

David Duong

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Today (April 30, 2025) marks 50 years since the fall of Saigon.

For many, it's a chapter in a history book.

But for my family, it was the end of one world and the beginning of an uncertain journey toward another.

My father served in the South Vietnamese army. Just before Saigon fell on April 30, 1975, he, along with my grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and their close family friends, suddenly found themselves lost, and the collapse of everything they knew.

They became part of what the world came to call the "boat people." Vietnamese refugees that escaped to the sea on crowded boats, navigating waters with no land in sight. Uncertain if they would survive the journey. Many refugees didn't. But somehow, my family did. They survived. Pick up by a contracted merchant ship that carried them to Guam's refugee camps.

This was one of the largest refugee resettlements of its time. Over 500,000 Vietnamese were welcomed into the United States. My family was among them resettling here in the United States. They didn't have much, but what they did have was faith, and determination to rebuild their lives.

They worked long hours, worked many jobs and learned English. They raised families, built homes, built businesses and held on tightly to the culture and traditions they nearly lost.

For them, survival wasn't just about making it out. It was about making something better for the next generation. For us. For me.

I was born here, in the United States. I didn't live through that journey, but I live because of it.

Lately, my cousins and I alongside some U.S. Navy veterans who served in Vietnam have been piecing together our family's timeline. We're collecting stories and memories. So much of this history wasn't written down. It was carried in silence, in glances, in the quiet strength of the generation that came before me.

Their story deserves to be remembered—not just by their children, but by their grandchildren, and all who benefit from the freedom they fought so hard to find.

To my family, to their friends who became family, to the veterans who witnessed both war and aftermath, and to every Vietnamese refugee who made that impossible journey we see you.

We remember.

And we will never forget what it took to get here.



In summer 1975, a Vietnamese family, seeking life away from Communism, was welcomed into the parish family at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church and into the West Point community. This was accomplished through the efforts of then Pastor Henry van den Boogaard with the support of the parishioners. The old convent (now the Mercy Center) was cleaned and stocked with necessities by parish volunteers to serve as temporary housing. The old Port Richmond Public School building was also cleaned and stocked for longer term housing. Jobs were found for those eligible to work. Later, other Vietnamese families were brought into the fold. They have been a steadfast and faithful part of OLBS.

The first family to arrive was the family of Gian Duong (pictured above). Gian was very active in the church. He took communion to the sick and shut-ins, was altar server for daily Masses and most funerals, and participated daily in Eucharistic Adoration. Many younger members of the families grew up to become altar servers, cantors, helpers with Vacation Bible School, and Meals on Wheels.

At the close of Mass on Sunday, August 1, 2010, Father Edgar Cleofe, OLBS Pastor, called all members of the Vietnamese community forward for a special blessing. Hospitality after Mass was held in their honor and in celebration of the 35th anniversary of their arrival.

(Below) In 2015, 40 years after their arrival, the group had grown. Many of the Vietnamese families remain in the OLBS and the West Point communities.





Bạn đi chậm thế nào không phải là vấn đề miễn là bạn không dừng lại.

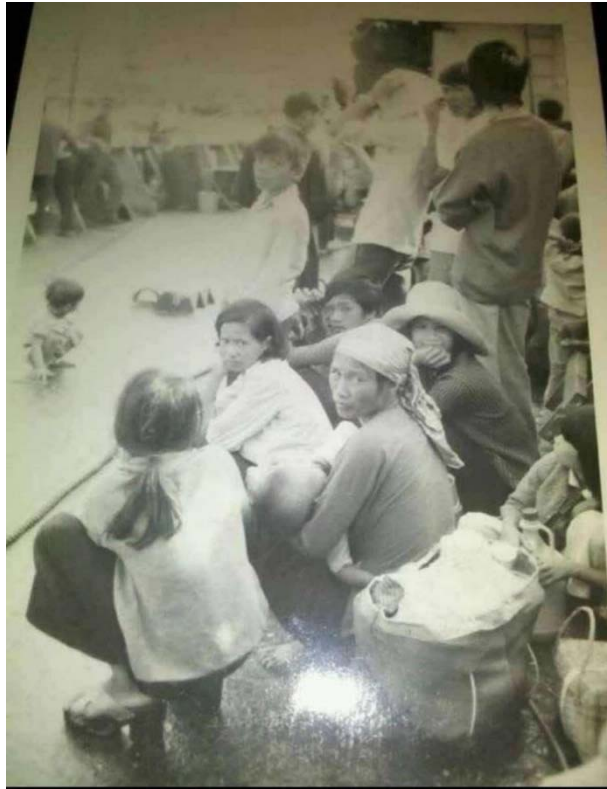


(It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop.)



Hãy là chính sự thay đổi mà bạn muốn nhìn thấy trên thế giới.

(Be the change you want to see in the world.)



Fr. Henry Van Den Boogard





Old Port Richmond Public School building