

The Hopes and Dreams Series
Vietnamese-Americans

The Family from Vietnam

A story based on history



Second Edition

Tana Reiff

Illustrations by Tyler Stiene

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The cover and illustrations are by Tyler Stiene. The book was set and designed by Tana Reiff, consulting with A.A. Burrows, using the Adobe *Century Schoolbook* typeface for the text. This is a digital adaptation of one of the most popular faces of the twentieth century. Century's distinctive roman and italic fonts and its clear, dark strokes and serifs were designed, as the name suggests, to make schoolbooks easy to read. The display font used on the cover and titles is a 21st-century digital invention titled Telugu. It is designed to work on all digital platforms and with Indic scripts. Telugu is named for the Telugu people in southern India and their widely spoken language. This is a simple, strong, and interesting sans serif display font.

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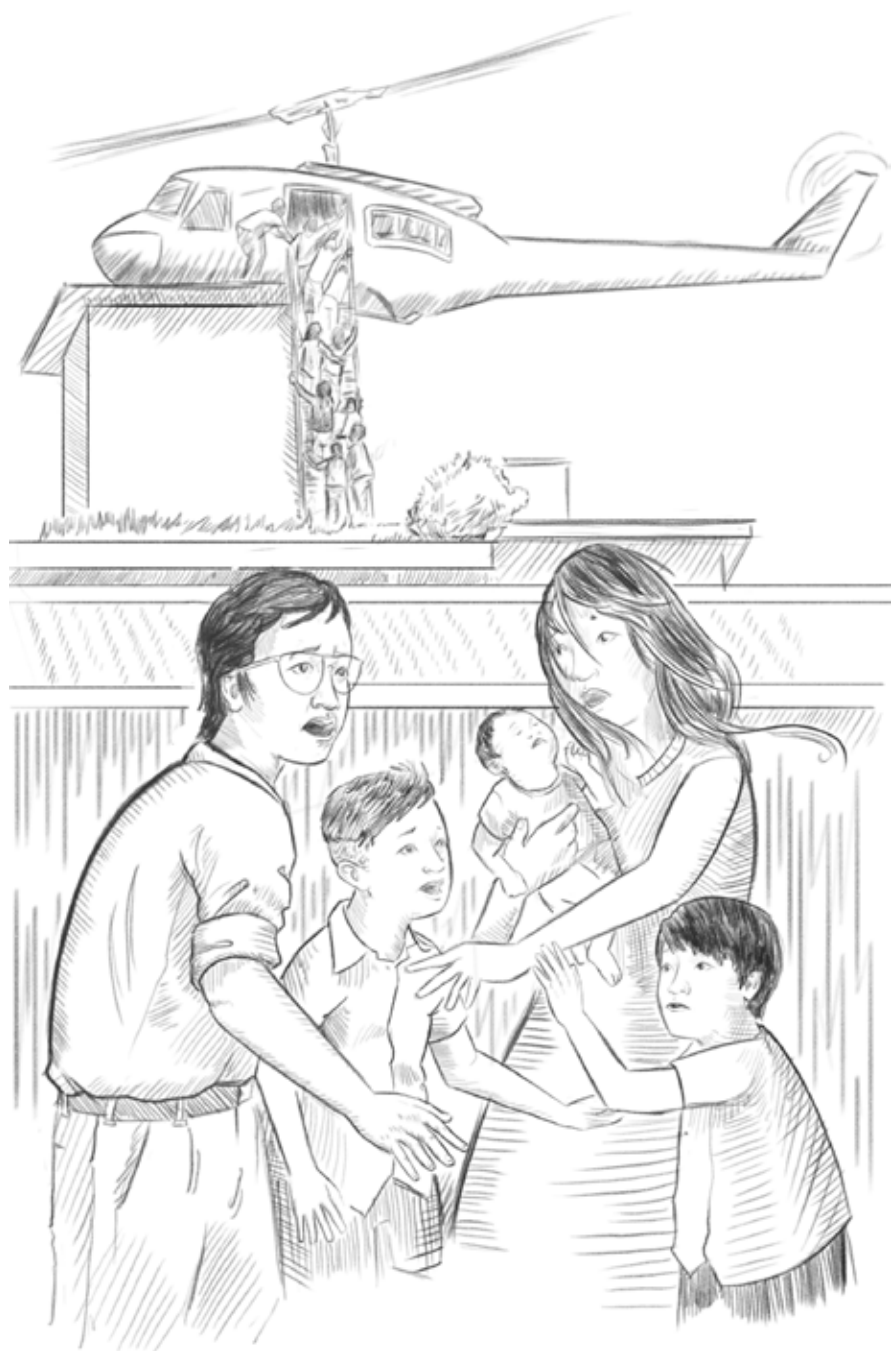
The Hopes and Dreams Series

by Tana Reiff

The Magic Paper (Mexican-Americans)
For Gold and Blood (Chinese-Americans)
Nobody Knows (African-Americans)
Little Italy (Italian-Americans)
Two Hearts (Greek-Americans)
Hungry No More (Irish-Americans)
Sent Away (Japanese-Americans)
A Different Home (Cuban-Americans)
The Family from Vietnam (Vietnamese-Americans)

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1 Time to Leave

A Village in Vietnam
April 29, 1975

In their small house,
the Nguyen family waited.
The parents, Mai and Set,
watched the war on TV.
They saw other villages
burned to the ground.
They saw many people
being killed.

The war in Vietnam
had been going on
for many, many years.
Now, at last,
it looked as if
it was coming to an end.
But not a happy ending
for South Vietnam.
The North Vietnamese
were heading for Saigon,
the capital of South Vietnam.

If the North Vietnamese
took Saigon,
the war would be over.
The Communists
would take over.

The Americans
were helping people
get out of the country.
People were leaving
by boat,
by plane,
by helicopter.

Mai and Set
did not want to leave.
South Vietnam
was their home.
They had their house.
They had good jobs.
Mai was a teacher.
Set was a doctor.
They had money
in the bank.

And they had three children.
The older boy's name
was Vinh.
The second boy
was Bao.
The little girl's name
was Thi.
She was not much more
than a baby.

 If they stayed,
they might be killed.
Set's uncle
worked for the Americans.
That put the whole family
on the wrong side
of the Communists.

 Outside their house
they saw neighbors
in the street.
Something was happening.
Then, Bang! Bang! Bang!
on the door.

Set looked at his wife.
Mai looked back at him.
There were no words.
Only fear in their eyes.
Set opened the door.
There stood his uncle.
The uncle's car
sat out front,
its engine running.

“It is time to leave,”
said the uncle.
“Now!
You each may take
two bags.
My car is running.
Let's go!
Now!
Hurry!”

Mai and Set
had hoped
that this day
would never come.
But their bags were packed.

They were as ready
as they could be.

Mai, Set, and Vinh
each picked up two bags.
The bags were heavy.
Bao and Thi
were too little
to carry them.

“Where are we going?”
Set asked his uncle.

“To Saigon,”
the uncle said.
“Tan Son Nhut air base
has been bombed.
No planes can fly.
Instead, we must go
to the American embassy
in Saigon.
Helicopters are there,
on the embassy roof.
They are taking people
to ships out at sea.”

Set turned
to his uncle.
“What about you?”

“Don’t worry about me,”
said the uncle.
“Give me your house key.
And give me
your bank numbers.
I will take care of business.
And then I will get out.”

Set did
as his uncle asked.
Then the family
with their bags
piled into the uncle’s car.

The drive into Saigon*
took 30 minutes.
The family
would never forget
what they saw there.
People and cars
filled the streets.

* In 1976, Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

Scared people.
Crying people.
People with heavy bags
on their backs.
People pushing their way
toward the American embassy.
People looking up
at a helicopter
on the roof
of the embassy.

The helicopter lifted
off the roof,
into the sky.
Then another helicopter
took its place
on the roof.
One after another,
the helicopters
flew in and out.

The Nguyen family
waited in the car.

They watched
as the guards
turned people away.
They had no papers.
There was no way
they could get close
to the embassy
without papers.

Set's uncle
got out of the car.
The others
waited for him
for two hours.

Then they saw their uncle
walking toward the car.
He waved his arm
and opened the car door.
"You can go now!"
he called.

Set, Mai, and the children
got out of the car.
Uncle took the wheel.
“Good luck!”
he called to them
as he turned
the car around.

The guards
waved them through.
They became
part of the crowd
as they made their way
toward the embassy.

Name pronunciations:

Nguyen: “win”

Mai: “my”

Vinh: “ving”

Bao: “bough”

Thi: “tea”



2 The Airlift

The five Nguyens
pushed toward the embassy
with the crowd.

“Stay together!
Stay together!”
Set kept saying.

Mai carried little Thi
tied to her back.
She held a bag on each arm.
Set held Bao and two bags.
Vinh, the older boy,
held two bags.

At last they were close
to the embassy.
But the gate was closed.
So they climbed the wall.

“It’s too much!”
Mai called out to Set.

“I can’t hold all of this!
I will fall!”

“Drop a bag!”
Set called to her.

One of Mai’s bags
fell to the ground.
She pulled tight
on the child pack
on her back.
Little Thi cried.
Mai looked around
at the girl’s face.
When she turned her head,
the other bag fell.
She kept on climbing.

All five Nguyens
reached the top of the wall.
One at a time,
all five of them
jumped to the ground.

“Give me Bao!”
she called to Set.

“I can hold him now.”
Set handed over the little boy
to his mother.

Then they waited
inside the embassy grounds.
Every ten minutes
a helicopter landed.
It quickly filled with people.
Then it flew off.
The helicopters were very loud.
They covered their ears
and waited their turn.

The U.S. Marines
let the Nguyens
come inside the embassy.
They went up the stairs
to the roof.

A helicopter sat ready.
A ladder went
from the roof
to the helicopter.

Marines pulled people
from the ladder
into the helicopter.

Mai with the two little ones
were ahead of Set and Vinh.
A Marine reached out
for Mai's arm.
He pulled her and the children
into the helicopter.

Inside, the helicopter
was packed with people.
The helicopter blades
began to spin faster.
The engine got louder.
The door slammed shut.

Mai looked around.
She tried to look out
over the crowd.
She looked at every face.
"My husband and son!"
Mai called out.
"Set! Vinh!"

But it was no use.
No one could hear her.
The helicopter lifted off
into the air.

So there she was.
On an American helicopter
full of Vietnamese people.
Over the South China Sea.
Carrying two small children.
Without her husband
and her older son.
No bags.
Nothing to eat or drink.
Lost in time and space.

Goodbye, Vietnam,
Mai said to herself.
She told herself
to be strong.

The next day
tanks rolled into Saigon.
And then the war was over.



3 Out to Sea

The helicopter
flew only 20 miles.
It landed
on a U.S. Navy ship
in the South China Sea.

All the people
got out of the helicopter.
Then the Navy men
pushed the helicopter
off the ship,
into the sea.
It couldn't go back
to Saigon,
and there was no room
for the helicopters
on the ship.

The ship headed out
into the Pacific Ocean.

It would be at sea
for six days.
The people on board
had little food and water.
The sun
beat down
on the open deck.
The air was cool
only at night.

Mai felt sick
most of the time.
And she could not sleep.
Her thoughts
kept her awake.
She tried
not to worry.
She had always tried
to live one day at a time.
But she had so much time
to think.

She thought about
how nice Vietnam had been
before the war.

Her children
had never known those days.
She thought about
her mother and father.
They had been killed
in the war.
She thought about the school
where she had taught.
It was gone now.
She thought about her house.
She would never
see it again.

Little Thi was crying.
“Don’t cry, my baby,”
said Mai.
“Don’t be afraid.
Your mother is here
to keep you safe.”

Mai’s words
were not her thoughts.
She was very afraid.
She had never been
on a ship before.

And her husband and a son
were not with her.
She had two children
to care for.
She did not want them
to know she was afraid.
She smiled at them
and hid her fear.

She thought about
Set and Vinh.
If only the family
could be together.
Everything would be
so much better.
Where were they?
Mai hoped
they would meet up
when the ship
reached land.

She did not know
that Set and Vinh
were on another ship.
And that ship
was going to a different place.

Glossary

Definitions and examples of certain words and terms used in the story

Chapter 1 — Time to Leave page 1

burned (to burn) to the ground — Completely destroyed by fire. *They saw other villages burned to the ground.*

going on (to go on) — To continue; not stopping. *The war in Vietnam had been going on for many, many years.*

looked as if — Seemed or looked like.
... it looked as if it was coming to an end.

heading (to head) — To go toward a place or in a specific direction. *The North Vietnamese were heading for Saigon.*

Communists — The North Vietnamese army and government.
The Communists would take over.

take over — To defeat and control another group.
The Communists would take over.

get out of — To leave; to escape something or a place.
The Americans were helping people get out of the country.

the wrong side — In a bad or uncomfortable situation; opposite. *That put the whole family on the wrong side of the Communists.*

running — (The engine) is on, ready to go. *The uncle's car sat out front, its engine running.*

bombed (to bomb) — Hit by bombs, explosives falling from airplanes. *Tan Son Nhut air base has been bombed.*

take care of — To do what has to be done.

I will take care of business.

piled (to pile) — To get into (a car) quickly, without being very careful.

Then the family with their bags piled into the uncle's car.

lifted off (to lift off) — To move from the ground into the air and fly away. *The helicopter lifted off the roof.*

turned people away (to turn away) — To not allow (people) to enter or go forward.

They watched as the guards turned people away.

turned the car around — To go back the way (the car) came. ... *as he turned the car around.*

waved (to wave) them through — To allow someone to enter or pass, sometimes by moving the arm forward.

The guards waved them through.

Chapter 2 — The Airlift page 10

reached (to reach) out — To hold one's arm out to help.

A Marine reached out for Mai's arm

blades — The wings on top of the helicopter that turn around rapidly to lift a helicopter into the air.

The helicopter blades began to spin faster.

spin — To turn around quickly, again and again.

The helicopter blades began to spin faster.

rolled (to roll) into — To move forward one after another.

The next day tanks rolled into Saigon.

Chapter 3 — Out to Sea

page 15

beat down — The sun shines very hot on a place or people.

The sun beat down on the open deck.

hid (to hide) — To not show something; keep something secret. *She smiled at them and hid her fear.*

Chapter 4 — Guam

page 19

territory — A place or area. Guam belongs to the US, but it is not a state. *It is a territory of the United States.*

needle in a haystack — An idiom meaning something is difficult to find. A needle is a small metal pin used for sewing. A haystack is a very large pile of hay (dried grass). *... like looking for a needle in a haystack.*

comfort — Help that reduces stress.

But she had time to give Mai some comfort.

carry on — To continue doing something although it may be difficult. *... we got out in time. We will carry on.*