her that on the third day of my father's imprisonment, he was forced to drink huge amounts of liquid. Then soldiers in heavy boots jumped on my father's abdomen until they burst his bladder. His body was thrown into an old abandoned well.

From that time on, life became even more difficult. With the help of my oldest sister, my mother struggled to support herself and her nine children by buying vegetables from local farmers and selling them in the market. My oldest brother bought bread and sold it door to door in the surrounding neighborhoods. We younger children went to school and helped at home by doing the cooking and cleaning. We were very poor. I had two dresses and little to eat,

but my mother somehow found enough money so that, with the exception of my two oldest sisters, all the children, went to school.

I completed the Baccalaureate Part I in 1957 and the Baccalaureate Part II in 1961 in Saigon. I continued my educations at the University of Saigon, Faculty of Law and earned a Bachelor's Degree in Civil Law and Sociology in 1963. That same year, my mother developed heart disease and could no longer work. It fell to two of my brothers and an older sister to support our family.

One night about 9:00pm, I was walking home from an evening typing class when I noticed a very handsome young man in uniform on a motor bike was following me. He slowed down, started a conversation with me and offered me a ride home. He was a student in an academy that trained military reserve officers. Over the next six months, Tran Tang Nghia and I became friends. In time our friendship blossomed in to love and we planned to marry when we were both finished with our training.

After graduation, jobs were very hard to find even for someone who had finished university, so my mother encouraged me to take training to become a midwife through the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Program. I completed the program and was awarded with my certification as a midwife on June 6, 1964.

Because of the war, it was still difficult to find any employment. I had been looking for work for almost a year. One day, the sister-in-law of one of my school friends told me she had heard that a Filipino contractor with the Pacific Architect Engineering Corporation might be hiring. My friend's sister-in-law drove me to the hotel where the contractors were housed and waited in the car while I went to inquire about a job.

I knocked on the door of the man's room and waited. When he opened the door, I told him that I had heard he might be hiring. He motioned for me to come in and shut the door. He

said nothing. He shoved me down onto the bed, began pulling at my clothes, and raped me. I was a virgin and very frightened. I screamed and begged him to leave me alone. That only made him angry. When he was finished, the sheets were bloody and I was hysterical. My culture places a very high value on a woman's honor which is in great part measured by her virginity. Having "lost my cherry", I knew both my family and I would be disgraced and my fiancée would not marry me.

My screaming and crying had been heard by people in the adjoining rooms. The walls separating the rooms were only heavy tarps. The people in the room next door began waving flashlights on the walls in hopes of quieting the disturbance. This frightened the man as he feared the authorities would be called. I quickly pulled up the pants that I was wearing under my dress. My life had been ruined. I was desperate. It seemed my best option was to throw myself out the window and end my life before anyone could know of my disgrace. As I lunged out the window, the panicked man grabbed my ankle and pulled me back into the room. This was not an act of caring, compassion, pity or even guilt. He sought only to protect himself. He knew if I died jumping from his window the police would come to investigate and he would be arrested. He lifted me to my feet and shoved me out the door into the hall. Traumatized and shamed, for the first time in my life, I felt truly alone. In that brief encounter, I had lost not only the possibility of a job, but my virginity, my reputation, my fiancée and all hope of a promising future. No honorable man would want to marry me.

Downstairs, my friend's sister-in-law was waiting. I did my best to pull myself together and went down to the car. I decided not to tell her what had happened. If it had been reported, my whole family would have borne the shame and reproach. I went home and that night I slept in my mother's bed for comfort, but I told her nothing about what had happened to me. The next morning, my mother told me she had had a strange dream in which

Buddha told her that I would have a baby. I was terrified. I realized that there was the possibility that my mother's dream could come true if I had been impregnated by my attacker.

Two months later, I left home. For the next three months I drifted. I would stay a few nights at the home of a friend and then move on to another friend's house as I continued to look for work. I needed to support myself, but my country was at war and, despite my education, employment opportunities were scarce. One day a friend who knew of my circumstances, suggested that I might be able to find work at a bar that was frequented by American soldiers. I hated the idea because I knew that the women who worked in those bars quickly became prostitutes. As I approached the bar, a young woman carrying a baby came out of the bar and asked if I was looking for a job. She said that she was not going to be working there anymore because she was going to live with the American soldier that was her baby's father. I told her I was looking for a job and desperate. She invited me to stay with them that night.

The next day I dressed myself carefully in the prettiest dress I owned. It was a beautiful orange tunic worn over black pants. I went to the bar to talk with the owner about a job. As I entered the dark room, I held my head high hoping it would divert attention from the sick feeling of fear and desperation that gripped my heart. While my eyes were adjusting to the darkened room, a Vietnamese man approached me and said, "Ma'am, my boss, he want to see you." He said his boss was inviting me to sit at his table. I had not had a chance to scan the room to locate the owner. I was worried that the owner of the bar would notice me and be angry since I wasn't working for her. I looked in the direction the man indicated to see the table where his boss was sitting. The man at the table the man had pointed out was a Spanish-American man with large dark eyes, dark hair, and a moustache. He appeared to be several years older than I was. When I approached the table, the man rose and offered me a chair. He

extended his arm to shake my hand in greeting.

“My name is Philip O’Dell. What’s your name?” he said.

“Le Ngoc”

“You are very beautiful, Le Ngoc, and very graceful. You shouldn’t be working in here.”

I told him that I had few alternatives. I had no place to live, no money, and I needed to support myself. He said he was a civil engineer from San Diego, California. The company he worked for had been contracted by the American government to build a highway connecting Saigon to the ocean.

Mr. O’Dell was kind to me and very respectful. He bought me dinner and invited me to dance. He asked me many questions about myself and my family. As the evening came to a close, he asked me if I would be interested in going to a night club for dinner and dancing the following evening. It meant one more day of not having to work in the bar so I decided to accept his offer. He offered to have his driver to take me to the home where I was staying that night and said he would have his driver pick me up the following evening.

The next evening, the driver picked me up and took me to a very nice night club in Saigon. Everything was lovely and I had a wonderful time. We talked for hours because he seemed to want to know everything about me. He did not want me to have to go to work in a bar, so he said that I could live in a room at his home and he would give me money so I would not need to go to work in the bar. He told me that he was a Christian and he would not expect anything in return. He felt Jesus had prompted him to save me from working as a prostitute in that bar. His faith was very important to him. Philip knew I was a Buddhist, but he told me what it meant to be a Christian. What he told me was all very foreign to me, but he had been very kind and I felt I could trust him.

Over the next two months, I lived in a room at his house and almost every night he

would take me out for dinner and dancing. At the end of the evening he would kiss my forehead or my cheek to say goodnight.

As we got to know each other, I came to trust him. I told him that I was not a virgin because I had been raped. He was very angry that the man who had raped me, but he said that knowing I was not a virgin did not change his feelings for me.

The relationship continued to develop and Philip asked to meet my family. I told him, "No." They did not know about my rape or even where I was and I was ashamed. While Phillip was working during the day, I would go to the market and do little things around the house.

One evening, after a lovely time, Philip took my hand, looked into my eyes and asked me if I would marry him. He said, "If you say, 'Yes', tomorrow I will go to the U.S. Embassy and complete the application necessary to marry a national." I was thrilled. I loved this man who had been so good to me. Three months passed before we were granted permission to marry. We were married in a Christian church by a Vietnamese pastor who also spoke English. Before he agreed to marry us, the priest talked to each of us separately. He wanted to be sure that this was something I really wanted to do. It was December 1966.

We had a good life together. Phillip hired servants to do the housework and care for all my needs. When he came home each evening, he would ring the bell and call out, "Hey, Crazy Cook, I'm home." I loved cooking good meals for him and he teased me by giving me the nickname, "Crazy Cook."

After we had been married about six months, one of the servant girls asked me to go with her to meet her mother. We visited her mother and I gave her mother some money to help her as they were very poor. As we left her mother's house and headed into the street, I saw one of my older brothers coming down the street. We were both shocked to see one another after so many months. He was angry with me and demanded to know why I had left my

family with no warning or explanation. He wanted to know where I had been and said that our mother had been searching for me for over a year. He insisted that I must go with him to see our mother who had been so hurt and worried since my disappearance, but first he wanted to go with me to my house to meet my husband. As we walked, my brother told me that in 1963 his company had sent him to train as a meteorologist at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas.

Philip was delighted to finally meet someone from my family. Philip showed my brother the marriage certificate and put my brother at ease. My brother asked Philip if he could take me to see our mother. Philip agreed and went with us to see her and show her the marriage certificate. It was a tearful reunion with my family. I was careful not to tell them about the rape or that I had become so desperate that I had gone to look for work in a bar. It would only have caused them hurt and shame. Before we left, Phillip invited my family to dinner in an expensive restaurant. He also gave them money to help provide for them.

During our life together, Philip often talked to me about his faith. He explained what it meant to be a Christian and the difference between Protestants and Catholics. At first it was very hard to understand. His God was so different from the gods I had known and worshipped.

In July of 1967, Philip had to return to the U.S. His current job had been completed and he had to return to San Diego, California to negotiate another contract. I was worried that he would not come back to Vietnam and I would never see him again. That is what had happened with so many women who had relationships with American soldiers. The soldiers would leave with promises to return, but the women would never hear from them again. It seemed like a very long month, but, as in everything else, my Phillip was a man of his word. He said he would come back to me and he did.

Philip's new contract was to build the first freeway in Vietnam. That highway would be very important in improving the transport of men and materials as part of the war effort.

We were happy and the months passed quickly. I was surprised when Philip's Driver came to the door one day in the middle of the day. He was very upset and said that Philip had been shot in the head by Viet Cong snipers. He rushed me to the hospital, but Philip was already dead. It was February 1968. We had been married just fourteen months.

I was in shock. Waves of grief washed over me as I struggled to deal with the terrible loss of my husband. I sent a telegram to Philip's mother and sister telling them of his death. As his widow, Philip had left me money, diamonds and gold. I sent money to his mother and his sister so they could come to Vietnam to pick up his body. They took his body back to the U.S. to be buried in his home town of San Diego.

After Philip's death, I felt lost and alone. I decided to go back to live with my mother. My older sister who had always helped my mother selling vegetables was married now and had moved away. Only the youngest brother and sister were still living at home. I took my sister's place helping my mother.

The war was always a factor in our everyday lives, but shortly after I returned to my mother's home, the fighting in our area became very intense again. We could no longer sell in the market and we had to hide. If it had not been for the money Phillip had left me, we would not have been able to survive.

I had a brother who was working for Pacific Architect Engineering in Qui Nhon. In January of 1969, he and his wife invited me to come live with them and apply for a job on the same base where he was working. I applied, was interviewed and was hired by Col. McClendon to work for the U.S. Army Construction Engineering Brigade. I worked on the base as a crash control officer for military aircraft. I worked twelve hour shifts as the only person in a small room in a restricted area. My job required constant visual vigilance and quick response. I listened to radio conversation between pilots and traffic control, recorded air craft type,

flight number, tail number and estimated time of arrival for all flights.

My mother's heart condition grew worse and in April of 1971, I resigned from my job on the air base and returned to Saigon to care for my mother and two youngest siblings.

Because I had experience on the air base, in July of 1971, I was able to get a job working for Philco Ford Corporation's main office located 90 km south of Saigon. The general manager of the company was a retired Colonel from the U.S. Air force. He was impressed that I had worked on an airbase and hired me on the spot. They had a contract on the Can Tho Airbase in the delta working with the U.S. 7th Air Force Division. They rented an apartment for me in Can Tho. My work for them put me at risk so they gave me a 38 caliber pistol and trained me to shoot it very well. I carried it for protection whenever I left the base.

While working on the Can Tho Airbase, I met and fell in love with a Vietnamese Air force Lieutenant, To Ngoc Vien and we planned to marry. In March, I was pregnant with his child when he was hit by rocket fire on the base and killed. In August of 1972, I gave birth to his child.

"In early January of 1973, the Nixon White House convinced the Thieu-Ky regime in Saigon that the U.S. would not abandon the GVN" (Government of the Republic of Vietnam – South Vietnam)" if they signed onto the peace accord. On January 23rd, therefore, the final draft was initialed, ending was initialed, ending open hostilities between the United States and the DRV" (Democratic Republic of Viet Nam- North Vietnam). "The Paris Peace Agreement did not end the conflict in Vietnam, as the Thieu-Ky regime continued to battle Communist forces." *

In March of 1973, I learned that one of my brothers had been hit by rocket fire at Bien Hoa and died. His wife went to Saigon to stay with my mother.

"From March 1973, until the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, ARVN" (Army of the Republic of Viet Nam) "forces tried desperately to save the South from political and military collapse. *

By June of 1973, the U.S. Army had begun its withdrawal from Vietnam, so I no

longer had a job. I returned to Saigon again to live with my mother. I found a job on the Bien Hoa Airbase 30 km from Saigon working for the U. S. 101st Airborne doing the same type of work I had done in Qui Nhon. A military officer would come each day in a truck and drive me to the base and return me in the evening. The fighting continued, but by end of 1974, the 101st had also withdrawn, so again, I lost my job.

In December of 1974, I was successful in getting a job working for Pacific Architect Engineering at the Phan Thiet Air Field as an interpreter for the International Committee Control Supervisor. ICCS was comprised of four delegations, one each from Hungary, Poland, Indonesia and Iran. I would accompany a Colonel and a Captain for each of the delegations when they went on missions to retrieve leaflets the Viet Cong were dropping over the countryside. The leaflet told the people to stop fighting because a cease fire had been signed in Paris by South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu and Pham Van Dong, the leader of North Vietnam. I translated the leaflets for the U.S. government and the delegations charged with the responsibility of overseeing the cease fire. All of the US Army forces withdrew from the Republic of South Vietnam.

Two weeks after our first trip to retrieve the Viet Cong leaflets, we attempted a similar mission in the jungle of Ham Tan Province. Just as the helicopter landed, we came under gunfire from the Viet Cong. We jumped out of the helicopter, but before we could pick up any leaflets, we heard shots being fired. The Polish colonel took shelter behind a large tree and I crouched behind the bulk of his body. We waited about ten minutes in fear. When there was a brief pause in the gunfire, the colonel grabbed me and put me in the helicopter and jumped in behind me. The pilot and the Captain of the Indonesian delegation also returned and we fled as soon as the pilot could take off.

Viet Cong leaflets bore the image of the Viet Cong flag, a red field with a single yellow star. They told the people they should not trust the Americans or the South Vietnamese Army. It was part of the psychological war being fought for the minds and hearts of the peasants.

In January of 1975, the Director of Pacific Architect Engineering came to my office to tell me that they, too, were withdrawing from Viet Nam. Again, my job had ended and I returned to my mother in Saigon.

April 30, 1975, Saigon fell into the control of the Communist forces. South Vietnam officially surrendered and the communists took control of the government. President Nguyen Van Thieu and the general in charge of all of South Viet Nam's armies, General Cao Van Vien, had already been flown to the United States and reunited with their wives. That day is called "Black Day" in South Viet Nam. One of my last duties was to accompany the U. S. General's wife to the airport. She offered me the opportunity fly out with them, but I did not feel I could leave my mother and siblings. That was a decision I later regretted.

After the surrender, all my siblings and their families returned to the one room that was my mother's home. None of us could find work. My #4 brother and I supported all of us with some money we had saved while working on the air base.

It was May of 1975, when the husband of my daughter's babysitter introduced me to Tran Thanh Van, a professor of literature at Saigon University. The professor showed interest in me, and soon, I began living with him. By July, I was pregnant. He had a nice home on the fourth floor of his building, a housekeeper and a cook. This relationship gave me some measure of security, but this was a very dark time in Vietnam. When I began living with Tran Thanh Van, my oldest daughter continued to live with his sister in the Delta. Eventually, his sister adopted my oldest daughter.

The new communist government was arresting professionals and all the officers who had served in the army of South Vietnam. In November of 1975, Tran Thanh Van was arrested.

In Vietnam, prisoners received only a small amount of rice and a bit of dried fish that had usually gone bad. If their families did not bring them food and clothing they would starve. Every week, I went to the prison to take him food I had purchased with the dwindling stash of money, diamonds and gold that Phillip had left me. I supported my husband's mother and also gave her money for a wedding for one of her other sons. Later she came to me again asking for money to pay for a wedding for her ninth son. I gave her some, but she wanted more and became very angry with me. When Tran Thanh Van was arrested, his family had done nothing to help me. His mother told me that she would tell her son to leave me and marry someone else.

In January of 1976, I gave birth to my second daughter, Tran Le Thanh Loan, a full month before she was due. My time was consumed with caring for my daughter, my family, and taking provisions to the prison.

February 13, 1976, the door bell rang. As we were not expecting guests, the housekeeper pulled back the curtain over the window in the door. She saw armed security police and two civilians. One of the men shouted at her through the door, "No more freedom!" The servant stepped away from the door. Frightened, my heart racing, I opened the door. In my mind, again, I thought, "My life is over."

The men shoved their way into the room and told us to sit down and not move. We sat quietly. I worried about my infant daughter asleep in the next room. While one of the men kept an eye on us, the others began searching the house. They ransacked the house emptying drawers and cupboards and slicing mattresses. They took the money, diamonds and gold I had hidden in the mattress, the last of the U. S. dollars tucked into the headboard of the bed, and the gold I had hidden in a statue of Buddha. When they were finished, one of the civilians read an order for my arrest. They knew I had worked on three military air bases. I was accused of

working for the U. S. C. I.A. and of being an enemy of the Vietnamese people. They said I would be taken to the Saigon Central Security Police Station. They allowed me to take a nightgown, toothpaste and a toothbrush. I tried to go kiss my daughter. They would not allow it. They insisted that I no longer had any rights. They put me in the back seat of a civilian car. As we drove, one of the men kept saying, "You have more, more money, diamonds and gold. Tell us where it is!" I told him, "No, Sir. You have already taken it all. I have nothing left but my body."

The next morning, the housekeeper and cook had to leave our house. There was still some money left from what Philip had left me. The security police had not found the 4 ounces of 24K gold I had hidden in the frame of Ho Chi Minh's photograph. In preparation for the possibility of just such a day, I had told the woman who was my daughter's caregiver that if anything happened to me, she was to take my daughter and the gold to my older #6 sister. The cook took my one month old daughter to my older sister and told her that I had been arrested. She said that a sign had been posted outside my door that said, "This is the property of the government of Vietnam."

I was sent to a prison 90 km from Saigon in Long Thanh City. It was a former orphanage that had been converted into a prison. I was placed in a cell with nineteen other women in squalid conditions. Each woman was allowed the width of three bricks on which to sleep. I was given the job of dividing food among the prisoners. The meager rations of rice or sometimes a few bits of vegetables in a soup often made us sick. The vegetables used for the soup had been fertilized with human feces and they were not washed well before being added to the soup.

Once, from a distance, I saw a Vietnamese Air Force Sergeant I had known at Can Tho Air Base. When he caught my eye, he smiled. Prisoners never smile, so I knew immediately something was wrong. His smile seemed to say, "I win; you lose." He was, no doubt, an informer for the North Vietnamese. A couple of weeks later, I heard that he had been released.

During my imprisonment, my # 6 sister used the gold to care for my daughter and to bring me what food she could to help me stay healthy. I also worked in the prison garden for the first two years. We were given two small cans of water each day. This had to suffice for drinking, bathing and all personal hygiene. We would use some of the water to grow vegetables and fertilized them with human feces.

After two years in prison, one day I was called to the office of the woman who ran the prison. She was the head of security and a member of the Communist Party. She knew that I had been trained as a midwife. She informed me that she was making me the manager of the dispensary. I had no medical training beyond my training as a midwife, but my efforts were the only medical care available to the prisoners. Many prisoners suffered from Cholera, diarrhea, Dysentery, Scabies, and other illnesses. I delivered babies and provided what care I could, including writing prescriptions whenever medicines were available. Many of the prisoners died.

This job afforded me a room to myself with a bed, a white uniform, a stethoscope, and a large container of water every day. I was also given freedom to move about the prison during the day to tend to other prisoners, but I had to return to my private cell at night.

As years passed, the American government pressured the Vietnamese Communist government to release prisoners who had already served significant sentences. They finally began releasing some criminals and unimportant political prisoners. In August of 1982, I was surprised by the notice that I was to be released. They had decided that I had been rehabilitated.

When I was released, I went to the home of my #3 older sister in Saigon. I was given a three month temporary residency permit which allowed me to stay in Saigon, but I was on parole and was watched daily. Every three months, I had to go back to the Security Police station and reapply for another three month temporary residency permit. I moved from time

to time living with friends so as not to inconvenience anyone for too long. I had no job and no more money, so I was at the mercy of family and friends.

In November, I began to find work as an English tutor for people in the Saigon City, Cholon City, and Phu Nhuan City area. People I worked for would tell their friends about me and others would ask me to teach their children. This always had to be done very secretly because the government was very suspicious of anyone who spoke English or wanted to learn English.

Life was very difficult and there seemed no escape from the unbearable conditions. I became despondent and considered suicide. I was considering throwing myself in front of one of the government trucks. In my desperation, I thought of going to the protestant Christian church I had visited when I married Philip to try praying to the statues of Mary and Jesus Christ outside the church. When I arrived, there was a worship service going on inside. I ventured into the building, but I stayed in the back near the door. Through my tears, I gazed on the statue of Christ and prayed earnestly to Jesus Christ to open a way to escape. As I prayed, a thought came to me. I remembered that before I went to prison, I had met a man who worked at the U.S. Embassy. I decided to look for him.

One day when I was sitting in a restaurant, I saw this man sitting at a table near me. He was speaking in hushed tones with his companions about the Communist Party, but I couldn't make out what he was saying. I listened for a few minutes and then went to his table, introduced myself, and asked where he had been working since I last saw him. He said that he was still working at the U.S. Embassy in the Defense Army Office. We renewed our acquaintance and I became friends with him and his wife and family. In September of 1982, he helped me write a letter to Washington, D.C., requesting assistance in leaving the country because my work for the U.S. during the war had led to my imprisonment and, upon my release, made it difficult for me to find work and support myself, let alone my children. I found

work in a coffee shop as a servant washing dishes and cleaning up after the owner's dog. I was given little pay and no food. I had been working there for about three months when the owner died. One of our customers was an actor and comedian named Kha Nang. When he learned that I had worked for the Americans, he said I should work teaching English. He introduced me to a friend he thought might be interested in hiring me.

I continued to work teaching English in private homes when and where I could. One day while I was teaching, the lady of the house had a guest come to visit. The guest overheard me working with the children and came to speak to me. She said that she was impressed with the way I was teaching because I was easy to understand. She asked me to come to her house to teach her daughter English. I was happy to have another job. Times were difficult, so even with the income from these tutoring jobs, I was barely able to survive. All the money I earned went to buy rice. I still was not able to go see my oldest daughter because I could not afford to travel to the Delta where she lived with the woman who had adopted her.

The first day I went to the home of Mrs. Mai Nguyen, I was very surprised. Her home was right behind the Catholic church where I had gone to pray the month before. Our friendship grew and I shared with her my desire to leave the country. On one occasion, she pulled me aside quietly and told me that she had a brother who could help me escape Vietnam by guiding me on foot across the border into Cambodia. I wanted to go, but everything I earned was spent on food. I had no money to hire him. She offered to give her brother the money required for him to help me leave, but I had no money and no idea how I could survive even if I made it to Cambodia.

During the period between 1983 and 1985, I lived with my sister and brother-in-law and rode a bicycle to private homes to teach English. It was February of 1983. All through the New Year celebrations I had been despondent. My life seemed hopeless and again I was thinking of

suicide. One day I borrowed a bike and rode to my oldest sister's house to have lunch. When I arrived, her daughter handed me a letter for me that had been sent to their address. The letter was from the Army International Development Office in Washington, D.C. When I realized that the letter was a reply to my September letter, I shouted, "I have a letter from the U.S." My sister was alarmed and cautioned me sternly, "Be quiet! You are being watched by the Security Police!"

The letter was a copy of a letter that had been sent to the American Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand requesting that they assist Miss Ngoc Thi Le to emigrate to the U.S. through the Orderly Departure Program. It was signed:

Ms. Darlene Wagner Director of AID
Washington, D.C.
Cc: Ngoc, Thi Le
U.S. Embassy Thailand

Soon thereafter, I went to talk with another friend who had also worked at the U.S. Embassy and I told him about the letter I had received. He suggested I talk to three men who had also been political prisoners and released. One had been a Captain in the South Vietnamese Air Force and the other had been an officer with U.S. Aid. They told me I was very lucky to have the letter, but that it would be no good to me as long as I was in Vietnam. The Communist government would never allow me, a former political prisoner, to exit Vietnam through the Orderly Departure Program even with a letter from the U.S. government. They told me that I would first have to escape Vietnam if I ever hoped to get to safety in the United States.

I went directly to the home of the woman who lived behind the church. I told her that I

was ready to attempt the escape across the border into Cambodia. She told me to go get whatever I planned to take with me and come spend the night at her house that night. She would have her brother come for me early the next morning. He arrived and we left quietly before daylight. It was March 23, 1985.

We walked for three days and three nights and then traveled by boat through the Delta of the Mekong River to the Cambodian border. My guide paid bribes, first to the Vietnamese border police and then to the Cambodian border police. I hid in the bottom of the boat while he negotiated with them. We slept outdoors that night and then bought passage on a Cambodian commercial boat headed to Phnom Penh. In Phnom Penh, my guide paid the driver of a passenger truck to take us to Kong Pong Som on the Cambodian coast where we went to the home of a friend of his. It was March 26, 1985. I stayed with this family waiting for a chance to continue my escape. After a week, my guide left and returned to Vietnam. The family with whom I was staying lived near an open market. For the next three months, I stayed with the man's daughter and I helped her selling produce in the market.

In July, I found a job washing dishes in a coffee shop near the market. The shop was owned by a Vietnamese family. They paid me 10 rias a day (the equivalent of ten cents) and allowed me to live with them in exchange for teaching their daughter English. The child's mother had a sister in Australia and she hoped that someday her daughter would be able to go live with her aunt.

While working in the coffee shop, I met another Vietnamese vendor from the market. Vietnamese people who had fled Vietnam to live in Cambodia were called Khmer Krome. This new friend told me she had a daughter who lived in Phom Phenh and had been employed by the sugar industry before the sugar fields had become the killing fields under the Khmer Rouge. Her daughter no longer had a job and was planning to go back to Vietnam to look for work. She was looking for someone to stay in her house in Phom Phenh and look after things while she was away. I agreed to go. While there, I found work for a month teaching English to a woman in the neighborhood.

Next-door to the home I was house-sitting was the home of a Cambodian Security Officer. We became friends and one day he invited me to go with him for coffee at the large home of a family who lived near the Mekong River. The family had three daughters. The family offered to take me in to live with them and teach their daughters to speak English. They knew my ultimate goal was to leave the country. In exchange for their support and hospitality, they wanted me to take their daughters with me when I attempted to escape. I lived with them from November 1985 until March of 1986.

Meanwhile, my friend, the market vendor, the mother of the woman for whom I had been a house-sitter in Phom Phenh, had heard about a former Captain of the Republican Army of Vietnam, who was organizing a group to attempt an escape by boat. In exchange for a considerable sum which had to be paid in gold, he would accept a small number of passengers.

She told him about me and he came to Phom Phenh to see me. The parents of the family with whom I was living felt this was our opportunity to leave and agreed to pay the required amount in gold that the man required to take me and two of their daughters in his boat. The girls who were to accompany me, Tran Thi Thuy Thien and Tran Thi Danh, were eighteen and nineteen respectively.

When another of my students learned I would be leaving, she begged me to also take her eighteen year old brother, Tran Minh, with me. I agreed to take him if she could pay the fee to the man who was organizing the escape. She agreed and preparations for our departure in hushed tones were made.

I left Phom Phenh with the two teenage girls and one teenage boy. We traveled 310km on a bus to Kong Pong Som. The bus was frequently stopped by armed men demanding bribes. This was a common practice at that time. Khmer Rouge soldiers would come out of the jungle, stop vehicles and demand bribes. If they were not paid, they would shoot the people or bomb the bus. The organizer traveling with us paid the bribes each time and we finally made it to Kong Pong Som.

Once there, we went to shore and hid until night fall. We waited in fear.

When darkness covered the beach, by the light of the moon, ^{nineteen} ~~twelve~~ people crowded into a small boat that March night: the organizer of the group, his pregnant wife and his three

year old daughter, the driver of the boat and his wife and two children, the man whose role was to help the driver, three teenagers for whom I was responsible, and me. I was forty-six.

The organizer told me to get into the boat first and lie down in the bottom. He pushed the others to quickly follow and lie down on top of me. The organizer was the last one to get in. Just as he grabbed the edge of the boat, Cambodian soldiers spotted us. They yelled as us to get out of the boat and said it was illegal for us to leave. The organizer yelled back that we were going to leave. He said that he didn't want to live anymore under the rule of the Communist devils.

We immediately came under fire from Cambodian security officers shooting AK47 rifles. The first bullets hit the organizer of the boat and he fell back toward the shore. Next, a bullet hit the driver's four year old little boy, killing him instantly. The pregnant wife of the boat organizer was also hit, but the bullet just grazed her head. My only thought was, "Oh my God! I am going to die!"

I lay down in the bottom of the boat and the other passengers did the same, piling on top of me. The boat was going as fast as it could and we could see the bullets flying across it just inches above us.

The driver pulled the rope to start the engine; it rumbled, but it did not catch. I screamed at the driver, "Start the engine! Start the engine!" He was trying and the second time the engine roared and we moved away from the shore. Bullets continued to fly until the three

men shooting at us emptied their weapons and we were too far out to sea to be reached.

Very soon it became apparent that the boat was taking on water. The boat had been hurriedly and poorly made. There was insufficient tar sealing the boards of the boat and we began taking on water almost immediately. We bailed frantically with a discarded soldier's helmet the teen boy had picked up on the way to the boat, our hands, anything we could find, but we were losing the battle.

The driver steered the boat out into the ocean toward what we hoped was Thailand. We bailed and bailed. For two days and two nights we continued the frantic rhythm with exhausted bodies moved only by desperation and fear of imminent drowning. The second day, we saw a large Thai fishing boat on the horizon. As it drew closer, we could see someone on board looking through binoculars our direction. We hollered and waved frantically hoping to convey our distress and need for assistance. We were distraught when it appeared that the boat was not going to turn in our direction. Then a second time, the man appeared to look in our direction. I believe he saw that there were young women aboard and he decided to consult with the captain again. Then we noticed the boat had changed direction and it appeared that they were coming for us. We were elated. We would be saved!

When the boat came close to us, the crew began waving us aboard. They were hollering directions, but we could not understand their words, only their gestures. They grabbed the children, teens, and young mothers first. Then they indicated I was to be next. The two men

were waved away. We were screaming and terrified. The captain of the ship had made it clear to his crew that the men were to be abandoned, but one man clearly had both a compassionate heart and the courage to act on his conscience despite his captain's orders. He threw a rope to the two men.

Once we were on the fishing boat, the captain spoke to us using some English. I was the only one in our group who spoke English. We were given rice and fish and then the younger women and children were told to go down into the cabin of the boat. The men, the teenage boy and I were ordered to sit outside on the deck. Crew members went below in turns. They robbed us and repeatedly raped the four younger women. We could hear their screams and protests. When we saw the women again, they were clearly traumatized and their clothing was torn and bloodied. One of the women was about six months pregnant and she had just seen her husband shot two days before. The other adult woman had seen her young son killed and we had had to throw his body into the ocean as we made our escape. The two teenage girls had been virgins when they set off just days before in hopes of a better life. By the time the fishermen were finished raping the women, we were drawing near to the Thai Royal Navy station on Cockut Island off the coast of Thailand. Thai fishermen were not supposed to assist refugees so they began throwing us into the ocean. To get us to cooperate, they told us to hide under the boat until they passed the naval station and then they would pick us up again. I was the last one of our group and I was terrified because I did not know how to swim. The air was

filled with our cries. I noticed the teenage boy was swimming back toward the boat. He had grabbed three empty plastic jugs as before he went overboard. He was a strong swimmer and he hollered to me that he would help me. Someone shoved me from behind and I fell into the ocean. He came close to me and told me to lie across the jugs which would help me stay afloat. Once we were in the water, it became clear that the fishermen had no intention of picking us up again. They had robbed us, used the women, and were abandoning us. The others began swimming toward the shore. With the assistance of Tran Minh, the empty plastic jugs, and the current, I made it to the shore. I owed that young man my life.

It was the middle of the night when we reached the shore. We couldn't see anything but the ocean, the moon, and the outline of a large mountain in the distance. We huddled together on the beach for warmth and some slept.

When it became light, we began walking. Our feet were bare and the rocks and broken oyster shells on the beach cut our feet, but we pressed on. Finally we saw a house built up on stilts over the beach. A man saw us, came out of the house, and motioned for us to come and sit down. He did not speak a language we understood, but he began cooking a large pot of rice and fish and gave us each a bowl. It was good food and we ate it quickly with great gratitude.

When we had finished eating, he gave us fresh water to slake our thirst. Then he motioned for us to follow him and he took us to a large house nearby where the woman who lived there spoke some English. We later learned that her husband was a colonel in the Thai Army.

We were filthy and our clothes and skin were covered with tar from the first boat. This kind woman allowed each of us to take a shower in her home and she gave each of us some clean clothing. The women and children showered first, and then the men. That night, we were told to sleep on the deck. We were grateful for the kindness that had been shown to us, but we were fearful of sleeping out there because there were large coconut palms overhead and we feared we might be killed or injured by falling coconuts. We prayed to any god who would hear us and, overcome by exhaustion, we slept.

The woman contacted the Thai Royal Navy and a Thai national security officer came and spoke to us. He asked if anyone spoke English. I responded. He told us we would have to leave. He would have to send us back into the ocean. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees was out of funding and the U. S. had said that no more refugees could be accepted in the refugee camps. He said he had no choice, but to send us back into the ocean. I explained our circumstances. I told him I couldn't swim. I explained the horrors we had all endured in the last few days; I begged for mercy, but he was not swayed. Finally, it occurred to me to tell him about the letter I had from Washington, D.C. directing the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok to help me. He asked to see the letter.

None of the others in my group knew about my letter. I had kept it a tightly guarded secret. Before I left Vietnam, I had sealed it securely in plastic and put it in my bra. I asked him to excuse me a moment while I turned away to retrieve it as modestly as possible. He read the

letter and then told us to stand up and to wait. He took a speed boat back to the naval headquarters.

When he returned, he helped us into his boat and took us back to the headquarters. The colonel there spoke English and asked to see my letter. He read it and then had us all sit on rush mats. He ordered a great quantity of food prepared for us... rice, fish and even American hamburgers and candy. He ordered soldiers to set up wooden beds in the kitchen for all the women and children and had them covered with mosquito netting. He spoke to his men and made it clear that no one was to touch those beds or the people in them. He assured us we would be safe. The next morning, we were given a good breakfast and then the Colonel personally accompanied us in a large boat to the Klong Yail Refugee Asylum Camp to be sure that we would be safe and accepted at the camp. Before he left, he singled me out and gave me a small face towel, a toothbrush, and a beautiful bar of bath soap.

Conditions in the camp were difficult. We had no shoes, but needed to walk on the hot tar road. We slept on the dirty concrete floor of a structure with a metal roof. Plastic sheeting served as "walls." An uncomfortable feeling would cause me to awaken in the night; large worms would have crawled under my shirt. There was a separate room that served as a toilet room. It, too, was very dirty.

From our location in the asylum camp we could see the Cambodian and Vietnamese flags that flew on the hill just over the border. We worried constantly. Of course, if we could

see the border, the guards on the other side could also see us. The “security” guards in the camp were cruel and routinely abused their power over us. They investigated everyone who entered the camp and would beat people over small things. Frequently, the guards would not believe the statements of the refugees, but because of my letter, I was believed by the guard who interrogated me.

There was nothing to do in the asylum camp except lie around and wait for the poor food that was given to us twice a day. I spent my time writing letters to my sister in Viet Nam telling her I had arrived in Thailand. I had been in the camp two weeks when one day a guard came and warned everyone to be prepared to hide because there was a good chance that that night we would be attacked by rockets from Cambodia. We waited in fear; where could we go?

When the attack began, boys, Minh and Thinh, grabbed me, shoved guards out of the way and dragged me down into a bunker the guards used for their own protection. The guards tried to keep us out. I screamed and prayed. Again, Minh had saved my life.

The rockets continued to rain down on the camp for about an hour. When we came out of the bunker, I saw a sharp piece of metal from one of the rockets had cut through the plastic walls and lodged in the ground where my foot would have been had the boys not dragged me to safety. The camp conditions had been bad before the attack and afterwards we were left in even more difficult circumstances.

Another week of boredom and suffering in the camp was interrupted one night about 1:00AM. I had been awake praying. A Security guard came with a list and read from a list my name and the names of all those who had been with me on the boat. When he finished, he barked, "Follow me."

We were led to a truck and loaded inside. The windows had been covered with heavy plastic so we could not see where we were going and they told us nothing. We drove for hours. When the truck stopped, we were told to get out. From the look of the sky, it appeared to be about 4:00AM. We were at Panat Nikhom Refugee Center near Bangkok. The head of the camp came and drew circles in the dirt and ordered us to each sit silently in one of the circles and not move. He made it very clear that if we spoke or moved, we would be beaten.

The man in charge of the camp approached me.

"Stand up," he ordered. I scrambled to my feet.

"Do you speak English?" he asked.

"Yes, Sir."

"Do you have proof of your right to be in Thailand?"

I reached inside my shirt and produced the letter commending me to the U.S. Embassy in Thailand. He read the letter carefully and then ordered me to sit off to the side and translate for him as he questioned the other fifteen people. The others had no documentation to establish their right to be in Thailand. They claimed only that they knew me. When he finished

his questioning, he turned to me.

“Do you verify that all these people fled Saigon with you?”

“Yes, Sir,” I assured him.

He believed me or at least decided it was not worth his time to investigate further. All of us were taken to a facility like the one we had been in at the asylum camp—the same metal roof, cement floor and blue plastic “walls”. The sixteen of us were assigned to an 8’x15’ “room” referred to as space #19. It was April of 1986.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees provided money to the Thai government to provide for refugees in the camps, but either the sum was grossly inadequate for the number of refugees or corruption of officials at various levels had depleted the resources meant to be used to care for us. Both factors may have contributed to the dismal conditions. The food provided was a small amount of rice accompanied by bits of spoiled fish or tiny pieces of chicken that were so tough and rubbery I couldn’t eat them. Consumption of the spoiled food and poor sanitary conditions resulted in diarrhea among the refugees. That only compounded the problems in the camp.

While in the camp, some of the refugees asked me to teach them to speak English. Some could pay me small amounts of bat, Thai currency. I used what I earned buy good food for Minh and myself and the two women I had brought with me and to have a shirt and a pair of pants made for me and for Minh by one of the refugees who had been a dressmaker.

Sometime in August 1986, I was transferred with Minh and the two women to the International Catholic Migration Commission, Philippine Refugee Processing Center in Bataan, Philippines. While living in the Refugee Processing Center in Bataan, all the refugees were required to learn U.S. laws as part of a cultural orientation in preparation for resettlement in the U.S. The teacher, Michelle, was a Philippine woman whose husband was the chief of the American Council for Voluntary International Action. This was an agency headquartered on Park Avenue in New York. I was asked to carefully translate for all the lessons for the Vietnamese refugees. The refugees were very willing pupils as they were very grateful for the opportunity to go to the U.S.

March 18, 1987, Minh and I were told we would be admitted to the U.S. The two girls who had come so far with us, had met boyfriends at the first camp in Thailand. They emigrated later to Australia with their boyfriends.

Minh and I began this leg of our journey with a long, crowded, overnight bus ride to Manila. We left Manila March 19th 1987 and flew to Portland, Oregon. In Portland we were met by Carol Wilson, a Mormon woman, who had volunteered to act as our sponsor. She provided an upstairs room in her home and all our meals for a month. The American Council for Voluntary International Action provided money to U.S. Catholic Charities which in turn gave us cash and food stamps. Carol helped us find a small two-bedroom apartment on Holgate St.

Once we were settled in our apartment, I enrolled Minh in the Newcomers Program at

Cleveland High School and I looked for work. I found a job as a housekeeper at the Alexis Hotel on the waterfront. It was a beautiful place, but the work was very hard and the supervisor was very demanding. I was frequently reduced to tears.

After about six months, I began attending the Christian Church at 33rd and Knott St. One of the members of the church staff with whom I had become acquainted, recommended me to the Refugee Department of Lutheran Family Services in southeast Portland. The director interviewed me and asked how I felt about American/Vietnamese bi-racial children. I told him children of mixed races were badly treated in Vietnam. He hired me to be a case manager for one hundred American/Vietnamese bi-racial children. I worked there from 1988 through January of 1991.

In September of 1990, I had applied to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, headquartered in Switzerland, for a caseworker position at the refugee center in Indonesia. I received a phone call at 1:00AM one January morning offering me a job working with Vietnamese refugees at the refugee center in Pulau Galang, Indonesia. The voice on the phone a half a world away asked me, "Will you accept the job?"

I was eager to help the Vietnamese people in the Indonesian camp. I had shared similar experiences and understood the struggles from which they had come and knew the fears and hopes they had for their future.

January 10, 1991, I flew from Portland to Tokyo to Singapore and finally arrived in

Jakarta January 11th. It was a long tiring journey, but I was looking forward to my new job.

The head of UNHCR in Jakarta gave me a \$3,000 arrival stipend to help me get settled and established in the city that first month even though I would not begin work right away. I had three weeks to sight see and get to know my new home.

I worked in Pulau Galang Camp in Indonesia for one year. There were eighteen thousand adults and two thousand unaccompanied minors in the camp. I was the case worker for the two thousand Vietnamese unaccompanied minors, most between ten and sixteen years old. The parents of some of these children had paid adults to take their children out of Viet Nam, but once they arrived in the camp, the adults abandoned the children. My job was to interview each child to determine their family background, how they came to the camp and if they had family still in Viet Nam. I submitted a brief report on each child to the International Human Rights Attorney who worked for UNHCR. In 1985, due to a funding shortage, the headquarters of UNHCR in Switzerland would no longer grant refugee status to anyone who still had family in South Viet Nam. They were forcibly repatriated to South Viet Nam. Those who met the qualifications and were given refugee status were matched with a country willing to accept refugees. I did the interviews in the camp. Once a week I went to a nice hotel away from the camp to meet with the camp commander and a representative from UNHCR. They decided who would go to another country. For some children who would have been repatriated, I argued strongly for them to not be forced to return. If, for instance, the child's father who remained in Viet Nam was in jail or the child's mother had married a communist after the war, the children would have been in grave danger when he or she returned. Repatriated children were abused and denied education by the communist authorities. Children of South Vietnamese Army officers automatically qualified for refugee status.

Work in the camp was difficult...physically, mentally and emotionally. After one year in this position, I returned home to Portland.

It was the end of 1991 when I returned. For a year, I had no job, other than being "on call" for Northwest Interpreting Services to act as an interpreter for court appearances and legal proceedings.

In January 1993, I interviewed with the Troutdale Job Corps. I was hired as a resident advisor, counselor, and case manager. I served in this position for three years. This was a stressful time. In 1994, I sponsored my older sister and her husband to come to the U.S. Neither of them speaks any English and could not work so it was up to me to provide for them.

I also provided foster care for the young man I had brought out of Viet Nam. He was a troubled teen. As the problems with this young man became more difficult, I slipped into a significant depression. In June of 1996, my depression had progressed to the point that my doctor said that I could no longer work.

Without a job, I applied for assistance from the Dept. of Human Services. I received S.S.D. assistance and was given one room in a low cost housing facility on Holgate. I lived there from 1996-2001. During that time I met a man who was a resident in the same facility. I introduced him to a Vietnamese lady who was a friend of mine. They eventually married. In appreciation of my friendship and because I had introduced him to his wife, the man introduced me to Donald ^{NEWGENT} Nugent. Donald had suffered a stroke and had Parkinson's Disease. I agreed to live with him in his home on North ^{DEKUM} Decom St. and care for him. During the years that I was caring for Donald, my physician told me that I should apply for Section 8 housing so that when the time came that Donald would have to be placed in a nursing home, I would have a place to live. I was approved for a Section 8 apartment and began paying rent on that apartment even though I was still living in Donald's home and caring for him. Two years later, in July of 2007, Donald was placed in a nursing home. Because I had followed the good counsel of my doctor, the following month I moved into my one bedroom apartment in Unthank Plaza.

In February of 2003, two women friends gave me the money for a plane ticket to return to Viet Nam to see my eldest daughter and her nine year old daughter, my granddaughter. My younger daughter had died earlier that year in a car accident on the night of her wedding. I stayed with my daughter for twenty-eight days. She lives with her husband and daughter in a small room in the second story of a very poor house owned by her husband's family. Fifteen

people live in this house. My daughter's husband is an alcoholic. My daughter is a hairdresser. With her earnings she bought her husband a motorbike to use as a taxi, but he didn't want to work. He steals money from her to buy alcohol. The situation in Viet Nam is very difficult now and my daughter has very little work. I try to send her money when I can.

My granddaughter is now fifteen. She still lives in one room with her parents. There is no table or desk for doing her homework. There is no privacy. She is in the same room when her parents are intimate. It makes my heart sick to know that she is living in such circumstances. I would love to see my daughter and granddaughter again. My heart longs to find a way to improve life's circumstances for my daughter and granddaughter.

This spring, April 2009, my older sister and her husband returned to Viet Nam. They are not well; they don't speak English and they were lonely here. My brother-in-law said that they wanted to be with their children and to die in Viet Nam. Their return to Viet Nam only adds to my heartache.

I have experienced fear, pain and great heartache. Many times I thought I had drawn my last breath. Jesus heard my prayer that day so many years ago when, in desperation, I prayed to Jesus in that church yard so many years ago. He not only made a way for me in impossible circumstances and repeatedly spared my life, He has given me eternal life through Jesus Christ who is my Savior. Jesus has given me hope in the midst of hardship. I have experienced protection from physical danger; I have been forgiven of my sins and accepted as His beloved child. He is faithful. May His name be praised!