

# Life: The Vietnam War / America

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By: Ryan Nguyen

# Life during the Vietnam War

- All my interviewees were born and raised during the Vietnam War
- All were aware of the war going on around them although were not directly affected
- Memories of many people going off to fight (young men) often to never come back
  - Near the end of the war 1975: “My dad’s youngest brother came home with bullet shells as gifts and then left to go back to the war...and that was the last time I saw him.” - Aunt Phuong
- Fighting got intense near the end of the war everywhere in the South
  - Memories of going into the mountains or to a safe house to hide from the bombings from the Viet Cong
  - After the Fall of Saigon, the communist government took over and the country was in shambles
  - Many witnessed dead bodies and destroyed buildings everywhere

# Escape?

- “Die or survive and be happy” - Aunt Phuong
- “The idea of America sounded great because there was chocolate, Fiji apples, anything a kid could dream of. America sounded like heaven on earth” - Uncle Hoang
  - Anything would sound better than the present conditions they were dealing with in Vietnam
- Rumors of US boats on the ocean waiting to rescue people
  - Due to US intervention, the US was known/rumored to take people in
- Highly dangerous
  - Can get caught in imprisoned if caught by the communist government
  - Die on the ocean, small fishing boats meant for a few people with ~70 people

# Childhood

- Many were born and raised during the Vietnam War (Nov. 1955 - April 30, 1975)
- “Even amid the horrors of war, people continue to live their lives” - Espiritu
  - The war was “normal” to them as children while they grew up
  - Although there is a war, their lives go on like nothing is wrong
    - Many romanticized the old Vietnam, Uncle Don says “it was beautiful” and he gets emotional remembering the past since it was so nice although there was a war
  - Never knew anything better, America was glorified
- Many escaped Vietnam as children, not even adults yet
  - In one of the first waves of refugees, 45.9% of the refugees were children
  - Interviewees: Many escaped Vietnam under the age of 17 years old
- As a child, left Vietnam (everything you knew) behind and went to a new country
- Complex childhood, war was normal yet still had to continue their lives

# Importance of Education

- The refugees who were “fortunate” to come over at a young age went through the American education system
  - Achieved bright futures by working hard in studies and taking jobs that came their way
- Those without an education (college dropout / 4-year degree) had it harder
  - For Vietnamese women, beauty school was a very popular option
    - Not much need for much English and fairly easy job
    - Many Vietnamese women already did this and recommended it to friends/family
  - Those who came to America at an older age without a formal education had to take up any job
    - Often working under another relative
    - Work with low skills: restaurant, nanny, janitor, etc.
- Education very important for upward mobility

# Opportunities / Gender Dynamics

- America did present many opportunities but not the only reason for women getting jobs along with men
- Everyone worked no matter the age or gender
  - Did what they could to support each other and bring in income
- Interviewees never considered being stay at home wives
- Opportunity was there, took it to support their family and siblings

# Family as a Foundation

- Can be seen throughout their experience
- Family was need for sponsorship to America and was initial support to get into American culture and education
- Family escaped together and stayed together in America
- Initial reason to coming to America was for a better opportunity for family members
  - The American Dream
- 75 percent of family sizes ranged from 3 to 11 people (Rutledge 121)
- Coming to America was for a better life not only for themselves but also their children