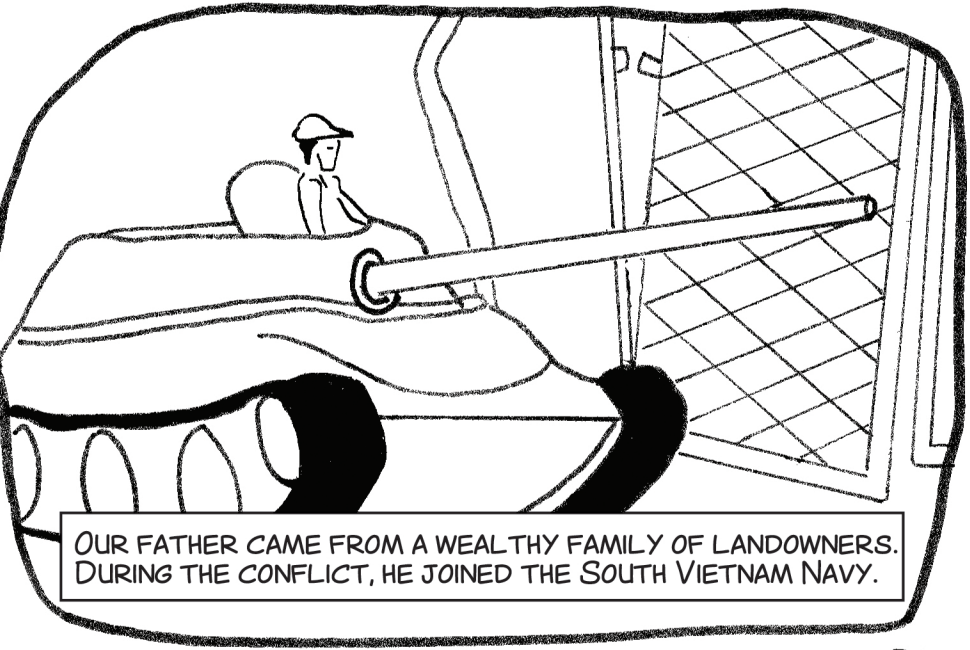
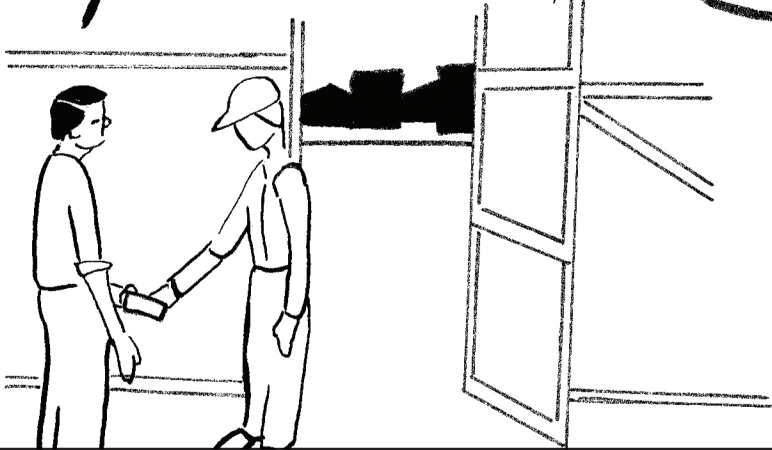


# PAST IS PROLOGUE

CHI HAI (TAM) CAN  
TELL YOU ABOUT SAIGON  
AFTER THE FALL.



OUR FATHER CAME FROM A WEALTHY FAMILY OF LANDOWNERS.  
DURING THE CONFLICT, HE JOINED THE SOUTH VIETNAM NAVY.



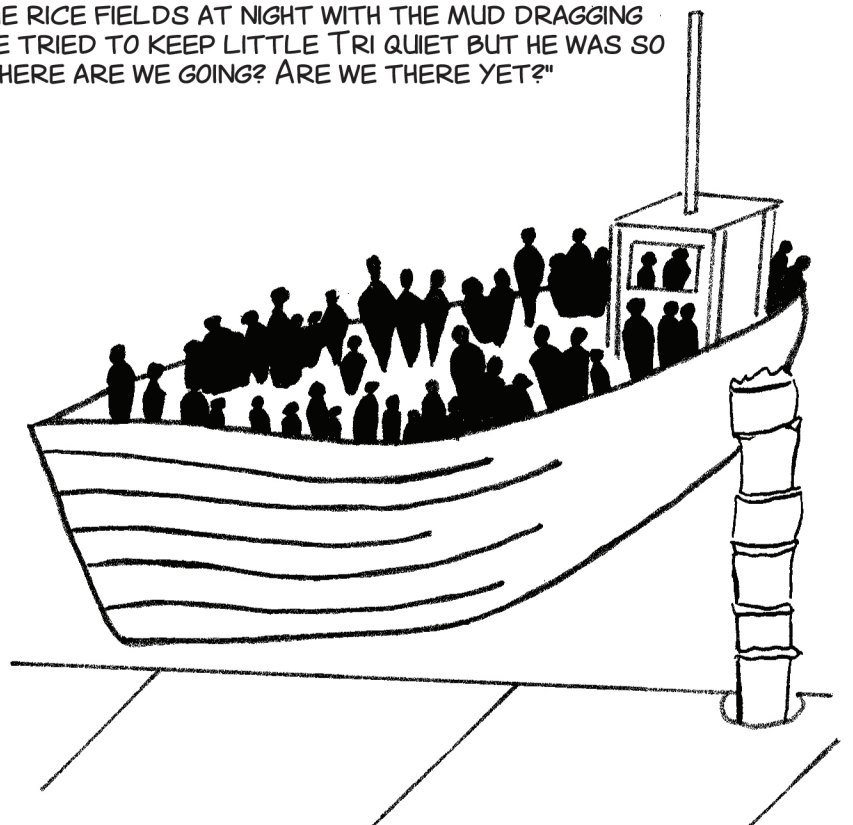
AFTER THE FALL, HE WAS TAKEN TO A REEDUCATION CAMP. MOM'S  
FAMILY WERE HIGH RANKING COMMUNISTS AND HELPED GET HIM OUT,  
BUT WE COULD NOT LEAVE UNTIL HE RECOVERED HIS HEALTH.



I WAS 22 AND ASSIGNED TO PAYROLL AT COMMUNIST HQ. WHEN I  
ASKED FOR A VACATION, MY BOSS WAS SUSPICIOUS BUT LET ME GO.

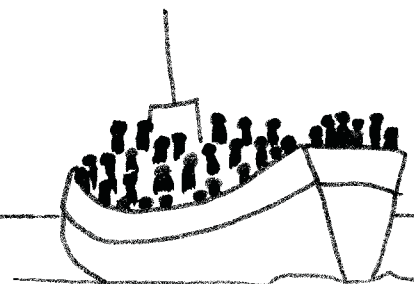
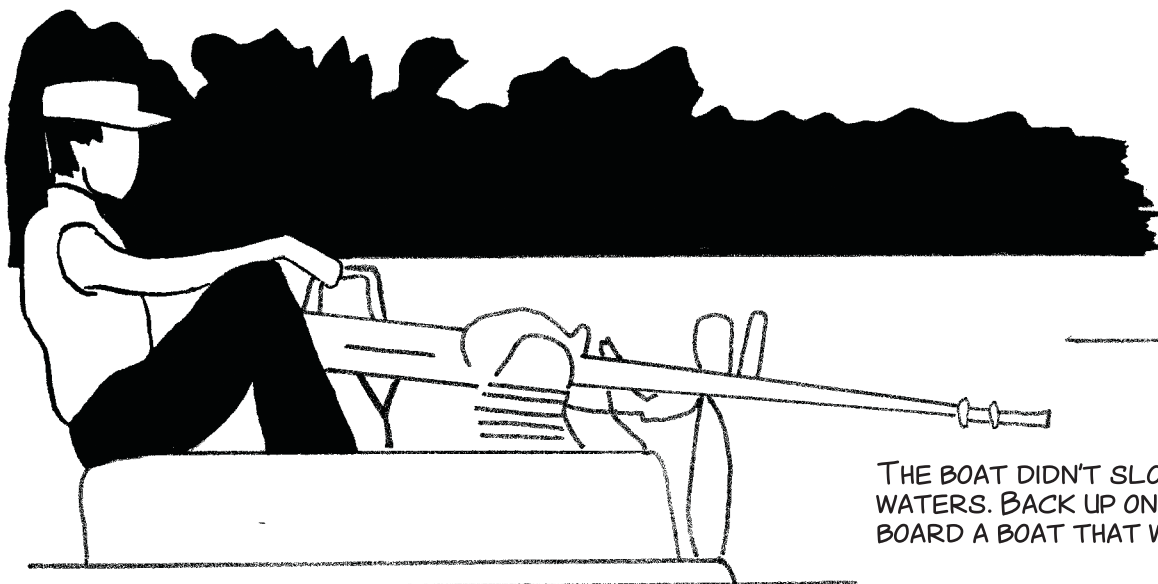
ALL DEBTS WERE PAID OFF. WE BROUGHT WITH  
US PICTURES OF OUR FAMILY AND OUR HOME.

WE CROSSED THE RICE FIELDS AT NIGHT WITH THE MUD DRAGGING  
AT OUR LEGS. WE TRIED TO KEEP LITTLE TRI QUIET BUT HE WAS SO  
LOUD, ASKING "WHERE ARE WE GOING? ARE WE THERE YET?"



DAD FOUND A FISHERMAN TO HELP US. THE COST WAS 8  
BARS OF GOLD PER PERSON FOR OUR FAMILY - DAD (TUONG),  
MOM (DUNG), TAM, TRUC, THO, THUY, AND TRI.

THE YOUNG WOMEN WERE HIDDEN IN THE ENGINE ROOM. WE COULD BARELY BREATHE FROM THE SMOKE AND BANGED ON THE HATCH. THEN WE HEARD DAD SAY, "PATROLS! WE NEED TO RUN! GO FAST!"



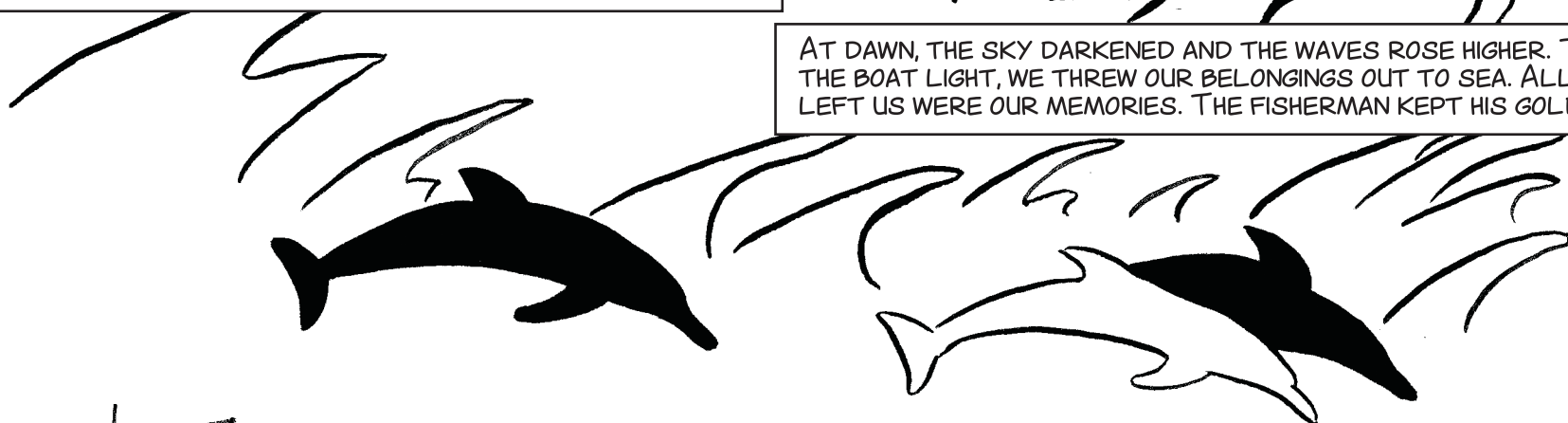
THE BOAT DIDN'T SLOW DOWN UNTIL WE REACHED INTERNATIONAL WATERS. BACK UP ON DECK, WE SAW THERE WERE 56 PEOPLE ON BOARD A BOAT THAT WAS 13 METERS LONG AND 3 METERS WIDE.



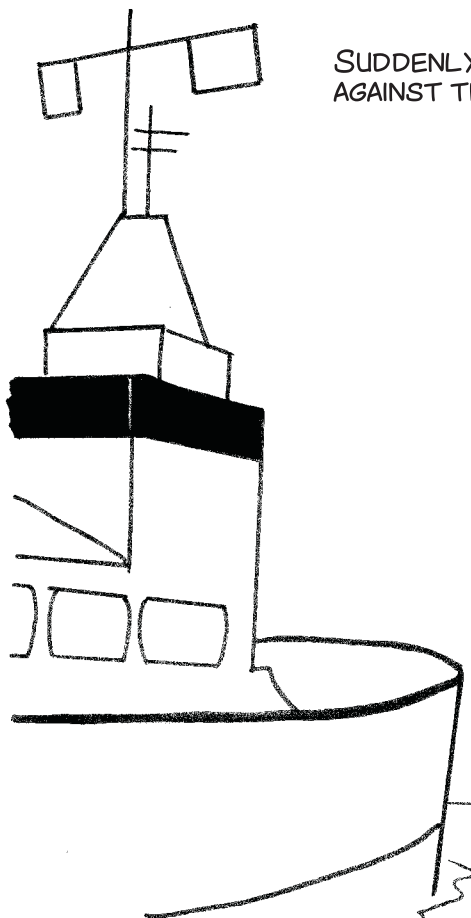
WITH THREE DAUGHTERS, DAD WANTED TO AVOID THAI PIRATES SO WE SET OFF ACROSS OPEN WATER TO MALAYSIA. WE LEFT IN MONSOON SEASON BECAUSE IT HAD FEWER COASTAL PATROLS.



AT DAWN, THE SKY DARKENED AND THE WAVES ROSE HIGHER. TO KEEP THE BOAT LIGHT, WE THREW OUR BELONGINGS OUT TO SEA. ALL IT LEFT US WERE OUR MEMORIES. THE FISHERMAN KEPT HIS GOLD BARS.



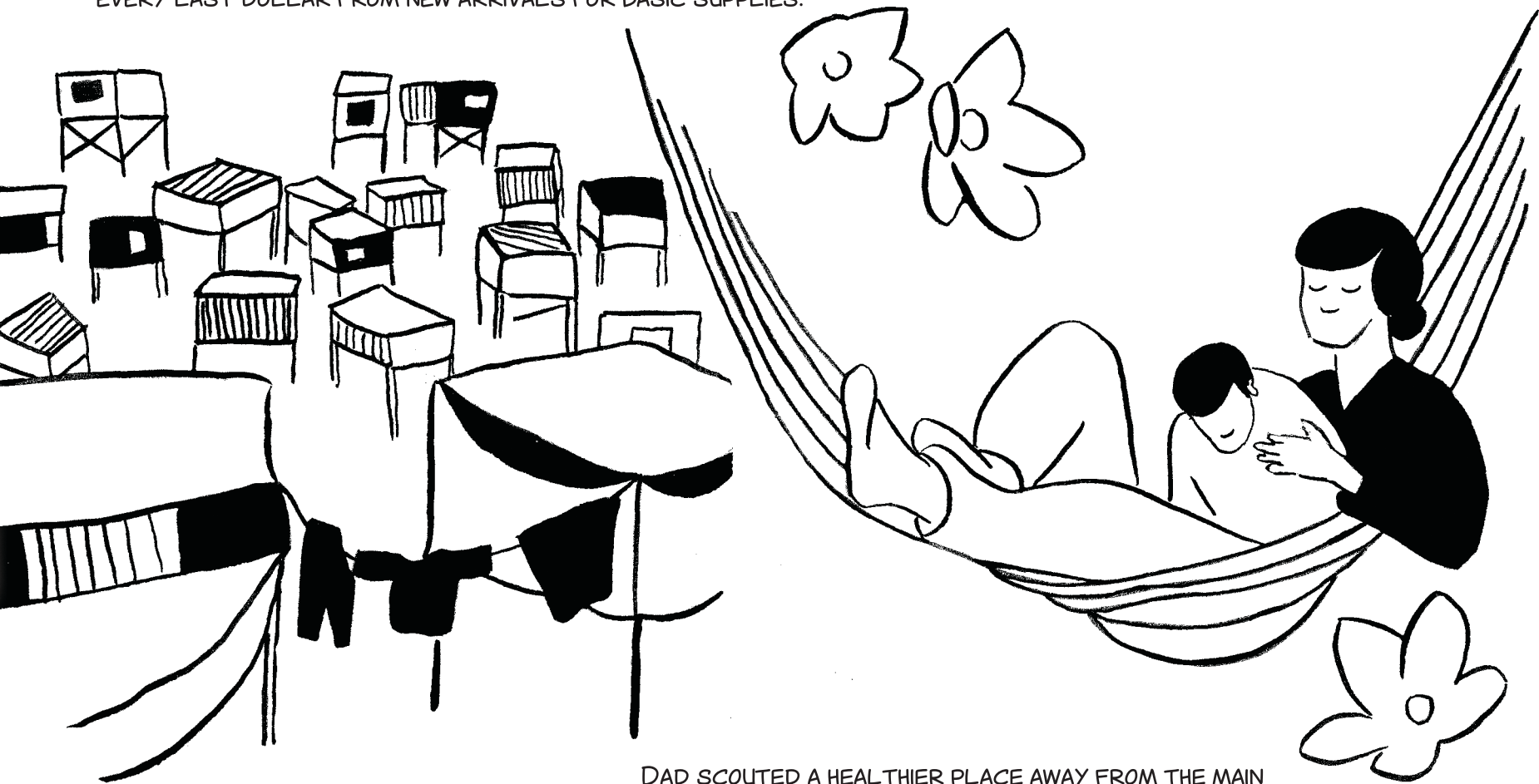
SUDDENLY, DOLPHINS CRESTED THE HIGH WAVES AT OUR EYE LEVEL. THE DOLPHINS PRESSED AGAINST THE SIDES OF THE BOAT AND KEPT IT FROM FLIPPING OVER. THEY LED US TO CALMER SEAS.



NOW WE WERE LOST AT SEA WITH ONLY A COMPASS. A SHIP WITH AN UNKNOWN FLAG APPEARED AND WE FLED. FINALLY, DAD LOOKED BACK AND SAW THE AMERICAN FLAG GO UP.

IT WAS A WORLD VISION SHIP OUT LOOKING FOR REFUGEES. THEY GAVE US WATER, FOOD, BLANKETS, AND DIRECTIONS. THEY LET ME ONBOARD FOR A SHOWER BECAUSE I HAD MY PERIOD.

AT THE REFUGEE CAMP IN PULAU BIDONG, WE WERE PACKED IN LIKE SARDINES. THE DRAGON LADY IN CHARGE OF THE CAMP GOT EVERY LAST DOLLAR FROM NEW ARRIVALS FOR BASIC SUPPLIES.



DAD SCOUTED A HEALTHIER PLACE AWAY FROM THE MAIN CAMP. THE MEN DUG A WELL AND SET UP A MAKESHIFT SHELTER. THE WOMEN HUNG HAMMOCKS AND WHITE ORCHIDS. LITTLE TRI SHARED A HAMMOCK WITH MOM.



CHI HAI AND CHI BA (TAM AND TRUC) SPOKE FRENCH AND SOME ENGLISH SO WE WERE TRANSLATORS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL DELEGATIONS INTERVIEWING REFUGEES.

WHILE WAITING FOR AUNT TIEN IN CALIFORNIA TO FIND A CO-SPONSOR, I TURNED DOWN AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE FROM A CUTE MUSLIM OFFICER. I LIKE PORK TOO MUCH.

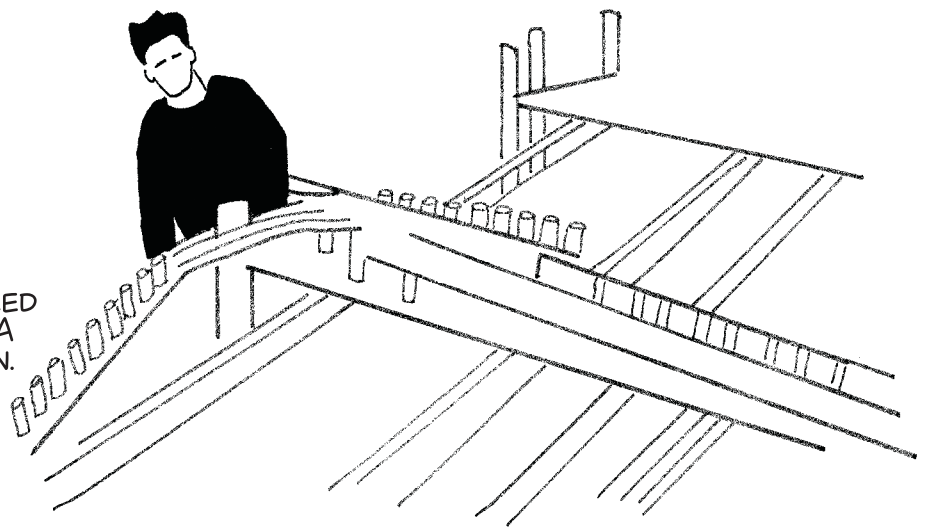
U.S. RESETTLEMENT WAS VERY SLOW. WHEN WE GOT AN OFFER TO GO TO AUSTRALIA, WE DECIDED TO TAKE IT. BUT A DAY BEFORE WE LEFT, THE U.S. DELEGATE RAN DOWN TO OUR SHELTER WAVING A MANIFEST WITH OUR NAMES ON IT.



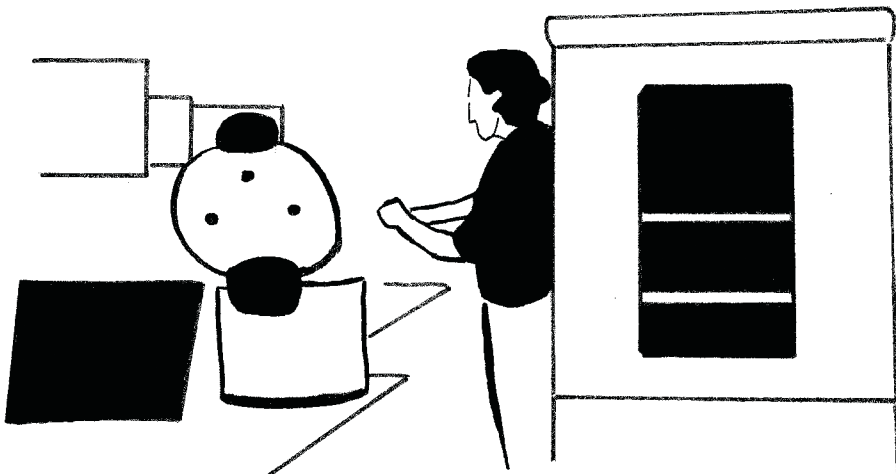
WHEN WE LANDED AT TRAVIS AIRFORCE BASE, MY MOM CARRIED ME (TRI-ANH SÂU) OFF THE PLANE FULL OF REFUGEES. AUNT (CÔ BA) TIEN WAS THERE WAITING WITH OUR CHURCH SPONSORS TO TAKE US TO A GUEST HOUSE.



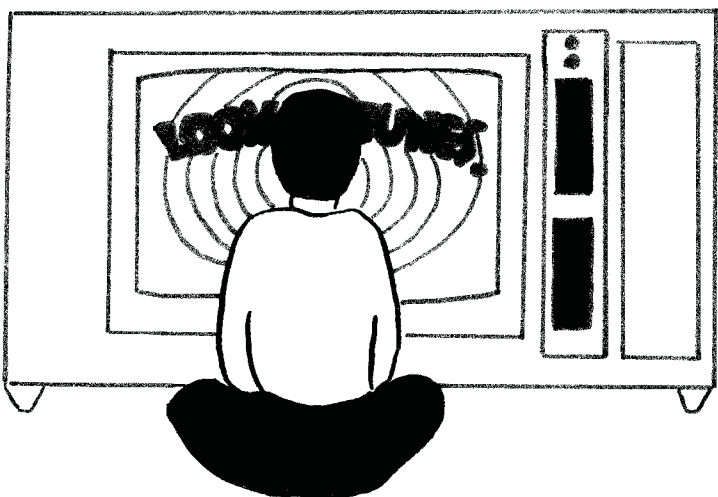
SOON MY FOUR SIBLINGS (TAM, TRUC, THO, THUY) WERE ALL ENROLLED AT THE NEARBY JUNIOR COLLEGE. TAM GRADUATED FIRST WITH AN AA IN ACCOUNTING AND ALL OF THE SPONSORS CAME TO HER GRADUATION.



OTHER EX-PATS GOT DAD A JOB DOING ELECTRICAL ASSEMBLY. LATER HE TOOK CARE OF THE MACHINERY AT THE CAMSCO SOUP CANNERY. HIS JOB OPTIONS WERE LIMITED BY HIS LIMITED ENGLISH.



MOM HAD EVEN LESS ENGLISH THAN DAD. SHE WORKED AS A COOK AT MOFFETT FIELD AND LATER FOR RETIREES AT RINCON GARDENS. EVEN THEN SHE KNEW GOOD FOOD WAS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE.



UNLIKE MY SIBLINGS, WHEN I STARTED SCHOOL I HAD NO ENGLISH. AT HOME, MOM AND DAD SPOKE VIETNAMESE. I DILIGENTLY WATCHED LOONEY TOONS AND SESAME STREET BUT THAT WAS NOT ENOUGH.

I WAS HELD BACK AND HAD TO TAKE KINDERGARTEN A SECOND TIME. I NEEDED TO LEARN ENGLISH OR I COULD NOT MOVE FORWARD. AT HOME, MY SIBLINGS BEGAN TO SPEAK TO ME ONLY IN ENGLISH.

TAM BOUGHT ME A SPEAK & SPELL TO HELP ME LEARN ENGLISH AND TOOK ME TO KEPLER'S FOR DINOSAUR BOOKS.



MY SIBLINGS WENT TO THE DISCO IN SAN FRANCISCO. THEY BROUGHT HOME ABBA RECORDS TO PLAY AROUND THE HOUSE. THEY'VE ALWAYS LOVED TO SING KARAOKE.



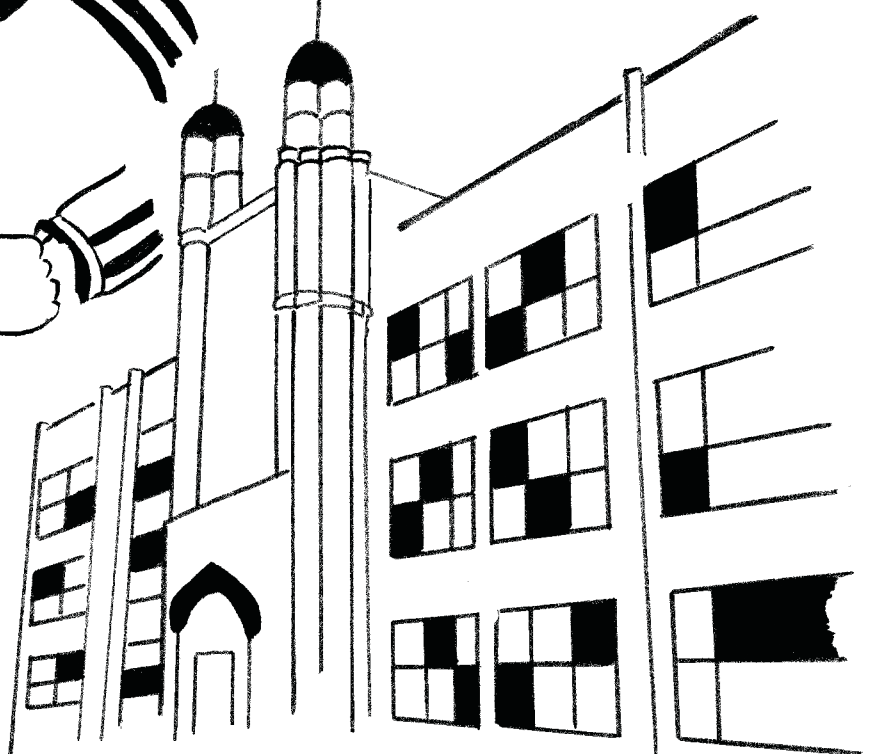
MY ENGLISH IMPROVED BUT SOMETHING WAS LOST BETWEEN ME AND MY PARENTS THAT I NEVER GOT BACK.



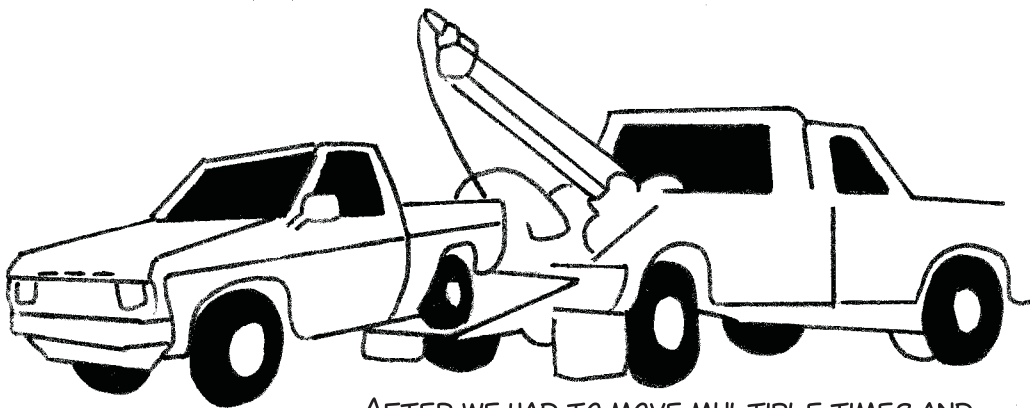
IN 1984, OLYMPIC SOCCER CAME TO THE BAY AREA. IT WAS ONE OF THE RARE OCCASIONS WHERE I FELT DAD WAS TRYING TO CONNECT.



WHEN I WAS IN SIXTH GRADE, I GOT SHIPPED OFF TO PENNSYLVANIA FOR A YEAR TO LIVE WITH TRUC AND HER HUSBAND, LARRY. IT FELT STRANGE BUT ALSO STRANGELY STABLE.

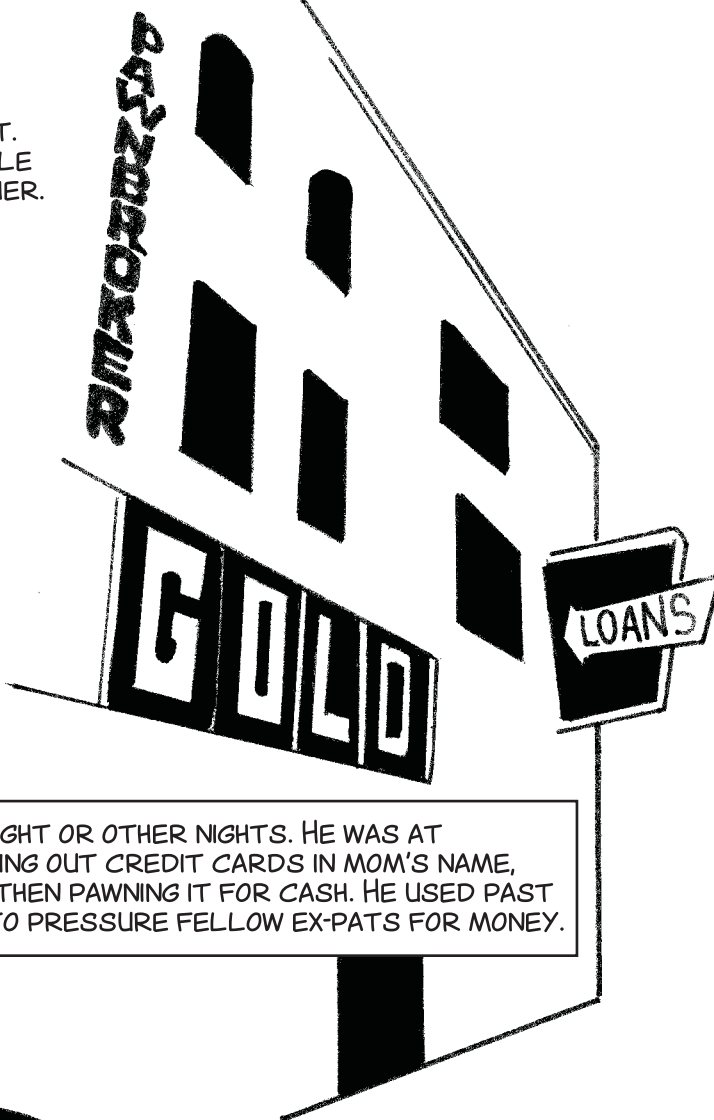


TRYING TO FIT IN AT A NEW SCHOOL WAS HARD. THERE WERE ONLY A FEW VIETNAMESE KIDS IN ALLENTOWN. I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND WHY I WAS SENT AWAY UNTIL LATER.



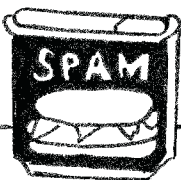
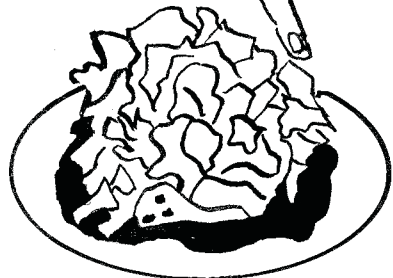
AFTER WE HAD TO MOVE MULTIPLE TIMES AND OUR TRUCK WAS REPOSSESSED, I BEGAN TO SEE THINGS UNDER THE SURFACE IN OUR FAMILY.

EACH MOVE MEANT FRIENDS LOST. MY SIBLINGS MOVED OUT. I FOUND MOM CRYING AT THE KITCHEN TABLE AFTER A DOUBLE SHIFT WITH THE CREDIT CARD BILLS PILED UP IN FRONT OF HER.



DAD WAS NOT THERE THAT NIGHT OR OTHER NIGHTS. HE WAS AT THE CARD TABLE AFTER TAKING OUT CREDIT CARDS IN MOM'S NAME, BUYING GOLD JEWELRY, AND THEN PAWNING IT FOR CASH. HE USED PAST HELP PROVIDED IN VIETNAM TO PRESSURE FELLOW EX-PATS FOR MONEY.

MOM WORKED HARD TO PAY BACK HIS DEBTS. I GOT A JOB WITH HER AT RINCON GARDENS TO HELP OUT. BUT, NO MATTER WHAT WE DID, IT FELT LIKE WE WERE BUILDING ON QUICKSAND.



I NEVER SAW MY DAD SHOW AFFECTION. WHEN I WAS 18, HE HAD A HEART ATTACK. HE DIED AT A CARD TABLE IN GARDEN CITY CASINO ON FATHER'S DAY.



MOM'S ENGLISH NEVER GOT BETTER, AND MY VIETNAMESE ONLY GOT WORSE, BUT SHE COMMUNICATES TO ME IN THE INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE AND I TRY TO CLEAN MY PLATE.