

# JOURNEY OF THE DUONG FAMILY

## A FAMILY CELEBRATION

OAK RIDGE FARMS - ZEBULON, NC

JULY 19, 2025



# **Journey of the Duong Family**

## **Fifty years of Freedom in a New Land**

***“This is a brief history of our family and how we became Americans, though we retain our ancient culture from half a world away. We celebrate our fifty years here and our younger members are as American as anyone, as are we, though we remember, also, another time and place. Our story is not a unique one, many many tens of thousands of families have had a similar experience. Such is the magic of moving to this welcoming land. This is our story.”***

### ***The Duong Family***

**About the Cover:** Led by Father Boogaard, the church group Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament of West Point, Virginia, accepted sponsorship of our family of twelve. Needing housing for this large group, they renovated a school building near the parish hall and it became our home for the initial part of our stay. Cover background Photos (left to right): Young Duong family of five, Gian and An standing in front of their home (color), All eight Duong children when in Vietnam.

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## A LITTLE BACKGROUND HISTORY



Vietnam or Viet Nam has been a region or country for more than a millennium, although the name to describe a common people, culture and geography is a fairly recent one. Ben Kiernan quotes a 1820 Vietnamese geographer in his *Viet Nam: A History from the Earliest Times to the Present*:

*“The mountains are like the bones of the earth.  
Water is it's blood.”*

Kiernan goes on to describe Vietnam's geography:

“The country's three historic lowland regions are bounded by extensive uplands, all linked by interrelated landscapes, economies, and cultures. Throughout the plains, water plays a key role in the economy and communications. In the north and south, the Red River and the Mekong River form wide deltas and flow into the South China Sea. Linking the two deltas is the central region, many hundreds of miles of curving coastline, broken every twenty miles or so by river mouths and port towns. In the past three millennia, these three lowland regions have nourished unique wet-rice civilizations. Overlooking the lowlands, and descending very close to the coast along the narrow central plain, forested ranges and hills (“the bones of the earth”) serve as the watersheds of the country's many rivers, occupy three-quarters of its territory, and are home to over fifty ethnic minority groups speaking as many languages. In one sense, this polyethnic culture

helped usher in the first use of the name “Việt Nam, meaning Southern Viet.” That term first appeared early in the nineteenth century after the consolidation of all these regions under a new dynasty that had been founded by a multicultural military force.”

The country has been around for a long time, using names such as: Nan Yue, Jiaozhi, Jiao, An Nan, and Dai Co Viet, although not everybody agrees just how long. Nationalist historian Nguyen Manh Ha once wrote “We are a nation that has existed for twenty-five centuries.” Ho Chi Minh, soon to be very important, placed the country’s origin in the first millennium BCE. U.S Historian Keith Taylor dated the final phase of the country’s birth in the tenth century when “Vietnamese leaders drew a political frontier between themselves and the Chinese.”

Regardless of the country’s age, throughout history Vietnam has been fairly peaceful. The French changed all that through its conquest of the region of Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, forming Indochina in 1887. That lasted until 1940 when the Japanese invaded and controlled the area until their defeat in World War II. When they departed, a battle to fill the void ensued. The Vietnam War started in the 1950s, according to most historians, though the conflict in Southeast Asia had its roots in the French colonial period of the 1800s. The United States, France, China, the Soviet Union, Cambodia, Laos and other countries would, over time, become involved in a lengthy war.

In January 1950, The People’s Republic of China and the Soviet Union formally recognized the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam, and both begin to supply economic and military aid to communist resistance fighters within the country. With the new assistance, the Viet Minh, formed earlier by the popular Ho Chi Minh, stepped up their offensive against French outposts in Vietnam. In June 1950, the United States, identifying the Viet Minh as a Communist threat, increased their military assistance to France for their operations against the Viet Minh. In 1954, French troops were humiliated in defeat by Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu. The defeat solidified the end of French rule in Indochina.

Except for the brief Japanese interlude, the struggle to fill the colonial void continued in earnest following the war. The United States and other allied countries attempted to save the country for

democracy, at least in the south, and a brutal war with the Communist north ensued. The long war finally ended in 1975 when North and South Vietnam were reunited as one country. Many Vietnamese refused to accept Communist rule and fled the country.

## OUR EARLY FAMILY



The Duong family grew in the North Vietnam city of Ha Dong, an urban district of Hanoi. Four of their eight children were born in that region. Devout Catholics led by the family patriarch, Duong Minh Gian and his wife, Bui Thi An, had already migrated south to flee the historic religious intolerance of the Communist North. Here the rest of their children were born.

***Duong Minh Gian and his wife, Bui Thi An.***



***Gian and his wife An with son Savio in her arms. Front, left to right: Ann (Hoa), Cecilia (Phuong), Francis (Quy), and Annie (Huong). Later, son Paul (Dung), daughter Mai and son La Vang would join the immediate family, with many grandchildren and great grandchildren in the not too distant future.***

The Duong Family had a good life in Vietnam. They didn't change, the country did. As you will see, they kept up the same happiness and success they have always enjoyed.

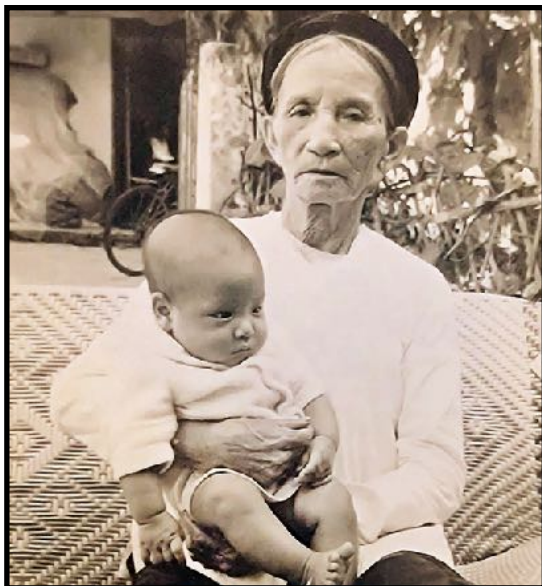
### **Photographs of the Early Duong and Bui Families**



***Young Gian and An (left) and four of their children: Ann (Hoa - tallest), Cecilia (Phuong) 2nd daughter (left), Francis (Quy) oldest son (right), and Annie (Huong), 3rd daughter (center).***



***Young Rose and Martin (left). Ann, a nurse, and a baby she helped deliver in 1972.***



***Do Thi Nem, holding her Great-Grandson, Martin in 1975. In a short time, they would be a world apart. Mother Ann, when a little younger!***



***Francis in military uniform.***

***(left) Nem (seated), with daughter An (back left) and Granddaughters Annie, Cecilia, and Ann standing behind her, and Grandsons La Vang (front left), Savio (front center), and Granddaughter Mai (front right).***



***A very early photo of the Duong Family (top left). All eight of the Duong children at an early age (top right), and three of the boys when a little older. Paul (left), Savio (right), La Vang (center). (Photos by Gian)***

A few early photo remembrances of the twelve-member family that escaped Vietnam during the 1975 fall of Saigon, plus grandmothers and great grandmothers of those pictured. The Duong Family of twelve would go on to establish a new heritage in a new chosen

country, while remembering where they came from.

## **OUR LONG JOURNEY TO A NEW HOME**

The defeat of South Vietnam by Communist forces from the North had been anticipated for weeks. United States planners had established a game plan for evacuating at-risk personnel from the country including Vietnamese citizens and their families who had aided the Americans in years past. Air lifts by passenger planes, ships

leaving Southern ports, and helicopter lifts of the remaining personnel were all planned. Not anticipated were those citizens fleeing a Communist takeover due to religious freedom concerns. All of this was captured by a US Navy code name, "Operation Frequent Wind." As the inevitable got closer, a fleet of US Navy ships waited a few miles offshore to accept and manage a large evacuation.

The Duong family represents the one large source of evacuees not previously considered - those fleeing Vietnam for religious reasons. With the fall of the South Vietnam government soon likely, the Duong Family, including the couple's eight children and two grandchildren, sought to escape. After several failed attempts, the family finally found a fishing boat in late April 1975, that would take the family and others and head to sea; destination not quite sure where! Gian had a connection to the fisherman's boat the family left on. It belonged to a former patient. He allowed the family to join them in their own escape. Both families still keep in contact today.

Gian and his family, left the coastal port of Vung Tau City, near Saigon, and went to sea hoping to find an American ship and safety. While airlifts and helicopters rescued thousands of refugees, small boats were responsible for many times that total. The sea was literally awash with small boats, each looking for a ride to freedom, the Duong boat included.

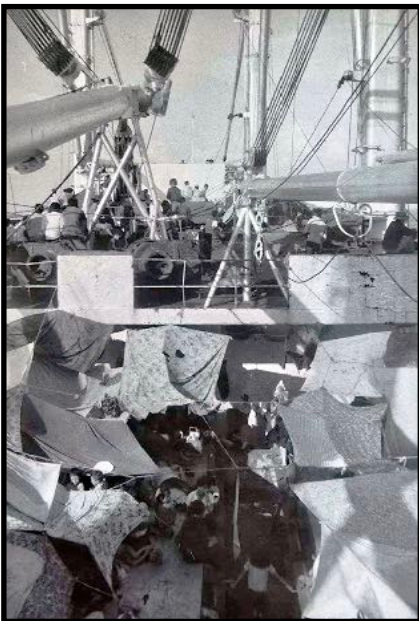
Gian's son Francis (Quy), recalls the family leaving Vietnam's coast on April 27, 1975, in one of two fishing boats carrying about a hundred people each. They couldn't help but notice that the considerable helicopter traffic stopped late on April 30. Saigon had fallen. They remained at sea another day or two before finally encountering a "large Navy ship" at night that welcomed



them onboard. Francis was forced to remove his army uniform before he was allowed to board. They were then taken to a refugee processing center and later transferred to Anderson Air Force Base in

Guam. Exactly what ship took them there is still an active subject of historical inquiry, although it is fairly certain it was a cargo ship belonging to the US Navy's Military Sealift Command.

### **Photographs of The Duong Family at Sea**



***Grandmother Bui holds her grandson Martin aboard ship surrounded by three of her eight children (top left) and Rose, Ann, and Martin (top right).***

***A makeshift refugee campsite (left) aboard ship houses many families, and a church service at sea (above) provides hope and comfort for many facing an uncertain future. (Photos by Gian)***

It was a happy group that disembarked “the ship,” upon landing in Guam. They had stuck together and were anxious, but hopeful, of what lay ahead.



***Leaving the ship in Guam was a joyous event. Annie on the left carrying some bags walking alongside Thuong Vu, Nhan Vu and Gian's Aunt Duong Thi Vong (behind Nhan.) Vong went on to enjoy her new life in California until the age of 106, passing away in 2021.***

## **The Journey Continues - Guam to a New Home**

Getting to Guam was not the end of the battle. Though the family was “homeless” in a country sense, they hoped that they would be welcomed in the United States. They needed a US sponsor, and sponsorship comes with great responsibilities. They were twelve and the leader Gian would not entertain a family separation. The family would stay together.

Guam would be a long rest stop for the Duong family. Air Force, commercial airlines and Navy ships worked around the clock bringing Vietnam War refugees to various refugee processing points, including Guam. Over 100 thousand refugees came through Guam on their way to start new lives in the U.S.A. The family marked time for months in Guam at Anderson Air Force Base and was later transferred to Camp Pendleton, California for another long wait while hoping for a US sponsor to resettle in the country. Their number of twelve was a challenge in quickly finding a willing sponsor. Finally, a past association with a co-worker from Gian's Vietnam days provided a breakthrough.



***Dr. Patrick Reardon with his wife Dorothy, alongside Kham Vy, and Phuong Thi Duong Vy. Dr. Reardon was crucial to the Duong Family's transition. He passed away in 2022, at age 90.***

Gian worked as a nurse in Vietnam during the war with Dr. Patrick Reardon, who facilitated the essential opportunity for the Duong Family to find resettlement in the US. Dr. Reardon and his family were associated with a Catholic Church in West Point, Virginia. Through their urging, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament

Parish agreed to take the entire family. Later, OLBS would accept other Vietnamese families and, fifty years later, they continue to leave a positive mark on the community.

***The Duong Family was warmly greeted by the OLBS Parish. They had survived a long ordeal and ended in a pleasant and loving place, where many of them still call home. This Journey was over, but a whole new life lay ahead.***

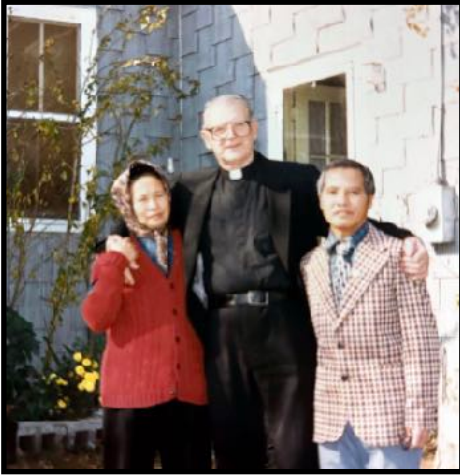


***Back Row: Hung Duong (Savio) , Quy Duong (Francis) , Vuong Bui (Annie's husband), Dung Duong (Paul), Father Boogaard, Middle Row: Mai Duong (Theresa), Huong Duong (Annie), Phuong Duong (Cecilia), Han Van Duong***

***(Gian's brother). Front Row: La Vang Duong, Rose (Cao) Didion, An Thi Bui, Hoa Duong (Ann), Martin Cao, Gian Minh Duong.***

Father Henry van den Boogaard, Pastor of the West Point church quickly went to work making their new live-in parishioners feel at home. They renovated an old and unused school building that

belonged to the parish to provide living accommodations for the family. They also found employment for Gian and two of his daughters at nearby Williamsburg Community Hospital as nurses aides. The family was off and running and haven't looked back.



***An, Fr. Boogaard and Gian in front of their home in West Point, Virginia.***

## **OUR FAMILY IN THE RECENT PAST AND TODAY**

Today, the Duong families live in California, Florida and Virginia, and with another US born generation now in the mix, Duong family members have spread out to other states. After fifty years and still as



***Rose (Cao) Didion (daughter of Hoa), arrived in West Point with the family at age 8. Also Shown with husband, Chuck, and sons Josh and Michael (center). It's a proud Chuck and Rose Didion with their US Air Force son, Michael!***

close as ever, their collective life is characterized by US military service, hard work, college degrees, educators, and business ownership. There was enough of the Vietnamese crowd that they built their own church including a seminary to train church officers from Vietnam. Thriving in a very different place, they also retain their native culture and teach it to their children. Sunday Mass is in Vietnamese.

Today's Duong family is far more numerous than the original twelve. Most of the family ended up in West Point, and still live in the Richmond, Virginia area. Granddaughter Rose grew up, married and eventually moved to North Florida with her husband, Chuck, and raised their two boys there. One of the daughters, Phuong Thi Duong Vy met and married Kham Vy, who had been sponsored by a family from California, and the couple moved there.



***Kathy Bui, is the 3rd grandchild of Gian and An (daughter of Huong), and the first born in the US. She started her career as a registered nurse, twenty-four years bedside, ten as a travel nurse. She now educates nurses on medical equipment. Shown here with one of her classes (top left), and a screen shot of her award ceremony as the Clinical Educator of the Year for Braun Medical in 2023.***

***Kathy and her husband Gavin.***



***The family patriarch Duong Minh Gian and his 2nd wife Dinh Thi Khieu and their extensive family.***



***Small business oriented, Paul shows off his barber shop. The Zen Cafe is owned and operated by his son Brandon (left). His brother Anthony (right) works there when not in college. Paul's daughter, Camille (center), is a practicing nurse.***



**Quy Tien Duong (Francis) is the eldest son of Gian and An (left). After settling in the U.S., he became an apprentice and eventually founded his business, Q.T. Duong Plumbing & Heating, which he has been running in West Point, VA for over 40 years. He and his wife Mai Pham have 7 children, including Christopher Duong, Yvan Do, Long Duong, Hoang (Andrew) Duong, adopted son Phi Hoang Do, Thanh Duong, and Nam Duong (left). Young Chris and grandmother An preparing a meal for the family (right).**



**David Christopher “Chris” Duong, oldest son of Quy (Francis) (left), was raised with a deep appreciation for food and gardening. He studied at NC State University, began working with the Poultry Science Department and later founded Oak Ridge Farms in Zebulon, NC, raising poultry for eggs and meat, gradually expanding to include pigs, cattle and floriculture. He now farms full-time offering various meats to local customers and seasonal cut flowers to local florists (left). Oak Ridge Farms gathers a crowd. They will gather a larger one at their upcoming family reunion (right).**



***Nurses Virginia Vy-Del Rosario (daughter of Phuong), husband Erick and children, Ila and Micah (top left), What might the two little ones one day be? Savio Duong, son of the late Savio (top center), is an Instrumentation Planner at Smurfit Westrock. Hai (Steven) Huynh, son of Mai, is all smiles after closing a big sale (top right).***



***Virginia is an adult and pediatric critical care & trauma nurse with 22 years of practice. When she's not in the hospital, she's teaching at a local college in Southern California. Her husband, Erick, is also a registered nurse practicing for over 13 years in the ER, outpatient and urgent care settings. Always entrepreneurial and dedicated to their profession, they started a joint venture of their own, a legal nurse consulting business. Their goals are helping their clients achieve the best outcomes in healthcare, medicine, and law. Virginia is shown here (left center) with her class and a retiring staff member.***



***The Bui Family siblings (left to right): John (BJ), Kathy, Theresa, Angela and Michael.***



***The California branch of the Duong Family has 3 generations of the Vy Family (above), including Kham and Phuong Thi Duong Vy. Back row left to right: Johnny, Chanda (Johnny's wife), Kathy, Virginia, Erick (Virginia's husband) & Dorothy. Front row left to right: Avery, Jonah, Ila & Micah. The next generation of the Duong family (below) continues to grow!***



This year, the Duong Family joyfully reunites to celebrate a remarkable milestone. 50 years of freedom, since immigrating to the United States. With hearts full of gratitude and generations gather. We honor the courage, resilience, and love that carried our family across an ocean and through half a century. A beautiful celebration of how far we've come, and the enduring strength of the Duong name.

## REMBRANCE AND MEMORIAM

It has been fifty years and time marches on. Gian (2013) and his wife, An (2000) and two of their children; Savio, the 2nd son (2016), and Mai, the youngest daughter (2009), Yen, mother of Paul's three children (2014), and Long, son of Francis (2006), have all passed. Although all are greatly missed, they left an everlasting mark on the Duong legacy.



***Grandfather Gian (top left) looks over Savio's family: wife Donna and their children (left to right): Maria, Jade, Jasmine, and Savio.***



***Francis, smiling with his 2nd son Long (top right), and Yen, always showing her positive spirit (left).***

***Mai with her five children (bottom left): Truong (Dario, in arms), Trang (Erica, 2nd from left), Hai (Steven, 3rd from left), Lam (Brandon, front center), Son (right of Lam), plus some cousins. Gian and An (bottom right).***



## OUR IMMIGRATION STORY AND A TRIBUTE FROM A FRIEND

Today, the Duong Family home in West Point has been demolished and cleared leaving nothing but a pile of dirt waiting for its next purpose. It will forever leave an imprint in the history of Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church. Reminders of Gian's spirit continue to shine as the bamboo trees he planted in the backyard continue to grow and multiply. The site now waits to become a memorial garden for those families the church has guided, past and present, including families from Latin America, the Philippines, Poland, Vietnam and many more to come.



***Future site of The Refugee Memorial Garden at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church in West Point, Virginia. It is a tribute to refugees everywhere who have enriched their own lives and those of their chosen new communities.***

*“The most remarkable aspect of the Duong Family Story is that it has been repeated in hundreds of thousands of communities throughout the world by people from many countries. The Duong Family and families like them, risked their lives in order to have a better one and enriched our lives and our communities in the process. They deserve our great admiration and undying gratitude.”*

*Captain Fred Braman, USN (ret), A Friend*

***This booklet was created to summarize our family history and describe the principle events of our long “Journey to Freedom,” which we celebrate today. We are delighted that you could be with us on this special and important day!***

**Oak Ridge Farms, July 19, 2025**