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### “Fleeing Theu Freedom”

My grandma is someone I know who lived through the Vietnam War. She has early dementia and has trouble remembering some things but she clearly remembers her life living in Vietnam and running from communism.

She was born in Nam Định, a city south of Hanoi in North Vietnam. Her name is Theu (pronounced “To”) Nguyen. (Pronounced ‘To’.) She lived in a small house and shared a room with her sister. She had two brothers; one older, one younger. She liked to play and have fun with them. She was very much a tomboy! She liked to shoot a slingshot for fun, jump in rivers, and get all dirty. She did anything her brothers did!

When she was in high school, she liked to walk from the high school to the Catholic church. There she would sit and pray for a little bit before going home. My grandma remembers her father talking to her mother about seeing all the posters about communism that were being put up all around the town and surrounding towns. He was concerned that even though people might think the idea of communism sounds good, it is not. He was worried that a war would be close at hand. One night, my great-grandfather told his family they would have to leave their home and their town. They were only allowed to pack one bag each. My grandma packed whatever was necessary and knew she had to leave behind so much. She left behind her beautiful dresses, her artwork, her childhood doll that her dad gave her, and her slingshot. She knew that she couldn't have the innocent life that she once had.

Her father hurried them while they were packing because they had to board a French ship before it left. As she was leaving the house, she looked back tearfully and etched the memory in her head, knowing that she would never see her home again. As she boarded the French ship, she saw many other Vietnamese people get on and the ship was becoming overcrowded. Many people were frightened and scared, as was she. She did not know where they were going. An American ship escorted their ship to South Vietnam. The journey took about three days. While she saw many people crying and dying while on the ship, she said a prayer for everyone and couldn't help but feel a little relieved to be escaping communism.

When the ship reached the dock in South Vietnam, her family got off and looked for another home. They wanted to settle in South Vietnam and start a new life. She eventually got married and had six children. She was happy living her life until the news of a possible attack from North Vietnam. This put everything in action and people were fearful again. A major surprise attack called the Tet Offensive happened on the Lunar New Year, January 30, 1968. There was chaos everywhere and her husband had to go to war against North Vietnam.

She wanted to help the South Vietnamese Army in any way possible, so she and some other women found loose wire and rolled it in bundles to give to soldiers to make bombs. As North Vietnam was advancing closer to her town, she and others were always one town ahead of them, trying to flee. When walking through different towns, my grandma would pick up grenades she would see on the streets and throw them out of the way of people.

News came to her saying that her husband had died fighting against North Vietnam. She had to take care of her kids alone and keep them safe. After some time, my grandma met my grandpa who was an American soldier. He promised her that he would marry her in the US and adopt her children. She boarded a plane for South Vietnamese refugees headed to the United States. When she arrived in the United States, she said a prayer of thanksgiving and felt lucky and relieved because she finally had freedom! She also would have a husband and a new life!... Years later she had my dad! I am grateful I never had to experience anything like my grandma did, but also grateful for her bravery and perseverance. I am grateful for my grandma.