

Truc's story from Vietnam

Part One

When Truc was a little boy, he lived on a farm in Vietnam. He lived with his grandpa, mum and dad, brothers and sisters.

Mum and dad grew rice and vegetables. They also kept ducks, chickens and pigs. The family ate what they produced and sold extras at the market. Home was a simple house with a metal roof, thatched walls and a dirt floor. There was no electricity or running water. Each child had a small basket for clothes. The children had no toys but played fun games with other village children.

When Truc was around three years old, he saw soldiers marching up and down the streets all the time. Day and night, he heard guns and helicopters. The noise went on for months and months. Very early one morning, bullets began flying through their house. Quickly, Truc's father dug a hole in the kitchen and lined it with rice sacks. Truc and the others were dragged into the hole. They sat there all day, listening to bullets whizzing overhead. The next day, everything was quiet. The war was over. It was 1975.

The new communist government wanted to take over everybody's land. They told people where to live and how to work. In return, the government gave them food and clothes. Because people didn't want to live this way, many tried to escape. It was risky because they could be jailed if caught.

Truc's family didn't have any money to pay to escape. But Truc's uncle was invited the family to escape on one of his boats. Two times the family tried to escape but failed. In 1981, however, when Truc was nine years old, his family finally left Vietnam on a fifteen-metre boat.

Truc left Vietnam on a fifteen-metre boat. There were sixty-five people on the boat. Apart from a small cabin, there was no shelter. When it was sunny, it was very hot. There were no toilets. The smell was very bad. In rough seas, the waves grew bigger than houses. People were afraid that the boat would be swamped. People threw up because they were seasick. Pirates with guns attacked the ship, twice. They stole

all the money and jewellery they could find. Truc was thankful that no one in his family was hurt.

After three days at sea, Truc saw land. It was Thailand. Everybody was very happy. Many boats came out to meet them. When the boats got nearer, Truc saw many angry faces. The Thai villagers came onto the Vietnamese boat. They took apart the motor and emptied the fuel into the sea.

The pirates had already stolen all the money or jewellery on the boat. So the Thai villagers took clothes and anything they could use. They held Truc over the side of the boat. They thought Truc's parents might be hiding some valuables. But Truc's parents truly had nothing to give them. Luckily, they put Truc back in the boat.

Some Buddhist monks walking on the beach saw what was happening. They called out, 'Stop! What you are doing is wrong. Don't hurt the people. Bring them ashore.'

Thai people respect Buddhist monks very much. The villagers brought the Vietnamese boat people ashore. The monks gave them food and water and let them sleep in the temple that night.

During the night, some people came in a bus. They said, 'We are from the Immigration Department. We have come to get the women and children.'

The monks did not believe them. They did not allow the people from the bus to take anyone away. The next day, the real Immigration officials came. So the monks saved them twice: first from dying at sea, second from people smugglers.

The immigration officials brought Truc and the others to a refugee camp in southern Thailand. This camp was by the beach. Truc's family lived in a hut with two walls only. There were no doors or windows, but the sea breeze blew in. Conditions were basic, but not much worse than what Truc had been used to in Vietnam.

Three times a day they lined up for food: sardines and rice. The food was very spicy, but Truc always ate everything because he was always so hungry.

Truc's parents applied to Australia for asylum and waited. They must have been very anxious. Truc was not anxious. Every day he played with the other children. He was with his family and he finally felt safe.

To be continued.