CANTLEY VALE TALES

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The Unforgettable Memory

“It has been two decades since the first trip to Australia,” said my mother. “It will never been forgotten. There are many good and bad memories I will cherish forever.”

When my mum was about twelve years old, she was forced to leave her home country, Vietnam, to start a new life in Australia. She had to leave all her friends behind.

“I remember the night I left with your uncles and aunties. Everyone was crying on the plane. We all missed our friends, but we just had to deal with it ourselves. My eldest brother sponsored all of us.” Her lips were trembling as though she had just eaten something extremely cold. The tears suddenly rolled down her pink cheeks. I decided to stop talking about the issue to make her feel better, but what she was saying sounded so interesting.

“We all lived in one house, all six of us”. She continued, “We had to find jobs to help pay for the house and other things as well.” At that moment, an unexpected smile appeared on her face.

“I remember one day when your uncle took me to the hairdressers to have my hair curled. When they had finished they charged me ninety dollars because they knew I was a newcomer to this country. My mum became happier as she continued to tell her story. When your uncle was driving me home, he asked me how much they charged me. He turned the car around and went back to the hairdresser. He made them pay back the EXTRA sixty dollars they had overcharged me,” my mum said as she laughed.

I then asked her, “How did this experience change your life?” My mum answered, “I would never have experienced all these things if it was not for your uncle. He was the one who sponsored all of us. However, some bad memories are still not forgotten, like the time I was on the plane and there was a huge thunderstorm. It was raining so heavily that I cried. Everyone was so frightened since it was their first experience of flying.”

So that was my mum’s life experience in leaving Vietnam and coming to Australia.
My Mum’s Journey - Only Half-Way

It was pitch black. Everything seemed to merge into one. My own hands and feet blended into the background. Black, black and nothing else. What was the date? I don’t remember. The days just rolled into one, as I anxiously waited for that night to come. Only last week was my birthday. Or maybe it was 3 weeks ago? With no calendar, it was hard to keep track of dates.

The boat swayed violently, jolting my stomach unhelpfully. The whoosh of the sea and the foul stench all swirled around me, becoming engulfed with black. Suddenly the boat stopped. The captain shouted loudly at us, “Now! Get onto the other boat!” Other boat?, I wondered before our tiny tug-boat got nudged. I looked to the side it came from, instantly regretting it as a wave of nausea hit me. I hadn’t eaten for days, weeks maybe. My stomach growled, as my throat ached for clean water.

"Mei! Mei! Chyo! Come now!” My dizziness vanished, as I rushed towards my brother’s voice. Mei Huang, that was my name. Crowds of people rushed towards the bigger boat, eager to get away from this nightmare. Someone took hold of my wrist.

I would have yelled if he hadn’t said, “Shhh...It’s me your brother, Hai Huang.”

“Okay,” I breathed, as he pushed me forward towards the edge of the boat, before managing to climb onto the other boat.

“Jump, Mei! The boat’s moving!” I saw that it was, as I heard loud splashes and shrieks from those who didn’t make it. Goosebumps ran up my arms. The hair at the back of my neck stood on end. It’s now or never, I thought, as I stepped back before running forward and leaping over the growing gap.

My stomach dropped, I felt myself falling…falling into water that would surely end my life. And then, I felt this strong jolt shoot through my arm, as someone grabbed me violently and pulled me to safety. “Mei! Mei!” I made out a dark shadow crouching next to me. It touched me gently, softly whispering in my brother’s voice.

“I wanted to say thank you to my saviour but what I croaked instead was, “Where’s Chyo?” I felt Hai tense.

“I don’t know,” he replied forlornly. My heart thumped sadly, as tears ran down my cheeks. I slowly got up to hug my brother tightly. Hoping, hoping that Chyo hadn’t fallen victim to the sea.

Throughout my journey, my stomach grumbled, my throat felt so dry and I only wore the same dirty, stinky clothes. But the fear of never seeing Chyo was more frightening and dreadful. We reached Malaysia and though we were only half-way there, the future never looked so bright.
Beginning of a New Life

A family of six in a small town in Serbia named Vukovar went on a journey all the way to Australia. This is their story.

Stojan and Ilinka, a couple in Serbia with four kids didn’t live the ultimate life. They were poor and couldn’t make a living. Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia and Macedonia were all combined to make a communist country called Yugoslavia. Stojan was very religious, so he didn’t want to join the communist party and in a country like Yugoslavia the only way to get ahead in life was to join the communists.

The Australian Government were paying people to live in Australia and Stojan didn’t think their kids would have a future in Serbia. When the opportunity came Stojan brought the form and sent it to Austria since there were no Australian Embassy in Belgrade. After a few months they got a positive reply but with pending medical examinations for each of the family members. Once all the forms were completed they packed three suitcases, gave most of their possessions to friends and family, and started their journey to the other side of the world.

There were all sorts of stories told to the four children about kangaroos jumping up and down the streets and snakes crawling on the windows. All the way from their hometown Vukovar they travelled to Austria using the railway. On the railway they had the most beautiful view of the Alps. They counted every single tunnel they went through until about 150, when they fell asleep. After collecting all the necessary documents from Austria they travelled to Genoa in Italy where they boarded one of the biggest ships leaving behind everything, hoping for a new life. When one of the children, named Goran, saw the ship it took his breath away, for he had never seen anything as big and beautiful. It was coloured dark blue, like the ocean, with two towering chimneys. On the ship there were people of many nationalities. There were movies and two swimming pools for the kids. They met many people, and formed close relationships. For Stojan it was a very hard decision to leave behind his brothers, sisters and parents to travel to a country that he’d never even heard of, but the promise of an easier life for his children outweighed the unknown factors.

After thirty days they arrived at their destination just outside Melbourne. They took a bus to a nearby hostel, which seemed to be in the middle of nowhere because it was night time when they arrived. After some time Stojan decided to go to Sydney, leaving the family, to look for an opportunity. Some of his friends helped him get a job and he went back to Melbourne to pick up his family and bring them to Sydney. From 1970-1972 they moved from house to house until they finally
bought a little house in Fairfield and have lived there ever since. Stojan and Ilinka are my grandparents. Stojan is now 71 years old and Ilinka is 73 years old. They have formed life long relationships with people they met on the ship. That shows how long relationships can last. Their four kids are happily married and have children. They love Australia and are thankful for the opportunity that Australia has given them for a better life.

**My Parent’s Journey to Freedom**

During the Vietnam War, many families in Vietnam were struggling to survive due to the invasion of Communist troops, which made life difficult for them.

My mum was living in Vietnam when she had to escape to another country. She was thirty-one years old at that time. She had to escape because the Communists had taken her house, her freedom and human rights. In 1983, my mum escaped on a small fishing boat with many strangers. All she brought with her were two sets of clothes. As she was making this journey, she felt like an ant in the ocean; scared to death. The boat was chased by pirates but they were lucky that the pirates did not rob them. After surviving six days and six nights on the boat, they finally reached Malaysia.

When my Mum made it to Malaysia, she felt very lucky and relieved that she had arrived safely as a refugee. She was interviewed in Malaysia, and the Department of Immigration accepted her as a refugee into Australia. My mum then travelled over to Australia, where she received some help from the Red Cross. Red Cross helped her find shelter and provided her with food and clothing. My mum soon became a citizen of Australia. She had to learn English and found a job that involved sewing. She then met my Dad and started a family.

My Dad’s story is similar to my mum’s. In 1978 my Dad was twenty-five years old and was living in South Vietnam, when he had attempted to escape communism in his country. As he was trying to escape, a Communist soldier spotted him and put him into prison.

In 1983, after being imprisoned for four years, he tried to escape again. This time it was successful. He travelled on a small boat with sixteen people, some of whom were his friends. He didn’t bring anything with him on the boat. As he travelled six days and six nights on the boat, he felt very scared and unsafe.

When the boat reached Malaysia, my Dad felt free and relieved. My Dad received some help from the government and was taken into Australia. He had a friend who was living in Australia, so he lived at that house for a while. After my Dad became an Australian Citizen, he met my Mum and together they started a family.

Twenty-two years have passed and now my parents have three children, my two older sisters and me. My parents are very grateful for all the help they received during this journey.
My Family Journey

My family’s journey is a weird one. It all started in 1962 when the Vietcong wanted to invade South Vietnam. Well as my Dad would do, he joined the Vietnamese Air Force and became one of the Communists’ most wanted!

It took him a gruelling six years to graduate as a helicopter pilot. One night he was on his 27th mission to transport the stranded Vietnamese farmers. One “civilian” dressed communist came on board with three other families. He pulled out his pistol and tried to aim for his head, but luckily the bullet rebounded and hit his leg. He was lucky to be alive and gain full control of the helicopter. He landed safely at an Air Force base 30 miles south of Da Nang and was instantly operated on.

Weeks went by and he was stuck in a room, recovering from the injury. One day he was called to the Commanding Officer’s office and was presented with a bravery award and a scholarship to the Top Gun Academy in Houston, Texas, USA, “The World’s Finest Air Force Academy”. He didn’t have much luck there. He couldn’t even pass the US border!

He had no choice but to take a boat trip to Australia. The trip was supposed to take nine months but bad weather near Singapore caused the small wooden boat to capsize as it was the rainy season. Another case of good luck appeared. There was an oil tanker nearby pumping oil and they noticed the boat passengers were in trouble, so they came and rescued all the passengers from what used to be a boat. They sent everyone on board to the mainland, Singapore, and soon transported everyone on the next flight to Adelaide, Australia.

It was 1982. He applied for a job in Yennora and soon moved to Sydney for it. He reached the highest role for the biggest Supermarket of that time, Woolworths. He worked there for another fifteen years, when a forklift accident occurred, leaving him disabled till this day. That is my family’s history; full of highs and lows.

Child Hardships

Children in this day and age think their lives are hard. Let’s compare their experiences with the childhood hardships of our parents.

In 1966 my father, at the age of five, left his parents to attend a distant boarding school. The boarding school was a school where children were sent for ten months a year to be educated. At the school my
father had little free time. They were only allowed free time on Sundays. There were people who looked after the students and they were known as “brothers”. If they were a female they’d be called “sisters”. They controlled everything that they did including waking up, showering and sleeping. Bells were rung every time one of the events occurred. If the students disobeyed either the brothers’ or sisters’ instructions they were reprimanded.

Each day started with the routine task of polishing shoes until they could see themselves in it. Students would have a time limit for everything; showering five minutes and eating thirty minutes, for example. If students were half way through having a shower and the time was up they would have to go out soapy. There was little entertainment available at boarding school; no toys, no cards. The only entertainment occurred on occasional Sundays. On this infrequent occasion he’d be able to go to the cinemas. They were allotted a two month holiday.

His holidays were spent mostly at home. He occasionally went to the beach or fishing with his parents, brothers and sisters. My father normally went around the city with his brothers. They were very close. One holiday he made a slingshot and used it to shoot rocks at trees or to play games with his siblings. His parents found the slingshot and took it away from him. They destroyed his toy because they thought it was a little too dangerous. The only thing he hated about the holidays was when it was nearly over, and he had to go back to boarding school.

My father went to boarding school until he was fifteen years of age. He escaped Vietnam when the North Vietnamese succeeded in overrunning the South Vietnamese Government. Fleeing the new unfair government, he found refuge in Malaysia and stayed in a refugee camp for a year before being accepted into Australia. My aunt, the oldest in the family, came to Malaysia to visit my father. My father didn’t know that she was arriving. She was standing on the other side of the river, and when my father saw her he was excited but to meet her he had to walk for thirty minutes. Instead he tried to swim across, but when he was half way he started to struggle. My aunt called a few fishermen to help him, and they got a boat and rowed out to get him. He was okay and was happy to see his sister who stayed for a week. In the camp he had to endure cramped and unhygienic conditions.

When he arrived in Australia he had nothing but the clothes on his back. He started feeling left out, lonely and very homesick as he didn’t have any friends or family in Australia. However, over time he started to blend in and feel Australian. He started to enjoy Australia and to this day he still does.

So do you still think that your life is hard?
STRIVING FOR SURVIVAL

My father’s journey to Australia from Vietnam is a tough and horrible memory. He and his family, with three hundred other people, suffered greatly during this journey. They dealt with many problems, both physically and mentally. Their long personal fight for a better life lasted around four months.

It began when my dad was six years old. He fled Vietnam to escape communism in the country. One particular reason for leaving their homeland was to achieve a better life for their family – a fresh new start away from communists and people who could endanger them. They left Vietnam on a narrow ten metre ‘fishing boat’. My dad remembered the boat trip from Vietnam to an island in Malaysia as absolutely traumatising. The boat consisted of three hundred or more people cramped together in a very confined space. He also remembers that there wasn’t enough food to distribute amongst the three hundred people, which caused fights. He explained that everyone was scared every second they were on the boat. They knew that the boat could sink any minute due to the wind causing high waves in the ocean’s water. Fortunately, the boat didn’t sink and nobody died. Finally, after four days and three nights of complete agony, the boat landed on a deserted island in Malaysia, ‘Pulau Bidong’.

The ‘boat people’ as they were considered, stayed at ‘Pulau Bidong’ for a long three and a half months. Although they had escaped from communism in Vietnam, their lives weren’t a holiday yet. Nobody had money, shelter, or any of the other essentials for living a normal life. Everybody had to start from scratch. My dad remembers my grandma baking bread, whilst my dad and his two brothers would sell it. They also had to build a hut to protect them from the wind and rain. After a month or so, other people from the boat and my dad’s family received support from UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the Malaysian Red Crescent Society. They provided them with food and water. My dad is still very grateful for their generosity.

After three months of living at ‘Pulau Bidong’, my dad’s family received sponsorship by the Australian Government for his family to come to Australia. The journey to Australia started when they left the island in a boat to ‘Kuala Lumpur’, the capital of Malaysia. They then boarded a Qantas plane travelling to Singapore and on to Sydney.

Once they were in Sydney, they were sent to an army camp in East Hills, where they were given food and clothes provided by the Red Cross. They were then left to live a safe, new life, with my grandparents looking for work as my dad and his brothers attended school at Busby Public School. Due to my grandpa’s job being in the city, my dad had to move houses and moved to Erskinville Public School. They then bought a house in Cabramatta, which therefore caused them to move schools again. This time they attended Canley Vale Public School, followed by their extended school education at Canley Vale High School.
My dad went through a lot during his time as a child, and I now realise the struggles many people had to go through. I am grateful that I have a safe life now, and understand that not everybody has had a happy life without experiencing any troubles.

**MY GRANDMA’S DEPARTURE**

It all started with a croaky voice and shortness of breath, symptoms like the flu. Her symptoms got worse even after rest and Panadol. We decided to take her to visit our family doctor. He told us that she had caught a cold and to let her rest for a few days. Her condition worsened, her muscles felt weak and her hand and stomach areas were swollen. She had trouble breathing and could hardly eat, drink or walk. All she could do was sit there and sleep.

Around a week later, she asked for an ambulance and she was taken to hospital where she was put on an oxygen unit. Many tests were done on her. The chest X-ray came back and there were scars on her lungs. From that day on she was isolated. My Grandma was treated badly by the nurses in the isolation ward. Even I, a twelve year old boy, could tell this treatment wasn’t right. Her meals were left outside the room with no knock or call to notify her. She was hooked up to an oxygen tank and pulse machine and she could hardly move, let alone walk out to get food, even though my Grandpa was with her whenever he could be.

About a week later, a test came back negative which meant she didn’t have Tuberculosis. She was moved back to a normal ward but her condition still didn’t improve. It actually got worse. The specialist said she could go home but she would have to use an oxygen tank twenty four hours a day.

Within two weeks she was at home with us and her condition was worse than ever. She had to be taken back to hospital, but this time it was different. She was taken to the emergency ward and we were told the bad news. She had lung failure and even with an oxygen tank, oxygen couldn’t get into her body.

We were asked by the hospital whether we wanted to bring her home and be with her for her final days or leave her in Palliative Care. As a caring family, without hesitation we brought her home. We ordered a $4000 elevating bed like the ones from the hospital so it was easier and more relaxing for her. We tried to make her final days worth living and relaxing so it could be memorable and we took her out using a portable oxygen tank to places like the city and a waterfall, along with her wheelchair. We did everything we could to make it memorable.

Soon she was too weak and couldn’t get out of bed. A nurse came and gave her morphine and helped us look after her. She slowly lost consciousness and it seemed as though she would never wake up. You could still hear her murmuring and tears slowly falling down from the corner of her eyes. It was 9:42 in the morning on the 6th of July, the day I witnessed my first death. It happened to my loved and admired idol, my grandma. I love you Grandma and I will never forget you. Rest in peace.
My family Story

My dad came from Vietnam, a country at war with itself. The war started between the North and South but the North wanted all the power, to control this divided nation. He was one of the eight children of my grandmother and grandfather and was amazingly the only boy in the family. At only eighteen he did what he was told and left Vietnam to migrate to a better country. On the journey he went with several other people, crossing meadows of mud and forests of fear. Finally something caught his eye. The sparkling blue ocean twinkled in the sunlight, something he was surprised to see in deep wartime. With his friends he entered the surprisingly small boat, and waited anxiously for more people to come and leave Vietnam. Gradually as days passed, more and more people came saying they wanted to leave Vietnam, to lead a better life, free of the horror.

They sailed in the vast oceans crossing waves of terror and storms of gigantic force and with only their relatively small boat to protect them, they were in grave danger. Their boat broke down. Luckily fate took its turn and a Thai boat spotted them and towed them in. The extremely generous people and police officers of Thailand fixed their boat and towed them back into the ocean where the boat could sail away. The people who fixed the boat might all have been put in prison, but they had smiles on their faces, knowing they had done the right thing.

The boat ended up in Malaysia and the good natured people helped feed them and bring them back to health. This all lasted for six months and after that period of time the people waved goodbye to their friends and watched the boats disappear into the sunset glow.

They finally arrived in Australia, a country free of the war and terror in Vietnam. The Australian people let him in and when he put his first foot in Australia he knew he was safe. The year was 1981, which marked an important year for him. He fulfilled his dream and started a new family, safe and sound.

Journey of Grandpa Chen

Once upon a time in a land far, far away from Australia a man was coming out of a little hut in the capital city of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. His name was Den and he was accompanied by his wife Kim. They had five children. The air was moist that morning for it was the first day of winter. They were on their way to the travel agent with a plan to travel to Australia.

They wished to travel to Australia because at that time Cambodia was a place of poverty and starvation. Everywhere you looked there were homeless victims of governmental tyranny. Mr and Mrs Chen did not want their children to face such
misery. They wanted them to live in a free country where tyranny did not reign and democracy was the law. After they entered the cool air conditioned room of the travel agency they stayed for two hours discussing prices and travel plans.

Five days after buying the tickets the children were woken up earlier than usual. They asked their mother what was happening and she responded saying, “It’s time”. As they entered the red airport of Phnom Penh, Mr Chen told his children to look out the window and say farewell to the country of Cambodia.

When they arrived at Sydney airport the air was humid and light - different to what they were used to. The terminal was an amazing sight for them for they didn’t see much technology back then. As they took their first glimpse out at the city the wind blew through Mrs Chen’s hair and she spoke the words that seemed carried in the wind like a whisper of nature “Welcome to our new home”.

**MY MUM’S LIFE**

By the age of five my mum was going to primary school. The students had to sing the school anthem and raise the Iraq flag before going to class every morning.

When homework was set it was expected to be finished or else the students would get hit by a ruler on the back of their hands or they had to stand for the whole class time. The teachers were tough and rough. Primary school was especially hard because Arabic was my mum’s second language. She had to learn how to read, write and speak. When the students called the teacher for something they had to say “cit” and their first name.

When my mum finished primary to go to high school, the school wasn’t mixed. Boys went to one school and girls another. The whole school was gated. There were no weekends. The only day off was a Friday. The students didn’t have any electives like we have today.

In the end my mum couldn’t finish high school due to her parents. She had to support them because there was only one person, her dad, working in a family of seven.

After working for many years my mum, her brother and thousands of others left Iraq because of the very bad situation created by the war and the siege. Luckily mum made it to Turkey. That’s where she got married to my dad and they left for Canada to start a new life.

**LIFE OVER THERE**

At the age of nine my mum started to understand what was going on. She went to school, had lots of friends and enjoyed her life. She was the fifth child in the family of ten. Two sisters died at the age of thirteen because of an extremely bad disease. No doctor could help.
On the first day of school at the age of nine, my mum got very excited. The uniform was a t-shirt and a very long black skirt. The class had only one teacher who taught everything: Maths, Language and more. My mum told me that at school if you didn’t finish eating your lunch you weren’t allowed to go to play. Mum said that this school was very strict.

Four years later, when my mum was thirteen my grandma and grandpa had money problems. There weren’t many jobs and my grandma had lots of children. My mum walked past her mum’s room and overheard them saying they didn’t have money to pay the school fees. My mum knocked on the door and said “Mum, I can stop school for you and let the others go to school”. “Why?” asked grandma. “Because we don’t have enough money”, my mum replied. My grandma was speechless…

**MY GRANDPA**

I remember when I was a little seven year old girl, Grandpa would tell me frightening bedtime stories. “The boogie man’s going to come and get you, if you don’t sleep!” said Grandpa as he made hissing noises with hand gestures. I would shut my eyes tight and count sheep in my head; one sheep…two sheep… three sheep…

I remember Grandpa telling me his two ambitions. One was to win the $21 million dollar lottery and the other, to become a space commander. He may not have been a successful space commander but he’ll always be my ambitious, funny, quick-witted, hell of a grandpa! As for the $21 million dollars, he actually just won a few dollars.

I will certainly never forget the time Grandpa lost his glasses. He looked everywhere; the kitchen, his bedroom, the bathroom, the shed, Molly’s Room, the kennel, the cat’s food bowl! Nowhere to be found! What he didn’t realise was they were perched upon his head. We were far too mean to tell him. Shhh…

Grandpa’s hands were as rough as sandpaper, yet filled with warmth and love. His skin was like scrunched paper around his hazel eyes. His kindness was too much for words. His laughter filled the room with joy and life, until the day I lost my best friend.

R.I.P. Grandpa

**WHAT IT WAS LIKE COMING TO AUSTRALIA**

My dad was a Vietnamese citizen, who then made his way to becoming an Australian Citizen. I asked my dad what it was like to escape Vietnam and he told me that it was like beginning a new chapter of his life. He said that while he was on the boat, he knew he could die at any moment because he did not know how...
to swim. My dad also said that he knew he would not be able to save himself if anything happened on the boat.

He had no choice but to escape his past. In the middle of the night, my dad boarded the boat with his older sister. After the boat was full of people, they headed out to sea, hiding from Border Control. The boat was old, small and mouldy so they had to travel slowly otherwise it could break or flip. The boat was extremely fragile and was not very stable or safe. There were also many other problems along the way. The engine broke down, they ran out of fuel and supplies, there was no direction and the sea was treacherous and rough. After seven days, they were lucky to be seen by Malaysian fishermen. The fishermen helped supply them with food, water and fuel. The Malaysian fishermen also gave them directions to show them how to get to a Malaysian Island.

After a few days of searching, they finally managed to find the island. Slowly the people on the boat started to collect food and found jobs. Soon after their arrival, the UN Commissioner came to the island to help setup a refugee camp nearby. My dad and his older sister settled into the refugee camp and were extremely happy to have overcome everything. From there, my dad had to wait to be interviewed by the UN Commissioner before he could be accepted to stay on the island to study. My dad found out that he was allowed to stay and study on the island.

After a year my dad had another interview, but this time, it was with The Australian Delegation, to find out if they could accept him as an Australian Citizen. They granted both my dad and his sister, a permanent resident visa. He was soon taken to Australia where he has spent the rest of his life.

*A REFUGEE’S LIFE*

My mother fled from Vietnam because of the war. My mother and her sisters were separated from their parents because they had to go to different places in China.

She took a train to Viete Chi, a town between Vietnam and China. In the middle of the journey, the back half of the train was separated because there were too many people entering China.

Everyone in the back carriages had to jump off the train, with their luggage. My mother and her sisters had to cross the river with the water up to their chests. Some of the bags, even children, were washed away by the river. After wading through the river they finally made it to the other side.

Upon crossing the river they had a long journey by foot before they made it to China. They were accepted into the country and sent to a refugee camp where they stayed for a week. The army truck came to the refugee camp and took them to a farm where they stayed for another week. The food was horrible because they had to eat the same thing everyday and that made people sick.
The army trucks then took them to another city called “Kuan-Ming”. It was a clean and beautiful city in which the refugees were provided with exotic food. The travelling continued as there was soon a very long train trip to Guangzhou. On the train most people played card games or chatted, while my mother thought about her parents and half of her family, who she hadn’t seen for almost a year.

The Chinese then sent them to a town called “Yingde” where they lived far from any other town. It was on a steep hill so working was quite difficult. My mother had to use a sickle to cut grass and dry it in the sun. She also had to collect buckets of water from the well or from the pond that contained blood sucking leeches. It was winter and it was extremely cold. Luckily they were provided with warm quilts and the soldiers’ coats. Food was scarce in winter, so sometimes my mother and her sisters would have nothing to eat throughout the whole day or night.

Later they finally contacted the rest of their family and everyone was reunited.

ESCAPING FROM THE BATTLEFIELDS

My mother was only twelve years old when she left her homeland in 1978. She was waiting at the dock for a boat to arrive with her parents and other passengers. At last, the big, old ship arrived. The quiet boat crew lowered the ramp and the passengers rushed up to their reserved rooms.

The boat captain was a horrible, selfish person who kept all the food and water to himself. Young children cried, boat crew and passengers starved leading to some deaths. Those who did not die had illnesses.

One day, one of the engines of the boat failed because there was a hole in it. As the water was filling up to the ankles, everyone panicked. My mum knew that she had no time to pack up all her belongings so she left her expensive clothes and shoes behind. Fortunately, everyone was saved by pirates. The pirates gave them food but were armed with weapons such as guns, knives, sledgehammers and crowbars.

A couple of weeks later, the sly pirates left the people on a deserted island and took all their belongings such as jewellery and clothes. For two days, the people hiked to search for food. My mum spotted a huge ship coming towards the island from afar. The people from the ship were kind-hearted Singaporean students. They shared their food and water with the ship-wrecked passengers and boat crew. The captain of the ship decided to contact Thai customs and brought the passengers to the exotic city of Bangkok.

They stayed in Bangkok for four months until representatives from the Australian embassy arrived. They had an interview with some of the passengers and my grandfather was one of them. After being accepted as Australian citizens, they immediately flew to Australia where they are still, thirty one years later.
MY FAMILY STORY

Back a long time ago when my parents were little, both of them lived in the countryside far, far away from the city. Life was hard on them living in the countryside because they had to work on the farm from after school until midnight. Every night they would celebrate the end of a hard day working.

When my parents were teenagers there was a war going on. It was a man named Pol Pot. He wanted to change the country of Cambodia. He wanted things his way. He had the army on his side so he could take Cambodians as hostages, making them work for him and make food. If you didn’t work hard they would know that you were pretending because they would feel your pulse. If it was beating fast it meant that you were working hard. If the pulse was slow they would punish you.

Then one day people who lived on the other side of the land tried to help them get out of this situation, away from the war. They tried to help my parents get out and have freedom. After that everything was all fine, and now they live a peaceful life. Happily they can look forward a good future.

MY FAMILY STORY

With my sisters and brothers along side me, we ran with no hesitation, striving for our dream.

The ground with its ragged rocks started to hurt my leg, my heart hurt from running, and my arms were tired from moving. My mother and my sisters had been pulled back by the guards. They had to wait for the next boat. I had to leave this savage country with my brothers.

I left when I was fifteen and the oldest of my two brothers. Staring out at the horizon made my day the happiest ever, knowing that my life would never be so miserable again, and knowing that I would start a new life and live the right way.

As I stepped on the boat, my body released itself from exhaustion, my face grew a smile and my heart skipped a beat. My brothers followed behind me and as the boat lifted out into the water, we looked back, saying goodbye to our sisters and parents.

I looked out into the sky and slowly in to the sparkling water. As the boat set sail, I lay down next to my brothers wondering what my life would be like when I reached Australia. I started to feel a bit nauseous. I sat up and looking at my brother I said “What do you think our life is going to be like?” He looked at me, then at my other brother, and then back at me, with a smile this time. He said “I don’t know but don’t worry because we will find out soon.” He closed he eyes and slowly leant back with on the edge of the boat.

I turned around, looking back at Vietnam, and said ‘Goodbye.’
... I trembled in the corner of the beach, anxious to grab my chance of escaping the horrible life in my home country, Vietnam. I leapt onto the boat, and risked everything to have the wonderful life I have now.

I was twenty-two when I escaped the suffering of the early days of Vietnam. I got on to a boat that took us out of the country without hesitation. We left the shores of Vung Tau beach down the coast of Vietnam, and went out to sea for five whole days. We had no food to eat. The boat was cramped with seventy eight people, and the only thing we had to keep us from dying was water. On the fourth day the boat luckily passed a French ship. They gave us supplies such as petrol, food and drinks. We then sailed for another day, hoping to reach our destination.

As the sun came up the next morning we stumbled onto the shores of a place in Indonesia. I was tired, hungry and weak. But this was my chance for freedom, and I held my hopes high. We arrived at the refugee camp moments later, and I stared at what was going to be my home for the next eight months.

Days, weeks, months passed by as I was living in this camp. We spent most of our days learning English, studying the customs of Australia and America, and hoping to fulfil our lifelong dream of ending up in one of these countries. Most of our meals were made up of rice and dried protein, such as fish. To keep myself entertained I spent a lot of my time playing games, such as soccer, and strolling along the beach each day as I waited for the chance to have freedom. At the same time, I made many friends and through the long nights we would tell each other stories and cheer each other up. It was a life of relaxation and laughs, but the conditions were not what I would call good. We slept in cabins each night on wooden low beds, in rooms with a large number of people. We bathed and showered at the creeks each day.

Although it sounds like there were a lot of things to do, there were also moments when I would be bored to death. This was a camp where we weren't allowed out, like a prison, but with no work or torture. The food and water weren't in good condition either. Every single person lacked in nutrients, as there was no fresh food for us to eat. At times I was weak. My legs would ache because of the lack of nutrients, and the only thing we got was medicine to relieve the pain.

The day finally came when the delegation from Australia came to the camp and interviewed several people. The moment they told me that I was accepted, my heart lit with joy and happiness. All the long months I had suffered were finally worth it.

When we arrived in Australia, I stepped out of the plane and gazed at the beautiful view of Australia. I can't explain the feeling I was experiencing. I was so happy and pleased. The country of Australia had very kind citizens. The climate was excellent. There were many good jobs that I could do to make money. They had good education, good and fair laws that could protect everyone and last of all …

FREEDOM!
How my Parents came to Australia

My parents were both born in a beautiful country where there are many different cultures and colours but one day for their own reasons they both had to leave their friends, family and this amazing country to start a new life in an unfamiliar place.

It all started with my dad who was the first one to come to Australia. It was in 1990, when my dad and a whole lot of other people boarded a boat to Australia looking for a better life. The journey was not an easy one. From Vietnam they travelled by boat to an island where they waited to be accepted into Australia. They all lived in small straw huts and had to find their own food. The hut was small and the beds were hard. One hut was shared among five people. It had holes all over the roof so every time it rained the water would leak in and the people would have to put a bucket under it. The typical weather was not pleasant; some days they had to try their best to keep themselves warm and others they had to look for food in the burning heat.

After six months on the island they were finally accepted in to Australia. When he came to Australia, my dad and some other people rented a small house together and soon got jobs as carpenters. At the beginning it was hard as there was so much to learn, but after working hard for two years he became more familiar with this new country. When he was sure that his life in Australia was steady he went back to Vietnam to visit his homeland. That was where he met my mum and after getting to know her they got married. My mum didn’t come to Australia straight away. She lived with my grandma and that was where I was born. When I turned one my dad came back and we all went to Australia.

So this is the wondrous journey about how my parents came to Australia. I will always be proud of my parents and where I come from, just like how my parents are proud of it.

My Family’s Adversity

In 1973, war broke out in Cambodia, against the communist Khmer Rouge. A man named Son, his wife, Han, and his youngest sister travelled from Cambodia to Vietnam.

Their two-year-old daughter could barely walk, yet they travelled together to Vietnam, to avoid being attacked by bombers. With nothing but a few dollars, the clothes on their backs and each other, they travelled by bicycle in very harsh conditions.

They found a small village, and Han gave birth to another daughter. They didn’t travel far to find a place called Ha Tien. It wasn’t great but it was the best they could get. It was a small, self-made, straw hut, about the size of our bathroom. They helped make a bed of timber planks one metre off the ground, which the whole family slept on. Underneath the bed, they kept a pig and a couple of
chickens and ducks. During the day, Son worked in the rice fields, while Han stayed home to look after the children. Later, she gave birth again, but to a boy.

Two and a half years later, Son managed to migrate to Australia. Back then, Australia was one of the safest, cleanest countries where people had the freedom to do things. Therefore, Australia was the best. Son lived in Georges Hall, Sydney, leaving his poor family behind. It was a very difficult choice, but at that time, people would do anything to get out of those harsh conditions and it would be the best for the future.

Han, back in Vietnam, struggled to survive with her in-laws. She could not even speak a word of Vietnamese. She then had to work in a fruit and vegetable market. Han raised her children, understanding she would join her husband soon. Life was tough for her and the children. She worked as hard as she possibly could to support her family. For a year, neighbours looked after the children because Han could not look after her children during the day. She came home every day exhausted from the hard work she did and the effort she put into helping her family survive this disaster. She would pay her grateful neighbours for looking after her children. Han barely had time with her two daughters and son. She would fall asleep nearly as soon as she got in the “house" (hut).

She struggled to communicate with her unhelpful in-laws. Her life was difficult and challenging in the city of Ha Tien, without any family or friends’ help or support. She could only communicate by airmail and letters. There were not any phones or radios. There weren’t even TV’s!

In Australia, Son was able to find work, even though he couldn’t speak English, but he still felt the pain and heartache inside. Leaving his family behind and hearing them suffer was very sad. He sent money to Ha Tien to support his family.

Due to the captain’s miscalculation, the boat ran out of petrol. They had to crash land in Song Clar, Thailand. They set up camp and stayed there for over four months. While awaiting news from her husband, Han had to struggle to look after her children among others. She had to endure cramped living arrangements. They all had to make do with food and medical supplies, donated by the Hainan association. Her in-laws did not help her setup camp, food or care. She struggled to keep her health and spirits up.

Finally, the day arrived. All of Son’s brothers and sisters were sent to Canada. His wife and three children were reunited in Sydney.
In a recent video conference the author, Pat Flynn, was asked how he came up with ideas for stories. He challenged the students to think of a situation where their character would feel like a FISH OUT OF WATER. Migrants in Australia sometimes experience a similar feeling when they cannot speak English and know very few people. The following three introductions to stories won prizes in the CVHS Literacy Week Creative Writing competition.

SARA, A FISH OUT OF WATER

Hidden in the shadows of the large oak trees, her heart slowed down, almost to its original pace. She glanced over her shoulder for a sign of a crackle or a sign of life. She was far from relieved as she could not shake the nagging feeling that she was being watched. Taking a deep breath, she stepped out of her hiding place, the sunlight shone on her dark, sunken eyes as she continued to dart from tree to tree, heading towards the opening in the forest.

Sara Hails was a very unusual fourteen year old girl. She lived a completely different life to normal teenagers because she was a slave. At the age of five, Sara was handed over by her poor mother to an evil woman who owned a mansion in the deepest darkest heart of the forest. She was forced to clean, cook and be used as a cane tester all her life. But she escaped.

When she reached the outskirts of Welshtown, she slowed her pace. She found the absence of cars and people very unwelcoming. She went further into the town. At last she reached the town square, where people were busy buying groceries, stopping for chats and enjoying breakfast in the cafes.

She did not stop to linger, although her fascination and curiosity at being in such a place was nagging her at the back of her mind. The town was buzzing with voices as people walked by. She knew where she wanted to go, to a building known as ‘Hope’ to slave children, abandoned children, where people can find hope and restore their life. Suddenly all was quiet, like the whole town had frozen. Gradually, a soft murmur filled the air. Sara looked up, her sense of fear, emerging, greater than before as she realised they were all staring straight at her. How could she be so ignorant? After all, no one could dismiss a girl looking as bizarre as she was as being normal. Why didn’t she think of it before? Sara continued down the street, her face burnt scarlet, she felt as if she was under a bright spotlight. She heard mothers and children whisper about her appearance, how odd it was to see a girl so pale, as if she had never seen sunlight in her life, how strange it was that she wore torn, filthy rags as a dress. But most of all, how mysterious it was to see this girl wearing a large rusty cuff on her left ankle, dragging a chain behind. As she approached the shops, the people inside goggled and pull their cameras out on the pretence of taking a photo to post on the internet, as if this was all a weird, funny joke. Sara hated this, she needed to
get away. Where she was going? Even she didn’t know! Just as she was about to run back into the forest, she saw it, she saw ‘Hope’.

Sara’s stomach lurched as she approached the battered old building. It was cracking in places and the paint was peeling off, revealing brick layered with mould. This was the orphanage. As she approached the door, the townspeople stared at her, wondering what on earth this strange girl was doing, standing alone on the bare stretch of desert, that surrounded the town. She opened the door and stepped inside. The orphanage didn’t exist. But if it didn’t exist, where was she?

**A FISH OUT OF WATER: WHY DEATH?**

Left leg then right leg. Left leg again, and then right leg. Leo was concentrating so hard that beads of sweat began to pour from his forehead. He could not afford to make a false move, like in the past. Behind him were two men in perfectly ironed black suits and polished leather shoes. They were accompanying and guiding him to his grandfather’s chamber.

As he approached the spiral staircase, the thought of climbing it almost caused him to collapse! He followed his recent pattern, left leg then right leg. It seemed as though centuries had flown by the time he arrived at the top.

Dragging his body across the marble tiles, he could not help but notice the eerie facial expressions of his relatives. They made way as he continued his journey into the heart of the mansion. Everyone used to be so happy. But why are they glaring at him with hatred in their eyes? Was it because of the incident? He did not want to remember the tragic event.

Why does he feel unwanted in his own house? In these corridors, he used to play adventurous games. But it was now filled with close and distant relatives and friends. Slowly, one by one they examined him with disgust and hatred. The light flowed from the crystal chandelier and reflected off the marble floors. With the light shining harshly into his eyes, he continued to force himself to look down. He did not want to see such pain in their faces.

As the funeral ended, more people appeared in the building. Advancing to the ample, oaken doors, Leo did not know what to think. His mind was racing as he considered his future. Would it have been better if he just passed away in the accident? He thought it would be a much better outcome, than being around his relatives. Holding in all the pain and suffering was unbearable. But watching the people around him, who now despised him, made it much more difficult to bear.

It did not feel right. His presence seemed to change the atmosphere around him. Leo felt as though he no longer had a home to return to. Even though he was in his own house, he did not feel wanted or needed there. He gradually became depressed as an overwhelming feeling dominated his mind and body. The feeling of not belonging and the loneliness he felt caused him to experience more agony and discomfort.
Life was tough, especially for the only grandchild of the most powerful and feared man in the financial world. Leonardo Rinorvia was the only grandson of Mr. D. Rinorvia. Due to his parents’ recent death, Leo was the family’s next successor. The only concern was that his grandfather had not entirely recovered from the unexpected news. His thoughts were unpredictable. His most precious son and daughter-in-law had perished from this world leaving behind a wound in his heart. Would he cherish his only grandson more or would he abandon his only grandson? This continues to be a mystery. He hoped that the scar and wound left behind would not cloud his judgment.

Beyond those doors, he will encounter his destiny. Will he suffer more or will his life completely alter? It is his grandfather’s decision to determine his fate. He does not wish to stay here, where he would only see those who blame him for his parent’s deaths. It is painful to lose both his mother and father, but it is worse when one is accused of killing them both with his bare hands. He constantly prayed to diminish the memory of the time he was covered in their blood. It was a time when he lacked responsibility, and eventually drowned himself in pure guilt.

A FISH OUT OF WATER: VISITING PLANET EARTH

The ground beneath the city trembled as the demons charged through the city. With a blink of an eye, the ground was flooded with lifeless, mangled bodies.

The sky was washed with blood and the wind screeched and peeled the great building’s paint work. The remainder of nature’s children sprinted recklessly into the World’s Hall, hoping to avoid death as they made their way. Chaos was quickly unfolding her wings and bringing destruction to the city, while the high priest was running out of time.

The high priest was like a dwarf. His plump form, failed to conceal the axe held firmly to his back. There were only a handful of the Caticillian people, who had fortunately escaped the demons. The late coming Caticillian banged on the door furiously, weeping and screaming to get inside the World Hall’s locked marbled doors.

“Hurry children, we must take you to a safer place,” boomed the High Priest. “Where?” asked the curious Caticillian elf. He was tall with his hair hanging to his shoulders. He was about sixteen years of age and in his hands he held a small golden necklace.

“To the planet earth,” replied the High Priest, handing the frightened girl a small wooden chest. “Don’t open it until you get to earth.”

“I can’t help everyone to safety but I can at least help the five of you,” said the High Priest.

“What about the others?” asked the curious elf.

There was silence in the room as everyone knew the answer to the question.
The High Priest began to chant a spell, while flexing his arms and striking his axe to the ground. From the massive dent of the axe shot out bright neon vines. The vines tightened and crawled around the five elves. The door was finally opened and in charged the wicked demons. The five frightened elves clung to one another to avoid the horrible sight of the demons, stabbing and butchering the High Priest, as they teleported to earth.

Walking carelessly over the mutated bodies, the woman’s brown living hair, snapped and licked at the bloody ground. The demons made way for her. Like a ghost, she glided smoothly into the World’s Hall.
My Mum and her younger sister

My mum lived in Cambodia when she was young and had one younger sister, one older sister and one older brother. My mum was about seven years old when she started going to school and when she got back home, she had to look after her little sister. My mum had to cook for her and the family, without an electric cooker. She had to use wood and matches. When her younger sister was about fifteen months old, she slipped at home (because my mum had just cleaned the floor) and the next day she became ill. Their mother had to take her to get an injection. A couple of months later, she couldn’t walk on her right leg. Their mother had to look for a specialist to help her and her leg eventually got better. She can walk but with her left leg dragging her right leg.

Escape from the Khmer Rouge

My parents were regular citizens of Cambodia, suffering from the difficulties of poverty. The Khmer Rouge was a big problem in Cambodia. It was when the Communist Party of Kampuchea, composed of leaders Pol Pot, Ieng Sary, Son Sen and Khieu Samphan, ruled over Cambodia from 1975 to 1979.

Every person was taken to concentration camps at different times so the ruling party could check on them. The problem was that many Khmer citizens were tortured by the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, no matter who they were.

However, if you were trying to travel to another country (which is what most citizens of Cambodia did), you would have to be accepted, according to your personal information. My parents were living in different parts of Cambodia and they had to get out before they would be attacked by Pol Pot’s army.

My dad and his family were taken to camps one morning and were checked. So was my mum. The next day, they were called to the airport, because they were accepted to leave the country. My mum was also allowed out of the country. They packed their things and went to the airport in a taxi. They were flown out of the country, and safely to Australia.
HOW ONE OF MY PARENTS IMMIGRATED TO AUSTRALIA

Okay, this is how it started; thirty years ago, between 1977 and 1978. One of my family members was about 11 years old, when the Khmer Rouge started in Cambodia. That little girl had a difficult life. They would capture the kids who were fifteen years of age or younger and they would probably kill them, so the little girl ran away and tried to save herself. She ran until it was dark. She ran so fast that when she stepped on spikes she didn’t even feel a thing. The next day lots of children were missing so the soldiers chased them. They would always say ‘you can run but you can’t hide’. But the little girl just kept on running. Sometimes when she ran, she could hear those soldiers talking and shooting bullets.

One day she crept up behind bushes and she peeked to see what was going on. She saw the soldiers telling people to get in a hole. They covered the hole with rocks on one side and put more on the other. They put sticks on the rocks to finish covering up the hole, before lighting a fire. They put a pot over it and they said ‘If you move, my pot with my soup in it will fall. How can you pay me?’ After she heard that she kept on running because she didn’t want to be treated like that. When it was getting dark and she was tired she looked for a comfortable place to sleep. She saw people sleeping on the ground so she slept near them. When she woke up she saw blood on them and they wouldn’t wake up. She suddenly realised that she was sleeping near dead people. She was so scared, she kept on running. A few days later she got to the border and entered Thailand with some of her friends.

The people of Thailand were so kind to them. The Thai people let them shower and took them to the airport. They put their names down as possible refugees and waited for their names to be called out. People were sent to different countries. Only about twenty people went to Australia and the rest went to America or England. The little girl was so happy when she heard her name called out for Australia. Those people who got to go to a country were so lucky, including that little girl.

And that little girl to this day is now my mum. She didn’t see her mum (my grandma) until 30 years later when I was 3 years old and we went to Cambodia. We went on tours and did lots of things there. I rode on an elephant over there. It was fun. After seeing my grandma and having lots of fun, we came back to Australia but three years later my grandma passed away. We didn’t know until my aunties sent a letter to tell us. By the time the letter came to us it took a week. As soon as we got the message we sent money to them to help with the funeral because we couldn’t make it.
Dad’s Life at Cambodia

My dad was born in Cambodia. He was the tenth person to be born in his family. Cambodia was a wonderful country to live in and there were schools in every village.

In 1975, a man named ‘Pol Pot’ raised an army of armed Cambodians from different villages and they were called “The Khmer Rouge”. Pol Pot wanted to rule Cambodia and people from all different villages in Cambodia were forced to leave and walk to a large rice field. Anyone who disagreed with the Khmer Rouge would be shot or beaten. The people who were forced to work at the rice field had to walk there by foot and the journey took about 30 minutes.

Everyone had to work seven days a week for twelve hours each day. My dad was bored with harvesting the rice plants and tired. If anybody was spotted having a rest he would be beaten. The Khmer Rouge offered little food or water. After five years my dad and his family had had enough of working very hard each day, so they decided to escape to a refugee camp in Thailand. My dad’s family escaped during the night when everyone was asleep. They took supplies like food and water with them and ran off. My dad knew the way and led his family. There were problems slowing them down, including avoiding the Khmer Rouge and old land mines.

It took about a month to reach a Thai refugee camp. The council of the camp offered more food and drinks than the Khmer Rouge and the best part was that refugees didn’t have to work very hard.

About four years later, the Australian Government visited the Thailand Refugee Camp and brought all the refugees to Australia. My dad’s family lived in Melbourne. He was happy living in Australia and working as an engineer. He has been happy ever since he arrived.

My Family’s Life in the Refugee Camp

In 1984, my family arrived at the temporary camp on the border between Cambodia and Thailand. They stayed at the camp for a few days to be interviewed by the leader of the refugee camp. If the interview went well, they would be allowed to stay in the camp. The camp was small and the amount of space that people were allocated depended on the size of the family. If a family was large they would get more space than a smaller family. Each person in the family was only given 1.2 metres of space to live in and every house had a captain.
The captain provided food, water, grains, sugar, salt, dry fish, pork/meat and Soya bean once a week. The captain gave only a limited amount of water to use and did not give enough time for people to shower. Life in the camp was like a prison. If someone tried to escape from the camp, the security guard would shave half of their hair. If they ran away again, the other half of their hair would be shaved. This was the only warning that was given. If a person was caught the third time, they would be beaten. The soldiers would whip people and sometimes they would bury them alive. A small group of people tried to find their way back home because they could not stand the life in the refugee camp.

If a person failed an interview, they would have to wait for a second chance at passing the interview. It would take a few years before they had another interview. People who failed the second interview were deeply affected and developed health issues.

After a few months, people who survived the camp were moved to another camp called ‘Side-Two’, and life there was very difficult. The refugees had to build a hut themselves. Sometimes the government did not provide any food or water for a few days as the camp was being bombed. The Thai Government would not deliver any supplies if refugees had their own money. They had to buy supplies from neighbours or anyone else who had food to sell. My family stayed there for a year and a half.

The final camp my family stayed at was in ‘Chantabuki’. This international camp was much better than the refugee camp at the border. My family lived in the camp for six months before they came to Australia.

In 1985 my family travelled to Australia by plane. As the years went by my family adjusted to their new life in Australia. They have enjoyed their life here and are proud to be Australian. They now call Australia their home.

**Mum’s Great Success in Life**

In life, there are times when we fail and we cry about them. But the times which form memories that we cherish are the times when we succeed in life, and we hold on to those memories to enjoy and laugh about. I am going to talk about my mum, who started off as an unhappy little girl but became a successful employee and mother. I am the one who will keep her memories alive.

My mum was born in Cambodia and has four siblings. Her family struggled with money ever since she was born. My mum helped her mother sell food every day from when she was ten years old, because they needed to make enough money to feed the rest of the family. She spent much of the time working but she also attended school. Her school was from 6:30 to 11:30 in the
morning so she had to get ready early. At school, Mum was the smartest student in her class. She didn’t make a lot of friends, but everyone relied on her for all the answers. Instead of playing on the playground, she spent her lunchtime studying in the classroom.

My mum got married at age seventeen because her parents arranged the marriage. She had to follow her parents’ orders. When they got married, Dad decided to come to Australia to start a better life, so my mum had to leave her family in Cambodia. Dad wanted children, so Mum gave birth straight after they arrived in Australia in 1994. It was very difficult for her because she didn’t know English, didn’t have an idea how to look after a child or how to cook. Dad was the only one working at the time, so they didn’t have enough money to buy a proper house. When my sister and I got a bit older, things started to change.

My grandfather came to live here. It was easier for mum because he could help to look after us. She then decided to go to study English at TAFE. When she had learned enough English, she started to work in a company which made doctors’ supplies. It was when I was eight years old that she made it into university. She was happy, and so was I. She started university part-time for two years but then decided to quit, because she couldn’t concentrate on being an employee, mother, wife, daughter-in-law and student, all at the same time. As we’re getting older, my mum believes she should spend more time with us.

Right now, my mum is worried about our futures since my sister is in Year 9 and I’m in Year 8, but she’s also proud of us, because we haven’t become daughters who disobey her. My mum is also a supervisor where she works and she’s well-liked by her boss and he relies on her. She still talks to her family living overseas and will soon visit them again. Because of what mum started off with to what she has become, I’m proud of her. She still would like to go back to where the rest of her family is, but she’s proud of what she has accomplished.

**MY MUM’S FIRST YEARS IN AUSTRALIA**

My mum was born in Cambodia. She lived in Cambodia for ten years before moving to Australia in 1980 to escape war and for a better life and education. She moved here with her parents, four sisters and two brothers.

When she arrived here in Australia, her family moved into a hostel located in East Hills for a couple of months. After that, she left the hostel to rent a three bedroom townhouse in Cabramatta in 1981, with the rest of her family.

The first school she attended in Australia was Mt Pritchard Public School in fifth grade, and then she moved to Lansvale Public School in sixth grade. After primary, she attended Canley Vale High School. My mum was in an ESL (English as a Secondary Language) class up until Year 7. English was difficult since it was not her first language but she enjoyed Maths, as it didn’t require much English, just numbers. She finished the HSC in 1988. However she said
it was hard to make friends at school because she was a foreigner. She was often bullied because of her background, but most Australian people were nice and welcoming to her. Since she didn’t have friends in Australia, she spent most of her time with her siblings. This didn’t help to improve her English much because she would communicate with them in Cambodian.

When she first came here, she didn’t know how to speak English and had difficulty understanding people. She said the food here tasted different at first but she easily adapted to the Australian way of life. She explained to me that society here was more advanced than Cambodia and she is happy that she spent her teenage years growing up here in Australia. School and education helped her adapt to life in Australia.

**MY MOTHER’S JOURNEY**

My mother’s journey started when she was just a little girl. She was living in Cambodia when the Khmer Rouge attacked her country. Her captors took her to their headquarters where they made her work for her food. She still has scars on her leg from all the punishment she received. Today she stands strong knowing that she left that horrible experience behind her.

During her time with the Khmer Rouge, she developed a confidence that she kept for the rest of her life. She was able to stand up for herself most of the time and take control, which enabled her to escape the clutches of the Khmer Rouge. During her escape she was captured once again by soldiers around the perimeter. She was almost killed but luckily they put her in jail instead.

My mother thought she would die in that cell but her brother was working for the American embassy which enabled her to escape while the American soldiers attacked. Her brother took her to America where she had the right to attend school, the freedom of speech and democracy. She attended a high school where she got the education she deserved. During her participation in school, she fell in love with my father. It was love at first sight and believe me, my mother was dumbstruck. They moved to Australia and my mum raised me into the sweet little thing I am today.

**MY FAMILY’S JOURNEY: LIFE IN CAMBODIA TO AUSTRALIA**

When my dad was living in Cambodia with his family he lived really peacefully because the government was good to them and they let them do as they pleased as long as they did not ask for any assistance.
Grandpa made ice cream and grandma made Cambodian sweets to sell so they could get money to feed their family – my dad and his brothers and sisters.

One day this all ended because a different government took over Cambodia and they treated the people horribly. Everyday my father had to eat what he was given (which was a few grains of rice with a lot of water) and if they didn’t eat it they would starve because they were not given any more than that. Many people listened to this government because if they didn’t then there would be serious consequences. Their family or loved ones might be killed.

Eventually they all came to Australia to live. They can have a say in what they want and they can do as they please, as well as getting a job to feed the family with three meals a day.

**MY FAMILY’S JOURNEY**

Living in Cambodia during a war was a nightmare. The people who invaded were cruel. They burnt down houses and shot people with guns if they tried to get away. Linda’s family had to run away to a secluded place where there were no soldiers and people were trying to escape on boats. The family managed to get on a large boat and sail away into the mist. No one really knew the right direction; they just tried to sail to a place where the war hadn’t spread to.

When they arrived at a destination, Linda wondered where she was. The villagers there were peaceful, happy and cheerful. After living at the place for a few days, they realised they were in Thailand. The Thai people welcomed the families on the boat and helped them. The girls went to school while the boys usually helped with the chores like farming, depending on their age.

After two years, living there the family received a message from the survivors in Cambodia, so they headed back. When they got there many houses and buildings were destroyed. They didn’t have a choice, but to get on with their life.

**A START TO A DIFFERENT LIFESTYLE**

My mum was born in Cambodia during the time of the Khmer Rouge. My maternal grandmother died when my mother was just four years old. My mother had three siblings: an older brother, an older sister, and a younger brother. When she was 13, she moved out of her father and stepmother’s house to live with her aunty and uncle in Vietnam.

She spent most of her teenage life there. My mum described her teenage years as being the best days of her life as they provided her with education. My great
aunt provided the money for her to go and learn Vietnamese, the national language of the country. Back then during school the severe punishments such as the cane were still around. This was used for students who didn’t complete their daily homework and also if they wrote with their left hand. School in Vietnam had two sessions that they could attend, early morning and late in the afternoon.

Whenever my mum had free time, she would go out and play with the children in her neighbourhood. Most of the children would play with marbles, elastic bands, skipping ropes, dolls or whatever they could find since technology wasn’t around as it is today. When my mum got too old for those games and toys, she started looking for a job. Her first career was to help my great aunt run her shop, which served traditional Vietnamese sweets. As many years passed she often went back to Cambodia to visit her dad and stepmother. After several years of travelling between Cambodia and Vietnam, my mum decided it might be time to get married and start a family.

One particular day she went out with some of her friends in Cambodia when she came across a group of men and spotted my dad hanging around them. My mum had seen him somewhere before but she didn’t quite remember where. One morning my dad went to my mum’s house with my paternal grandfather to arrange a wedding. A year after the arrangement, they got married. My mum and dad then migrated to Australia in 1995, where they had their first child in 1996. They are now living a sweet life with three daughters.

**TRAGEDY**

“HURRY UP!”  
“GRAB THE CHILDREN!”  
“WE NEED TO ASSEMBLE NOW!”  
“SHELTER, WE NEED SHELTER!”

It was war. It was hell. Pol Pot had taken over the country. People were screaming. There were mothers trying to hold onto their babies and trying to find a safe shelter. Gunshots were firing every second. There was blood. Deaths. No one was safe.

This was what my father had to experience. This is his story.

“Ok everyone!” exclaimed the teacher. “So, the circumference of a circle is πd……” She trailed off.

“What’s with the screaming outside?” asked a student.  
“Don’t know...” I answered. The whole class was silent. We could hear screaming and gunshots outside the school gates. The teacher soon realised it was Pol Pot. Everyone in the entire school ran
outside in curiosity.

The army was capturing those who were committing actions against the law. They tied each criminal’s hands with rope and dragged them into gaol. After all the corruption had gone, school ended. I then went to look after the buffalos and made compost out of buffalo manure and tree leaves for the vegetables like I did everyday.

The next day Pol Pot had made new regulations. Each village could only eat two times per day. They also weren’t allowed to fill their stomachs completely. Everyone had no choice but to follow the regulations in order to survive. At 11am the whole village would sit at a long table and eat a quarter of a bowl of porridge per person, and the same for lunch at 3pm.

That afternoon changed the lives of every child including myself. I was only the age of 12 when the army brought a few prisoners to the village. Once they had settled the prisoners from escaping, which some did, they gathered all the children from the village.

“What’s going to happen?” questioned my little sister.
“I’m not sure but if we’re in any danger I will protect you,” I answered.

THE ARRIVAL OF MY PARENTS

My mum and dad arrived in Australia on the 1st of February 1990. The boat my mum and dad were on was caught so they had to stay in a detention centre in Melbourne because they had come illegally. They stayed there for about seventeen months.

Afterwards they had to move to a detention centre in Sydney. While there they made a lot of new friends and recognised some old ones. Then they were allowed to go back to Cambodia and return legally in a year’s time.

While my mum and dad were in Cambodia they started dating and eventually married. After arriving back in Australia they found some of the friends they had made in the detention centre. They all caught up on news of their lives. One of them said that he had become a policeman.

I have just visited Cambodia myself and it was awesome. My favourite part was when we rode an elephant to get to the top of a mountain. The mountain was short and had many plants. When I reached the top I was waiting for my family to come but when I looked up they were already there.

MY MOTHER’S CHILDHOOD LIFE

My mother was born in the capital city of Cambodia, Phnom Penh. She had a difficult life at a young age because the war was starting in Cambodia.
At that time my mother was six years old. She was the second oldest in her family – Mum and her four other sisters and brothers lived with their parents. Mum attended school for only one year.

The conflict started in 1975, and the family had to escape from their house to the countryside so that they could avoid the weapons and fighting. My grandparents were extremely worried for their children because they were still very young. They could not carry enough food with them because they had to carry the children too. There was no transport so they had to walk to the countryside, without knowing where to go. Mum remembered people dying on the road. “It was very traumatising”, she says.

Life in the countryside was miserable. There was no food or medication. Most people died from hunger and sickness. The Cambodian Communists – often called the “Khmer Rouge” – overthrew the leaders of the republic and gained control of the country. Everyone was forced to work hard labour jobs.

Six months later, my mother’s family was fortunately rescued by Vietnamese soldiers. They were very relieved. The family was then sent to Vietnam as refugees. In Vietnam, Mum lived a happier life away from the conflict. The family was still poor but had enough food. Mum got to go to school for two years but had to look after her siblings and her parents.

It was not until 1990 that my mother’s family was sponsored by my mother’s aunty to come and live in Australia and have a happier life. It was a relief after everything she had overcome, although she will never forget everything that occurred in her miserable childhood.

**INVASION**

Everyone has a story, whether it’s good, bad or a mixture of both. These stories are like fingerprints, all uniquely interesting...

It wasn’t the best of memories, but I remembered it for this reason. They were horrible to the young, and to the old. But I only found out what really happened recently.

I was five when Pol Pot invaded Cambodia. The year was 1975. I still vaguely remember the first day. People were running for their lives, and chasing them were men with guns and black masks. My mother screamed as she took all the gold and money she hid under the door mat. I was confused. Where was everyone going? Why was it so dusty?

“RUN!!” my mother shouted. My brothers grabbed me, and then ended up carrying me anyway.

Not so long after that we were running with the others. All I could hear were people shouting and gun fire. Inside I knew something was wrong. I searched for my mother but she was lost in the crowd. The only family I could see was my
older brother carrying me. I started crying and my brother put his hand over my mouth. I sucked my tears back in and stayed quiet for a while.

The crowd of people was starting to go away, but I still could not find my mother or the other members of my family. I started to tear up again, but I still held it back. My brother slowed down and then went off to the side of the road. He saw my mother and followed her. Mother was following one of the Pol Pot men and we were led to a house.

The man spoke very scarily and told us this would be our new home. He left us and mother hugged all her children. Father walked around the new house and investigated. The house wasn’t so different from our old one. It had a palm leaf roof and a door that didn’t work. The walls were also palm leaves but there were holes in them.

The next day I was last to wake up. I went outside and everyone was busy cleaning the house. That was strange; at this time yesterday we had breakfast but today, everyone was all dirty and cleaning. It was also strange that gunshots were heard almost every second. I stayed in the doorway and watched my brothers and sisters clean. Mother was ploughing the nearby crops. She said father had left to find palm leaves for the walls.

When father came back he was holding a bunch of palm leaves and palm juice. He rushed into the house and told the family to gather round. He told us that nasty people had invaded our country and we had to be careful what we said. I was still young so I didn’t really understand what he was saying.

After our “family meeting” father passed over the palm juice and we all had a bit to drink. I guess that was our breakfast. My stomach was still not filled though. Not long after our “breakfast” those men came back and told us to leave. We walked for a bit then we stopped in front of a big hall. The man told us that we were staying here and then took father and mother. There were other children there too and we were all looked after by an old lady who looked very tired. She sang songs to us and then gave us a small bowl of porridge at noon. That was lunch apparently.

Night fell and we were brought back home to where mother and father already were. Mother had prepared a little meal for the family. We ate our dinner around the oil lamp and laughed at the few jokes my brother made.

At that time I didn’t know much, but for three years straight, that was my life. Wake up, go to old lady, come home and hear ongoing gun shots.

JUST THE BEGINNING

I have been suffering since I was born. It’s a wonder I survived all these years, all these years of war, death and pain. I even cheated death twice, which I think comes down to one thing, sheer luck. That is why I want to tell you part of my life, and this is my story.
I come from a family of eleven. We were all unfortunate to be born in Cambodia because things were always unstable from the poverty and war between Thailand and Cambodia. During my childhood we were always running away like rabbits, escaping the poisonous venom in the country. If we were seen by a soldier, we would have been shot on the spot.

I was sixteen years old when my journey began. It was the 23rd of May 1983, a dark, frosty dawn with black-grey clouds, the reflection of my mood. My nine siblings and I were hiding in a delivery truck to get to the capital city, Phnom Penh. When we arrived, we hid in a friend’s house to find directions to escape. My eldest sister, being the ‘mother’ of the family, set off to secret places where people would help us find a way to escape. My other siblings and I wished her a safe trip, since going around Cambodia was very dangerous. I was very frightened when she left, and was dreading that she might never come back.

Fortunately, one month later, my sister came back safe and sound, much to my relief. Not only was she back, but she also found the best way to get out of the country, so that very day we set off again to our next destination. This time, we hid in a small car, going through the city called ‘Khaje’ and then arriving at a small village. At that village, we paid real gold to get on a small, narrow motor boat carrying sixteen people to get to our second phase of the escape. While my siblings and I were all squashed with the other six people who came with us, we crossed the dangerous and deadly Dhun Le Minh Khong River. It was so dangerous that whirlpools were very common in that river. When we crossed it a whirlpool started. Our boat was rocking violently, swaying from side to side while trying to battle the ferocious waters. For a minute we thought we were going to die, but for some reason, there was a second where the boat found a hidden weakness of the whirlpool, and slowly it started to balance against it. A few minutes later, we were safe on the calm waters of the river, reaching our next phase.

A forest stood before us. Tall, elegant trees stood magnificently in perfect rows, and birds flew everywhere. It was a wonderful sight, yet we knew that we had no time to enjoy it; instead, we had to go through it. The sixteen of us bushwalked for at least three quarters of the day, causing pain to our feet. After that, we waited in the bushes until it was dark, so that we could travel across another river of the Lao and Thailand borders. A small rowing boat was provided for us, but before we reached the other side of the river, we were hit by a sudden problem.

The rowing boat was filled with people, and since it was too heavy, the boat started to sink. We all thought we were going to die, but the two men who rowed the boat knew how to swim. They jumped out of the boat and pulled it to some flat rocks. While climbing out of the boat, we noticed in front of us there was a huge cliff, and on top of that cliff was a car waiting for us. We had to climb the treacherous cliff, without ropes. It was very difficult, but thankfully no one was hurt. As we reached the top, a new landscape appeared before our eyes.

We were all in Lao now. Unfortunately, we came across the wrong people waiting for us, because we were taken to the nearest police station, where the police took us to a prison cell and locked us up for four months for ‘trespassing’. Fortunately,
this was a friendly prison where anyone could contact anyone while still in jail, so the nine of us applied for sponsor forms. While in jail, the police allowed one person to cook rice for us to eat, using the police’s wife’s cooking utensils. However, there wasn’t enough rice to feed all of us, so we were always left hungry.

A few weeks later, the sponsor forms were accepted, so we were allowed to come to Australia as refugees. However, since the reply of the sponsors was so quick, we were transferred a place called Khao Yi Dang Camp in Thailand where we ‘lived’ in jail temporarily for twenty one days.

Since the Australian Government approved us to come to Australia, we had to wait for our turn in the suburb ‘Chinburry’ to get on the aeroplane at Suen Plu airport. There, we went on a Qantas plane (I was very airsick) to our new home. So few hours later, my nine siblings and I arrived in Australia on the 26th of January, 1984, Australian Day, when Bob Hawke was still Prime Minister.

These are just some of the experiences I had during the worst times of my life. I realised that migrating to Australia isn’t such a bad thing, since I can now live a happier and healthier life here. But migrating here doesn’t mean my journey ends. This is just the beginning.

THE JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA

Have you ever wondered what happens to citizens whose countries are at war? Some think that’s all in the past. Many people don’t even want to remember it. It is all blocked out of their minds, but Donna remembers everything so clearly, as though it had just happened yesterday.

Donna dreamt that she had gone back in time to when the war started. She was still in Cambodia, her birth place, under Red Rouge, the Khmer government. It was the worst time of Donna’s life, with the Red Rouge in government and the war going on.

What is there to do in such a situation? The only thing you can do is escape, and that’s exactly what Donna and her family did. They had to walk half way to Vietnam. Her legs ached for the whole trip. She had to suffer all this when she was only eight years old. But as they were walking, a bus picked them up at the midpoint. Donna was so relieved and tired that she slept the whole way with a smile on her face.

In 1979, Donna and her family arrived in Vietnam, and were escorted to the Song Be refugee camp, where they stayed for a few months. Donna had a great time there. They were not treated badly and there was a small field where everyone could play. It was much better than it had ever been in Cambodia, but they knew that they could not stay there forever.
In March 1988, Donna and her family came to Australia, sponsored by an uncle. This was the happiest moment of Donna’s life. A country with freedom, a place where you could speak your thoughts. What more would anyone ask for?

Donna had a job at a shoe manufacturing factory for a year, but saw no future in that. She went to study accounting at TAFE because she thought it would help her in the future and enable her to get a good job. She studied hard and even had a torch under her pillow at night for extra studying.

All that study paid off, as Donna got a job with a bank as soon as she finished. She had a bright future ahead of her. She always wore a bright smile on her face everywhere she went, thinking how lucky she was at that moment.

After a few years, she married John and had three children. This was a bizarre family, as even in a dull place like a funeral, they would always make everything brighter for everyone around them.

~Ding, ding, ding~
Donna woke up from her dream with yet another broad grin on her face.
My Parents’ Life

When I think back from now, I can’t imagine what my parents went through to come to Australia. They had to catch planes, trains then catch planes again. It just seems so complicated if you think about it.

The plane rides would go on forever and the never-ending train ride….it sounds like so much trouble to go from China to Australia.

My mum and dad started out as childhood friends and then they became really close and started liking each other.

In the olden days female children were “forbidden” to have relationships or even hold hands with a male, so it was hard for my parents to have a “relationship”. Since they weren’t allowed to meet with friends, at night my dad would go to my mum’s house and they would sneak out to play. It was pretty cute if you think back from nowadays.

After many years my mum and dad came to Australia, got married and had a family.

My mum would always call my grandma and grandpa to come over to Australia to take care of me and my sisters while she worked. My grandparents come over every now and then to visit and every time they come they bring us toys, clothes, jewellery and heaps and heaps of…LOLLIES!

Family Reunion

Dear Diary,

I am currently on a plane, flying to Australia from China. It is the 20th March, 1994 and I am now going with my Mum and Dad, my brother and sister, aunty and uncle and their two sons. It has only been five hours since we left the airport and I am already missing all my Chinese friends and other family members.

My parents told me that we are going, not only for a family reunion, but to live in Australia. When we land, my grandparents and other aunties and uncles who have arrived in Australia earlier in the year, will be picking us up.

When my grandparents, aunties and uncles arrived in Australia, they immediately went to buy houses for themselves and for us when we would arrive. The pictures that were taken of the houses are really clear. My house is on a corner and the
land is very big. I’m not sure whether it’s a duplex or a three storey house because it has a basement too. My grandparents’ house is similar, but is only one storey. The others are all living in apartments around the corner.

We have just landed in Australia and because it’s morning, there aren’t many people. It was easy to find each other. Since there is a lot of unpacking to be done, we have decided that the family reunion meal will be held tonight. We are heading to our new homes to wash up and have a little nap before going to my grandparents’ house.

At my grandparents’ home, the women are in the kitchen cooking, while the men are in the lounge room watching television. The other kids and I are in the backyard playing with the animals that my aunty had bought. There are rabbits, guinea pigs, dogs and other animals. The aroma of the food smells really nice, so we run into the kitchen. The food that is on the table is more suited for a barbeque than a family meal. Foods such as green tea and beer, vegetables like white cabbage, meat such as fish, chicken, roast pork, ox tongue, spring rolls, dim sum and cake are present.

**My Grandfather’s Story**

My grandfather was born in China. His family was very poor so he decided to leave China and travel to Vietnam in 1941 when he was only 17 years old. His journey to Vietnam was mainly by foot but whenever he could, he travelled by other vehicles. My grandfather wanted to go to Vietnam to earn money so he could support his family.

When my grandfather finally arrived in Soc Trang Province, Vietnam, the first thing he did was to look for a job. It didn’t matter what job it was, just as long as he earned money. He worked in many jobs. He delivered goods for people and he worked on a farm. He worked hard to earn money. In 1955, when my grandfather was 31 year old, he married my grandmother. Over the years they had five children, two girls and three boys, including my father. Now that he had a wife and children, he worked even harder to earn more money.

When the Vietnam War began in 1975, my grandfather heard other people saying that they could send people to refugee camps. After my grandfather heard this, he decided that he would let his eldest son, my uncle, go, since the rest of his children were too young. My grandfather gave his oldest son all of the money that he had been earning and saving for many years. My uncle promised that when he arrived in another
country, he would earn enough money to pay for my grandfather and the rest of his family to move there too.

My uncle left Vietnam on a boat with many people to a refugee camp in 1979. He was 19 years old and didn’t even know where he was going. During the voyage, they landed at a refugee camp on an island. After two long years, people were sent to other countries for safety. My uncle was very happy to leave, although they didn’t tell him which country they were taking him to. The people took my uncle and those with him by plane and fortunately the country that he arrived in was Australia.

When my uncle arrived in Australia in 1981, he also, like my grandfather, tried very hard to get a job and to earn money. He was very determined to earn enough money for the rest of his family to move to Australia too. Since my uncle didn’t speak English very well, he had very tiring jobs, but he never complained.

Finally, in 1991, my uncle had enough money for my grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunty and father to move to Australia. My grandfather’s oldest daughter (my aunty) didn’t join them because during the time my uncle was in Australia, my aunty had married. Today my grandparents, uncles, aunties and father are living very happily with their families. Sometimes they even visit Vietnam for a holiday.

## From China to the West

My mother migrated from China in 1990. She was 28 years old at the time and could not speak English very well. The first thing she noticed when she arrived was that Australians could not pronounce her name, so she changed it. She rented a small apartment in Brighton Le Sands and landed a job as a waitress.

Most of the Australians were very friendly but she met the occasional racist person. Australia was very clean compared to China. In China the main form of transport was taxis and because cars were expensive many people used bikes. Even though there are bins in China, everyone litters. The streets are dirty and many people spit and urinate on the streets. Australia was a clean haven in comparison.

Time slowly went by and she kept living on the little money she earned. She found it very hard to live in a place where she didn’t know anyone and often felt homesick.

By the time she was 31, she met my father. He also migrated to Australia except he came from Serbia. They both had a language barrier which stopped them from getting their desired jobs. In their own countries they had a very good education and both had gone to university but that didn’t count when they were looking for a job in Australia.
My Family’s Journey.

In 1966 a civil war broke out in China. My mother and her family were living in the Xin Jiang province, in China, just kilometres from the border of Russia. This was about communism in China. My grandmother is Russian and my grandfather is Chinese. My mother lived with her two brothers and one sister. While this war was taking place, famine and homelessness were widespread. Fortunately, this didn’t affect my mother or her family. When the war got too out of hand, Russia decided to step in and help China. After a few years the matters were settled and everything started getting better. Little did China know, Russia had plans up its sleeve.

The Chinese Government thought that the Russian government helped them out of the goodness of their hearts, but they actually wanted something in return. China couldn’t pay them back because they were still recovering from their recent crisis. Because China couldn’t return the favour, Russia was instantly furious and ordered one thing, which indeed affected my mother’s family. The order was that any Russian person who was married to a Chinese man had to be evicted from China immediately.

This, as you may have guessed, was shocking to my family. My grandmother was Russian. They no longer belonged to a country. They were now refugees. My mother and her family had some friends who had recently moved to Australia a few years previously to escape the famine. They found out about my family’s situation and sponsored them to come to Australia. They were forever grateful, but my mother was sad to leave her friends and life back in China. She was only fourteen. My grandparents were also sad, but they knew that leaving was better. They couldn’t stay in China anyway.

It was in 1981 that my mum and her family had to board three different planes to make it to Australia. My mum told me that Australia was not how she had pictured it. She expected a bushy outback. But it wasn’t. It was built up. They settled in and found work quite easily, though it was not to their liking. My grandpa was an engineer in China and my grandmother was a tailor. Because my grandparents
couldn’t speak English, they had to do a two year course in English. They worked part-time though, to support the family. Soon, they bought a house in Burwood where my mum went to high school. This is how my mother’s family’s new life began in Australia.

**CHINA GIRL TO AUSTRALIAN MOTHER**

Twenty years ago, my mother boarded an aeroplane and started her trip from China to Australia. She was going to see my father and get married here. My father had flown to China to meet her a year earlier. My mother was still a bit anxious but nonetheless happy. Life was hard for her in China and she thought it was a good chance to start a new life.

My father was there to meet her at the airport and pick her up. Afterwards, my father drove her home to where we still reside today. At first my mother found it unusual and awkward because she didn’t know many people in the neighbourhood in which she was going to live. Most of all, she missed her family.

The next day, my mother and father went to a court and got their marriage certificate. My mother didn’t find it a happy day or a sad day as she was still getting used to the area and the people. Two weeks later, there was the wedding reception. My mother was finding it hard as she was getting congratulated by all these people that she didn’t know.

Two months went by with my mother trying to get used to Australia. My mother decided to attend a school teaching immigrants how to speak English. However, my mother recently found out that she was pregnant with my older brother. She found it hard to balance pregnancy and school so she left after attending for one term. Although she found it hard to cope with pregnancy, she thought that she’d need some sort of skill to get a job. She later decided she’d attend a three week sewing course in the city. She found a job not too long after and started sewing clothes for a company from home.

Five months later in 1991, my mother gave birth to my older brother. My mother stopped work for about five months to help raise my brother. At this stage my mother found that she was getting to know everyone in her Australian family and the neighbourhood. She was also very happy that she had my brother.

Four years went by quite quickly. My mother got back to work and my brother started attending school. In May 1995, she found out that she was pregnant again with me. However, my mother kept working until I was one month due. In 1996, my mother gave birth to me. She felt overwhelmed with joy that she had given birth to her second son. She continued working at the same job until I was old enough to attend school.

She got a new job working as a store clerk at a clothes store and has been working there since. She is happy with what she has achieved in Australia and believes the move was for the best. She now keeps in contact with her family back in China and occasionally visits them, taking my brother and me along.
In China, a hot country with lots of people, there was my grandfather. He had to marry a woman who he had never met in his life, and he did not even know her personality. The marriage was set by the parents on both sides of the family, because they liked the son or daughter from the other side.

The wedding was over. Everyone went back to their place and had a rest. When my grandfather walked back to his room with the bride, they talked about their family.

One day my grandfather decided that the house was too small for them to live in. He wondered how he was going to get the money. He tried asking most of the people he knew for money, and he successfully borrowed enough to build a new house. When the house was finished the family moved into the bigger house with larger rooms. Everything in the house was so different to the old one, and it was comfortable living in a cooler house. Years went by and the family lived very peacefully in their cool house.

Suddenly there were people running to leave their houses. My grandfather was wondering what was going on. After six seconds, BOOM!!!! From nowhere, guns were being fired from the right side of the house. The family was scared that they might be killed. Then one of my grandfather’s friends ran in and shouted “THERE IS A WAR!!!” So my grandfather told everyone in the house to pack clothes and food. They ran out in time before those people blew down the house my grandfather had designed for the family to live in. While running my grandfather heard what language they were speaking. He knew that they were the Japanese. They followed my grandfather’s friend to the nearby shore. My grandmother looked around the area and found a boat that was boarding people. My grandmother suggested that they escape on it. Everyone was running to the boat.

My grandfather heard from his friend that they were going to Vietnam. The journey to Vietnam was a tough one, with the sea rocking the boat from side to side. The sea water that leaked in from the rocking rose to ankle level, so everyone held on to their bags. It took days to reach a safer place. Once they reached Vietnam, the first step my grandfather took, he felt that he was safe in this new country.

When everything was settled and no bad things were happening, my grandfather built a house, similar to the one in China. Everyone moved in and the family was warm again and felt safe from those evil Japanese people.

My father was born in Hong Kong in 1959. He grew up in the streets of Hong Kong and like most boys, had parents and siblings. His parents were divorced; he never knew his mother however his father was a restaurant worker but was not very close to his son. At that time, Hong Kong was a British colony, an English port; England had taken control of Hong Kong before it was returned to China in 1997. My father had started to learn English at the age of five but there weren’t
enough teachers around, although they were doing their best. He didn’t really pay much attention to the small details of the English language. He had never thought that one day he would go abroad, so far away from Hong Kong, to a country called Australia, where the language was complicated and perplexing.

His first impression of Australia in 1979 was that it was fairly big compared to Hong Kong. Back in his homeland, it was crowded and it was very small. Australia had no tall buildings but there was plenty of sunshine. He noticed the native flora and fauna and that the people were friendlier, whilst the air was so good that he longed for Hong Kong to change its crowded, polluted atmosphere. In Australia, he had his own room; in Hong Kong he had to share!

He came here to study for six years in high school and university. His feelings were so different when starting afresh here. He regarded it as “a second chance to get an education. There were more options like architecture, law and medicine and much more and there were fewer restrictions in Australia than in Hong Kong.” Studying at school in a different country was a real contrast; Hong Kong was restricting in many ways. In high school the subjects he had to choose were decided at an early age. Subjects were grouped into two separate areas such as Arts or Science, while in Australia the possibilities were endless. This allowed him to choose something that he would like to do. In Hong Kong the jobs you expected in your future were either a factory worker or a clerk. Seldom could one make it to the professional level.

Life wasn’t easy. The English language for my father was proving to be very complex, though he had a lot of help from his new friends and teachers. One gave him a book, “Aussie English” which he kept for a while. However, he had to cook, fend for himself, look for odd jobs, teach himself and he had never worked before. After a lot of these experiences, he says, “It was very different from school. You would knock on doors and ask for a job. If you were sick you had to look after yourself. I had a few friends but the summer holidays were very long and lonely. That sort of feeling, you can still feel after so many years.”

In 1985 my father, single and handsome, started to work in a bank where he found love. He went back to Australia to flee the 1997 crisis when Hong Kong was returned to China. His idea was to, ‘get out before it was too late’. He married in 1980 and is living happily today with his wife, my mother and me, their daughter.

**A Journey**

Journeys, can be filled with hardships or happy memories. My mother’s retelling of her journey was filled with a whirlwind of emotions. The story started when my mother was fourteen. Her eldest sister had just left the country and sailed to Australia.
My mother was too young to go with her. Instead she, along with the rest of the family, moved back to China. In China the family was in need of more money and now that she was the eldest, had the most responsibility. They could no longer afford to educate four children so my mother was sent out to look for a job.

Her first job was at an orchard picking fruit. It wasn’t the best paying job, and it certainly wasn’t the easiest either, but it was a job. Every day with her wages my mother saved a little so she could one day go to Australia. Every year she repeated the same thing and only stopped during the holidays. This was the life my mother led until she one day saved enough money.

Happy. Relieved. Ecstatic. My mother was filled with emotion, but then who wouldn’t be? “Finally a fresh start!” she exclaimed, eyes filled with memories of the past. I felt her joy radiating around her.

With enough money in her pocket my mother got out the suitcases and filled them with all her belongings. Her whole life was packed into those suitcases. Then on the 24th of December in 1990 my mother and her brothers landed on the shores of Sydney Australia.

**From Hong Kong to Australia**

The year 1989, was a big year for my parents. It was the year that they were taken away from their home in Hong Kong and ordered to live in a camp. They remained in this camp for six years. My mother and father described this as a very traumatic journey, but they have learnt a many lessons from it.

*This is how the journey began…*

It was the beginning of a new day. The bright sun shone through the window of my parent’s room in Hong Kong. The sun had awoken them. They began their daily routine of getting ready to go to the family business, selling meatballs from their cart. “Bang! Bang! Bang!” A sudden banging on the door echoed throughout the house. My relatives and cousins stopped what they were doing and stared at the door. They knew that this day would come. For the past few months, soldiers had chosen particular people and had taken them to a place nobody knew about. My father bravely opened the door expecting the soldiers. They ordered my parents to go with them, but allowed the girls in the house to remain. Luckily my uncle was not at home, otherwise they would have taken him as well.

My parents were taken to a camp that was run by the Chinese. There were other nationalities including Vietnamese and Filipino people in the camp. There was a shortage of food and water and many people died. Medical help like we have today was not available.

After living in the camp for two years, my father met a man who was originally from Germany but had lived in China for a decade. This man heard from his fellow relatives that there was a boat coming in for those who wanted to flee to Australia.
He warned my father that he could not talk about it when the soldiers were around. The plan was to get as many people as possible into the boat and get away quickly without the soldiers finding out. My parents knew that there was no way that the secret was going to be kept from the soldiers, but they prayed that a miracle would happen.

One night while my parents were sleeping, my father’s friend woke him up to tell him that the boat had arrived. Many people began to gather around a hole that had been dug to get to the boat. About thirty five people were able to get out, including my parents. Just as my parents were getting out the siren rang which signalled a lockdown. Soldiers came running out with sticks to stop people. My father was caught and taken to prison. It was a hard decision to make for my mother. She knew she could not begin a life in Australia without my father, so she decided to stay in the camp for a few more years until my father was released.

Ten months later, people were being released and allowed to migrate to Australia if they had someone to sponsor them. Luckily, my father was released and informed my mother that he had a sister in Australia who could sponsor them.

The plan worked out perfectly. My parents sailed on a boat to Australia which was a rough journey. They survived two days without food or water and defended themselves from the rough waves and conditions of the seas. Every night my mother and father prayed that they would survive this journey and their luck lasted them throughout the whole journey. On the very last night, my mother looked at the sky and saw that a big storm was coming. She learnt from her father how to read the weather by looking at the colour of the clouds and how they were formed. She warned everyone on the boat that there was a storm approaching. The people didn’t want to take risks especially since it was the last day of the journey so they listened to my mother and got prepared to protect themselves from the storm.

The storm was severe but thankfully everyone survived. My parents said those who were on the boat with them felt like a second family. To this very day they still communicate with those who they met with on the boat.

My parents lived with my aunty for a year in Australia. Afterwards, they decided to go back to China to visit my relatives again. It had been about four years since they last saw my relatives. My parents didn’t return to Australia for about a year. Many happy moments were shared in China. My sister was born in Hong Kong but had a pretty hard life afterwards because my parents were not completely sure of whether they’d settle in Australia or not. My parents felt that my sister was too young to return to Australia so they travelled to the Philippines to meet up with some old friends.

After a few years when both my sisters were about the age two and five, my parents decided to travel to Australia. They went to live with my aunty, uncle and cousins for a few years until they saved enough money to buy a new home. My parents said that it was a great feeling but at the same time it was a hard time in their lives.
To this day, they feel privileged to have the opportunity to start a life in Australia where many couldn’t because of the wars going on and also the harsh conditions in China. My parents have had a huge impact on me because they didn’t have the kind of life that I have as a child. When they told me about this journey, I realised how lucky I am to be living in a free country like Australia and to have parents who are hard-working, caring and loving. From my point of view, my parents never gave up hope throughout this stage of their lives, this proves to me that they are strong and can take care of their four daughters.
OTHER TALES

MY MOTHER’S FAMILY HISTORY

When my mother was living in Vietnam her family owned a noodle, rice and tea restaurant. Every day, my mother and all her siblings would go together to the restaurant. She was the youngest in her family, and was attending school. Normally in Vietnam, school would start at 7am and finish at 11:30 am.

In school, they would have a break and go home to eat lunch with the family, have a rest, and return to school at 1:30pm to 4:30pm. My mum would go home, eat lunch, help out with the family business and then take a nap. In the early morning, my mum’s family would go out on the street and sell vegetables, fruit, pork buns, and lollies for little children. At the time there were no menus, so you had to ask whether they made that food.

One day a man pretended that he had a lot to order. He was joking, but my mum didn’t take it as a joke and she did what she was told from this regular customer. She went from the restaurant to the house and back a couple of times. She didn’t yell or complain.

What shocked me was that even famous Vietnamese singers came to her restaurant. Most of them she knew because they lived down the road from her. What made me feel sad was that after people had finished their meals and had left, homeless people would rush and eat the leftovers. That was how much they suffered with hunger. Eventually my grandparents retired and closed the business down.

ESCAPE FROM WAR: MOTHER’S PERSPECTIVE

We were really happy back in our hometown. But when war began, we did not know what would happen to us. Soldiers were marching with rage and shooting at the sky to scare people. Many of us became prisoners and slaves. Most men were forced to join the army.

The women suffered the most. But we were lucky. A third party entered the battle and we got the chance to escape. We were advised to leave our hometown, even though we loved it so much.

Despite the sadness over this, we were very happy. Everyone we cared about had survived. We rushed to the aid workers, who allowed us to leave the country. As we boarded the plane, we waved goodbye to our hometown. We thought we wouldn’t get to Australia safely but we did. We started a new life here where there is peace and quiet.
**Mother saves the day—a fishing story**

Everybody loves fishing and so did the Wang family. Most days they spent their time fishing. There were three daughters, grandpa, grandma, mother and father. However, one day was different. They usually spent their time fishing at the river near their house but this time they went fishing out to sea in the middle of the ocean. They went further away from the shore.

“Blop! Blop! Blop! Blop! Blop! Blop!” went each of the ends of the fishing lines and into the sea. One fish, two fish, three fish, four fish. There were so many fish that they had caught and they all thought they would have a feast but, Uh Oh, a SHARK! They panicked and sped away. Unfortunately they had forgotten to fill the fuel tank so the boat stopped. The grandma fainted, the grandpa was sleeping and the mother and two of the daughters were scared. The father needed help. The only person who was brave was the oldest daughter. She managed to start the boat. They got away from the shark. After they had escaped, they praised their daughter by celebrating with all their friends and neighbours and feasted on the fish they had caught.

They partied all night until everyone left and the eldest daughter received something special from her family. It was a necklace. It was a really pretty one, too. They all thanked her for saving them and they slept happily together. That was part of my mother’s life, as a little child in China, living with the people in her family.

**Half-Necked Chicken**

Have you ever seen an almost headless chicken running around your backyard with dreadful scenes of blood splattering everywhere - oozing out of it? Have you ever wondered what it would be like? Well, my aunties, uncles and dad have all definitely experienced it!

Years ago, before anyone from my dad’s family had moved to Australia, everyone was living happily with my grandma and grandpa. One day my grandma decided to cook chicken as a gift to the elders in heaven as a kind of prayer offering.

She lifted the cook’s knife and dropped it very quickly, directly on to the chickens’ neck, almost cutting its head off. Unexpectedly, the chicken managed to get itself up and, in a panic; it started running around their backyard with its head dangling. Everyone was so scared.

All that could be heard were screams and yells. Eventually, grandma caught the chicken and continued with her business! Even though everyone was scared at the time they have mostly recovered. Only Auntie Ann still fears chicken. To this day, she can’t eat it.
My Dad’s Fishing Story

When my father was a child, he sailed the seas with his grandfather and grandmother. His grandfather was very wise, because he had some very clever tricks to lure fish.

They were in a canoe, big enough to fit four or five people. This was the day that my father started fishing. On his first attempt, he caught a little yellow-golden fish. He was overwhelmed and named it ‘Vang’ which means golden in Vietnamese. His grandmother slipped the fish into a small plastic bag filled with water and placed it in my dad’s hands. “It’s so wriggly!” shouted my dad with a bright and happy expression.

On his next attempt, a small shark took a bite on the hook. My dad screamed, “Arrghh!! Big fish!” Quickly, my grandfather helped my dad to pull it out. After some pulling, the shark landed in the canoe. My dad was shocked by the size, comparing it to the yellow fish.

“Plop!” went the next hook into the water. This time, he caught a cod. It only took him five minutes. Then my dad’s grandmother told them to go home, because it was time to have dinner.

My dad shouted to everyone in the house, “Hey everyone! I caught three fish!” Then, my dad smiled proudly.

Every time my dad goes out to sea, he places his hands on top of the water to feel the softness of the sea and remembers that special day. As they arrived home, my dad and his grandma took the fish in, while his grandfather was packing up the equipment.

The Bad Boy That Skipped Class

My grandmother was a teacher in China for three years. One day a bad boy truanted from class and went for a swim. My grandmother was looking for him. She found him, grabbed his clothes and ran back to class. She left the clothes near the door and returned to teaching. The boy, who was wearing only his swimsers, grabbed his clothes and went to get changed. While he was doing this, everybody laughed their heads off. The teacher only smiled. He came back to class and everything settled. The kids were grinning and the teacher said nothing. She simply returned to teaching for the rest of the day.

The Day My Mom Ate Ice Cream

A few years ago, when my mother was still in high school, she always walked to school. On this day, it was her last day of school and she took a shortcut to hurry. When she turned into an alley, she saw a man. He was spitting left to right, and left to right again.
My mother didn’t want to humiliate him so she just kept walking, but by the time she stood near the man, he accidentally spat on my mother’s head. She was so embarrassed that she ran straight to school and into the girls’ toilets.

She managed to wash her hair and dry it in time before the school bell rang. She participated in school and ran straight home. She didn’t tell anyone what happened and went to spend the rest of her free time shopping and eating ice cream. Today, she still remembers that day and begins to eat ice cream whenever she remembers it.

THE JOURNEY OF A YOUNG GIRL

It all started when...
She grew up having to live like a slave and never expected the world to be so cruel. She wanted to know how to escape the dreaded place she’d been working in for several years.

She knew she had to escape the cruel fate she had ahead for the rest of her life. She waited for the right moment to flee from the fields of grass where she pulled lemon grass to feed the soldiers. Although she was only four years of age, she knew how to swim and knew it was the only way to get onto the other side of the creek. Quickly she dived into the deep, murky waters, lily pads colliding with her each time she gasped for breath.

She started swimming towards home where she vaguely remembered her parents and friends. She had wondered what had happened to them and how they were.

She started to struggle against the swelling current from an arriving storm. Suddenly a bolt of lightning struck the water. It hit her under the water. Everything went black. When she awoke she found herself drifting along the water. She stood up realising the water was shallow and turned to walk to the edge.

She saw her parents worried and relieved faces. For them to see her after two years was a shock but not a burden. BANG!!! A rifle aimed towards her innocent face.

“Give me the girl and no one will get hurt” a soldier boomed.

“No, I can’t let you take away my daughter” cried her mother.

He grabbed the girl’s arm and dragged her away into the truck where all the other runaways were. She was taken back in chains where she was ferociously whipped until blood started gushing from her sore back. She collapsed, losing so much blood she was taken to the local hospital to recover. It took several weeks for her to be able to get back to work. Although she was almost whipped to death she never learned
her lesson and kept returning to her parents over and over again.

She didn’t die because she is now 40 and as healthy as ever. A happy ending to her cruel childhood!

**MY FAMILY HISTORY**

My grandpa told me that when he was my age, life was hard. He had to work for money and went through many hardships until 1965.

My grandpa was involved in the armed forces. At that stage, there were a lot of soldiers from other places coming to our country to fight. My grandpa and other men from the armed forces tried really hard just to save the people and the country.

Life is much better for me now. I feel so lucky that I don’t have to go through many hardships like my grandparents experienced. I also hope that no war will ever exist again.

**Journey to Snowy Mountains**

One day I had to wake up very early in the morning. I was going to the Snowy Mountains. My family, cousins and my dad’s friends were coming with us because we wanted a vacation and also wanted my dad’s friend to have a great time. When we were packed and ready to take off we had to put more seats in the van. This took us about fifteen minutes.

It was a strange day because every two hours it rained. Stop, rain, and stop, more rain. When we arrived in the outback, I saw lots and lots of animals. I even saw a sheep, which I wouldn’t have seen around home. We kept going and saw a dead kangaroo. I didn’t look at it for very long because my dad said not to. Further on, I looked to the right and saw a group of trees in a row. Behind the trees was a police car. We thought that we were going to get a fine because my dad was driving fast. My dad told everyone that we might get caught so he slowed down. When we went past the police car, we heard a police siren, which freaked us out, but actually they were after the car behind our van. It was a long long trip, so my dad took a shortcut.

It was bumpy but we got there in just four hours. If we had not taken the shortcut it might have been eight hours more. When we finally arrived at the Snowy Mountains, we were extremely hungry so everyone decided to eat and then play. After lunch, we played around and took lots of photos.

**About My Family**

When my grandma was born they were very, very poor. They could only afford a sheet of canvas to make a tent to live in. However, my grandfather was in a gold rush and he found the biggest gold
nugget ever so they became rich for the rest of their lives. They could then afford a house, food and anything they wanted.

Uncles from both sides of my family were in the war and sadly, they did not survive. My dad immigrated from Germany to live in Australia and was very happy he came here.

**BAD LUCK IN MOVING HOUSE.**

Have you experienced moving your house? I did. On the night before we moved house, we wrapped all our important belongings in a plastic bags. In the morning the removalists arrived and everything was taken to the truck. I went upstairs to carry some bags to the truck.

Our house had carpet. I was walking when I stepped on something. It hurt! I saw it was a needle in my foot and it was painful. I had to pull it out. That really hurt…. owwwwccc! I had fun rolling the bags down the stairs.

There was one more thing left for me to do - carry the toy box to our car. We had stone stairs to exit our house. The toy box was pretty heavy. I was pretty scared thinking I might fall, but I walked down. So far so good. It was slippery because it had rained the previous night. A bright red bird came flying past me. I lost control of myself and fell down the stairs. Dear me! I had a bruise on my leg. After that I had to spend two hours in the car resting. When everything was moved into the car we drove off to our new house. I waved goodbye to my house and left. Every time our family drives past our old house memories come flooding back.

**MY MUM’S WORK**

Thousands of packages are made every day by the company where my mum works. She works on holidays and weekends only. They create millions of materials that are made into advertisement packages everyday. The materials include console packages, boxes, party decorations, posters and other advertising products. My mum has been working there for two years. The company advertises things in many shops such as ‘Target’, ‘Big W’, ‘K-mart’, ‘Toys r us’ and ‘Myer’.

My mum makes advertisements by picking the suitable material, printing then publishing it. She used to make boxes but was promoted to advertising products and making packages. She sometimes brings packages home for me and my family to look at. She is a very good worker and has made lots of money.

Previously my mum worked with bathroom and kitchen tiles. She went to lots of houses to show people different tiles. She also had to lay the tiles in bathrooms and kitchens. This job was difficult for her so she switched careers and received a better job.

My mum has never failed in any jobs because she always tries hard.
My Grandmother’s Journey

1987 was the year when the people of Laos fled from danger into sorrow. The Chinese communists invaded Laos and took control of the Laos community. Unfortunately, my grandmother was a part of this small community. This sudden incident led to the loss of many jobs with only a few people being lucky enough to keep their jobs. But this did not mean that everything was fine. These people now had to work twice as hard to earn enough money to feed their families. This caused great hardship for my grandmother. My grandfather was the only one to have a job out of a large family of ten. Leisure and recreational activities ceased to exist in her community because people were too afraid to leave their homes. This meant that socialising with other local people decreased and many people hardly knew each other.

New laws had caused many families to make a heartbreaking decision to leave Laos and flee to another country. My grandmother was born and raised in Laos. It was devastating for my grandmother to make a decision to leave her beloved country. Although she did not want to leave, it was required of her. She had no choice. Not only my grandmother, but many other families felt unsafe and afraid in their homeland.

When everyone thought things could not get any worse, they eventually did! Although parting from their home country was bad enough, travelling on the river for days, weeks, and months in an overcrowded boat was horrific. The lack of food and water affected the crew greatly. Many people became ill as sickness spread on the boat. Sadly, the illness and the cramped conditions on the boat made life difficult and miserable for everybody.

The boat finally reached Thailand. All the people on the boat, including my grandmother, were led to a refugee camp nearby. This camp was to be home for the people on the boat for the next few months. The accommodation in the camp was not very pleasant. Although life in the camp was difficult and unpleasant, my grandmother knew that most people would prefer to live in this camp, rather than live in an unsafe and hostile place.

This refugee camp was cramped even though there were many tents and sheltered areas. Inside a tent, there were four or five large beds with four people sharing a bed. It was very untidy and sometimes there would be rats running around under the beds. Food was a big problem as well. On many occasions, the owners of the camp were not able to provide enough food and water for the families. Every day would feel like one long long diet.

After a long period of time in the refugee camp, my grandmother and the other refugees were set free. My grandmother flew to Australia and was finally able to re-start her life. After her horrific experience, my grandmother does not want other people to go through what she did. This experience has affected both my grandmother and my parents. They want their children to have a better life and never experience what they had to endure. They believe we should work hard and not ever take our most comfortable life for granted.
**My hero**

There is one story that amazes me every time I listen to it. This story occurred when I was seven or eight. My dad had to go to a drive in bottle shop so that he could get a present for his friend.

Another car had pulled up behind us. At this stage, we had no idea that the guy behind us in a car, had any type of weapon. But to our surprise, he had a small gun which he used to try and make the shop owner give him all of his money. Whilst all of this was happening my brother and I were sitting in the car and were witnesses to this very scary crime that was happening right in front of our very young eyes.

The robber told my dad that he was not allowed to move but if you knew my dad then you would know that he doesn’t listen to anyone (especially someone he doesn’t know). He made the choice to run to his car. At this stage the look on the owner’s face was a look that I will never forget. He was really terrified! My dad then headed for the nearest phone booth and rang the police, but in a state of shock he accidentally dialled wrong numbers. We rang emergency triple 0.

I had to help him dial the right number. As soon as we called the police they were immediately on their way. When they got there they were able to catch the man and arrest him. Now every time we see the man that owns the shop he thanks my dad and tells me this story.

**My grandpa’s unfortunate accident**

It was a Thursday night around twenty years ago when an accident happened to my Grandpa. On that night my mother and Grandma returned home, to find someone standing in front of their house. At first they thought it was just a stranger. They walked closer and saw that it was actually my Grandpa’s friend. My mother and Grandma were startled to see him this late at night. His face was pale with a worried and scared expression. He was there to tell them terrible news that upset my mother and Grandma. They both rushed to the hospital.

My Grandpa had been in a bad motorbike accident. When they arrived at the hospital, they saw an old man lying there. There was blood everywhere, and two nurses and a doctor were taking him to the emergency room. At that moment my Grandma noticed that it was Grandpa and burst into tears. With my mother by her side, they both sat quietly waiting. Hours passed causing my mother and Grandma more and more anxiety.

Finally the doctor came from emergency. They both rushed to him asking if Grandpa was alright. The doctor calmed them and stayed silent for a while. When my mother and Grandma saw the expression on the doctor’s face, Grandma, without warning cried. They both knew that they would receive more dreadful
news. The doctor told them that because it was a terrible crash, my Grandpa would have to stay in hospital for more than half a year for scans, operations and recovery.

The first month was the most painful for not only my mother and Grandma but especially Grandpa. In that time he had over ten operations. He didn’t know what he was doing or saying and couldn’t remember anything.

In the end, Grandpa knew he wouldn’t be able to walk as quickly as he used to and would have some problems. He did not give up but kept on going. He knows someday he will fully recover with support, love and care from all of us.

**LIFE EXPERIENCE**

When people migrate to Australia or come as refugees, they might not know English because they have a German or French background. Some people might get confused because they’re from an Asian country that doesn’t teach English. For example there was a time when my mum went to the train station and just kept looking at the timetable, trying to understand it. Many trains kept passing by and she didn’t know which one to board.

New migrants might not know how much to pay at the shops and have trouble understanding money and prices. That has happened to my mum. People will find themselves in even more trouble if they don’t seek help but it is often difficult to ask.

Finding yourself in another country is a hard thing and takes a lot of getting used to. This would be the same for many people. Imagine yourself in another country not knowing what to do. You must cook food on a stove when you are used to cooking on a fire. You must wash your clothes in a sink or a machine when you are used to using a river. Think about it? What would you do?

There are many risks in the journey people have taken to get to their new destination. They can experience bad times and good times when things are new and different. You can’t expect everyone to be perfect in a new environment straight away.

**MY MOTHER’S LIFE EXPERIENCE**

When my mother was young and still living in Indonesia, she was very poor and needed to earn money for food. Her parents stopped paying school fees because it was too expensive and did not leave them with enough money for food. My mother had to work with the family when she was in year 5. Every morning at five o’clock, my mother had to make breakfast and coffee for her mum and dad so they would not work on an empty stomach.

One day, my mother got married. She moved to Australia so she could make more money and eat well. In Australia, my mother was working in a restaurant so
she could earn money and my father was a fisherman so he could bring food home for my mum to cook.

After living in Australia, my mother decided to go back to Indonesia so she could help her family. When my mother was in Indonesia, she was making lots of money for her family. After one year, the family was getting more money than usual. My mother moved back to Australia and studied to become better at English.

**EARLY CABRAMATTA**

Cabramatta in 1983 was totally different to modern Cabramatta. My dad and mum moved into Cabramatta in 1983. Back then, the suburb looked like a forest. There were few roads and not a single traffic light in sight. The streets were very quiet. There were few cars on the roads. There were no supermarkets except Franklins, but the goods they sold were very expensive.

My dad worked in a printing factory. The factory of 400 employees helped print boxes for a major business. My dad’s job was to stand near the start of the machine and flap the boxes, so that air could get inside. This prevented the boxes from going in two at a time. Whenever the factory printed a different box, my dad had to remove the ink remaining.

My dad took the train to and from work. At that time, there were a lot of train and railway track repairs and construction. This led to train strikes, and often everyone had to take the bus or taxi. My dad took the taxi because if he took the bus, he’d be late for work. The taxi drivers called out different places, but my dad hopped in the one that called, “BANKSTOWN, BANKSTOWN!” In the taxi, there were another two people who were heading in the same destination. The taxi driver would divide the fee equally into three.

My dad was paid $147 after tax for working forty hours a week. The house my dad bought cost roughly $60,000. It would take over one and a half of my dad’s salary to pay off the house if he didn’t buy food. But my dad bought food and paid bills. It took him three and a half years to finally pay off the house. The four bedroom house he bought was falling apart; my dad renovated it and made it look just as good as new. My dad also turned the garage into a room as he didn’t have a car.

For my dad to renovate the house, it took him a lot of effort and money. My dad worked overtime to get more money to raise my sister and to buy furniture. He would rebuild the house himself when he had time. After each day of work, my dad would come home tired. Luckily, my mother always made him dinner.

My father and mother both slowly but surely worked their way to raise us. Five children. They sometimes went through some very hard times. They borrowed money from relatives to pay for our school fees and other education. Recently, my brother and sister graduated from university and are working to take care of the family. My parents are now living their life peacefully and joyfully.
Cabra today is like “Asia in one small community”. Here everyone remembers the happy parts of their old country.

Changes in Cabramatta through the years

1905

1923

1950

1988

early 1980’s

Freedom Plaza now

Photographs courtesy of Fairfield City Library. Thanks to Marilyn Gallo, at Cabramatta Library, for her assistance.
**Vietnam**

**My Mum’s Journey to Australia**

When the Vietnam War had almost ended in 1978, my mum had to leave Vietnam because it was unsafe. She went on a boat with another one hundred and ten people on board. The boat was sixteen metres long and my mum had to stay on the boat for three days and two nights without eating or drinking.

After that, my mum and the other one hundred and ten people went to a Malaysian island to rest and eat. When they set off again, they met some Malaysian pirates who threatened my mum and the other people. The pirates told my mum and the other people to give them all their jewellery, petrol and other valuable things. Then the pirates attached a thick rope to my mum’s boat and dragged it out to the ocean. The pirates stopped their engine and cut the rope to let my mum’s boat drift out to the middle of nowhere. My mum was really scared and thought she would starve to death. Luckily, they drifted to an island and met the Red Cross. The Red Cross gave my mum and all the other people food to eat for over six months. The Australian Government took my mum and the other people to Brisbane and told my mum to look for a job and live there. She was very very happy to make a new life in Australia.

**The Boat to a New Society**

My dad was a boat migrant refugee. As the name suggests he came here by boat. Along with thirty other people my dad travelled from Vietnam to Australia on a boat about fifteen metres in length and four or five metres in width.

During the journey, the people on the boat fought and survived horrendous storms and monster waves. Not all the people made it. During the storm, many people fell out of the boat to their watery graves.

Though my dad was only a child at the time, he held on with the strength of a grown man along with his two sisters and three brothers. Food supply was scarce as the food grew mouldy due to the moisture in the air. There was very little food and only the children were allowed to eat. The adults spent many days and nights starving and in great pain.

It’s hard to believe that thirty people could fit on a boat so small. My dad had made it to Australia. And gradually, the rest of his family came over to join him on this peaceful land we call Australia.
MY MUM’S STORY

I was born into a country of war. I didn’t know what else to do so I just stayed there for years. After the war ended there was still unrest. Many people fled the country fearing that the changes during the war would affect them badly.

In 1986 my brother, my nephew and I decided to flee that country of unrest. We soon set off on our journey to escape. At first, we thought it was a success but eventually my brother and my nephew were captured by the police who roamed the country.

They were later released from prison but fear struck my brother that something might happen to him and he refused to try to escape the country again. So it was up to my nephew and I to flee Vietnam.

After days of walking, we arrived at our boat with a few other people, who were also escaping Vietnam. After meeting some of them, we soon set off on our escape. There were very few rations on board so we only had a spoonful of water and a handful of rice a day. What made the trip even worse was the constant waves that made us go up and down like a roller coaster. I vomited badly all the time.

Eventually, I got used to the waves. Not long after, we arrived in Malaysia where we were given food, water, shelter and much more. Malaysia was great but not long after we arrived my uncle found out that my nephew and I were residing in Malaysia so he offered us a ticket to Sydney, Australia. It was such a wonderful feeling to come to a peaceful country.

Hung’s Journey to Australia.

Hung described his journey to Australia as challenging. He came here during the most devastating times in Vietnam, the Vietnam War. It was possible to stay there, but in his mind he knew that he couldn’t. He knew he couldn’t live in a country with the Communists taking over the South so he set out on a journey to another country with his future wife and approximately thirty other people.

Hung was one of the people aboard who steered the boat. Everyone’s life was in his hands. He steered for the first three days of the journey to a free country when the boat broke down. There was absolutely no way that the motor would now work. Everyone on board was very scared and frightened for their survival. The next morning, Hung and the other men on board thought of a marvellous idea. When the wind was up, they would put up the sails and let the wind take them to land. However, they hoped it wouldn’t take them to the enemies’ territory or out to sea.

Onboard the boat, it was very lonely. To take their minds off things, Hung and the crew sang Vietnamese songs. It made them feel more relaxed. After about ten long and cold days, Hung started to lose hope. But on the eleventh day a man
named “Tam Bay” from Indonesia happened to be fishing where Hung’s boat was stranded.

Tam Bay was kind and offered everyone on board a ride to Indonesia. Tam Bay was the captain and with him, were a few other boats as well. Hung and his friends stayed with Tam Bay and their crew for a few days to help them with the fishing. It was their way of thanking Tam Bay and his crew for saving them. Hung and his friends felt quite sea sick because they were in open waters for about a month, but they were also relieved they had all survived and no one died from the disaster.

Hung and his friends were very happy as they finally returned to land. They stayed at “Pulau Galang” in Indonesia for three long and hardworking years. During this time, Hung finally knelt down and asked Hoa, who was his friend aboard, to be his wife. After three years, they were both finally accepted into Australia. Sadly, Hung and Hoa had to leave their friends and head off for a new life in Australia.

At first, Hung thought that a life in Australia was going to be tough but as the months went by, Hung started to fit in. They lived in Adelaide at first, where most of their other friends lived. This was where Hung stayed for the first six months of his life in Australia until he finally got sick of the cold, miserable weather and decided he and his wife would go and live in Sydney. They had some information about Sydney and found out that the weather was quite good. A few years later in 1993, they had a family. Ever since, the family has lived a happy life. Hung knows that if he hadn’t moved from his home country he would have regretted it.

**My Parents’ Journey in Life**

Before I was born, my parents lived in a place called Saigon, a city in Vietnam. My mother lived in a five storey house; the first floor was and still is my grandpa’s delicious noodle restaurant. My father was poor when he was young and he lived in a very small house. He had very little money because my grandma had to raise her six sons and one daughter alone. My father was the youngest out of all his siblings. My grandma lived a very exhausting, miserable and lonely life.

When my parents were young, Vietnam was involved in a terrifying and horrible war which finally ended in 1975. My father escaped from Vietnam and travelled to Australia in a small boat with his brother in 1978. They were worried that pirates would come and rob them but that didn’t stop them from leaving their homeland. It was a long and dangerous trip but they made it. In Australia, my father went to school for two years before he took the citizenship test to become an Australian citizen. Later on, he got a job at a restaurant in China Town. He worked morning, noon and night. He was working very hard and was exhausted when he came home every night.

When my father went to visit Vietnam, he met my mother and then got married a year later. After they were married, my parents flew to Australia. In Australia my mother lived with my father’s family, before moving to a rented townhouse a few months later.
My father left his old job and took a new job at a factory where he printed words and images onto plastic bags. My father had many permanent ink marks on him and all over his clothes. It was not the best job one could have but at least he had one. Later on, we moved into another house which had a large backyard, lots of space for my sisters and I to run around, and space for my mother to plant her beautiful flowers.

My father still works as an employee at the factory and my mother is still a housewife. I usually help my mother at home... or... rarely. My family and I love being part of Australia because everyone is treated well and people have many rights and freedom.

**Trip to Australia**

It was in the late 1990’s when my mother travelled across the vast ocean to arrive in a country called Australia.

My mother’s four older brothers were already Australian residents. My mother and the rest of her family wanted to be reunited with the four brothers, so they decided to migrate to Australia. Her eldest brother filled out the immigration forms, with the help of her other three brothers.

My mum had her bags packed ready to go on the Qantas flight from Vietnam to Australia with her father, mother and three sisters. My mother was jumping for joy at the thought that she was going to settle in a peaceful country.

But there was one problem, my mum and her family needed to obtain passports. This was a minor setback, but it was worth it for what was yet to come, migrating to Australia. They had to wait two grueling weeks before they were able to retrieve their passports and go to Australia. Once they had their passports, they were off like lions going for a kill.

The transport to the Vietnam airport was by a white bus with crimson stripes. The traffic was hectic. Motorcycles, bicycles and buffalos, were swarming the streets. Once she arrived at the steps of the overcrowded airport, my mother was overjoyed. This was her very first flight on an aeroplane. The flight was long and a little boring. The good side about travelling on the plane was the scrumptious food provided on the plane.

It was probably around 9 pm eastern standard time when the plane touched the ground. The view was spectacular when she left the airport. The sky was pitch black with pretty multi-coloured lights gleaming out of the tall skyscraper-like buildings. Towering over her was a scene to dream of. Her four brothers were waiting outside next to a large, white and green taxi. A smile, stretched from ear to ear, appeared on my mother’s face. Tired but happy, she departed the airport in a taxi. My mum was on her way to her very first house in Australia. The house was cramped and small, but the whole family managed to fit in. She slept in a bunk bed, which she shared with her youngest sister.
The next few days she went sight-seeing in the heart of Sydney-Central. The sights seemed to be endless. The best part of her day was when she took a road trip with her family, being escorted by her older brothers. The trip went under the Harbour Bridge and along the shoreline. The destination was like an island on a postage stamp. The palm trees swayed in the breeze. The leaves danced to the beat of the outdoor entertainment and the water, which flowed under the Harbour Bridge, was as tranquil as the CDs which played soothing music. As soon as they had taken in the scenery, the family went to a not so shabby restaurant at Lakemba. The duck skin served was mouth-watering.

Once all the sight-seeing died down, my mother, her younger sisters, father and mother decided to find a place of their own and moved out. The thrill of buying their very first home was exhilarating. Seeing all the properties on sale; town houses, flats and two-storey houses, she had a whole new perspective of the world.

Parents’ Life

My dad’s childhood was spent helping his parents doing jobs like washing dishes and cleaning. When my dad had free time, he usually went to a friend’s house and played games. At that time, there weren’t any computers around so he usually played handball with his friends. On the weekends he used his pocket money that his parents gave him daily to buy some books or toys. He liked to read and wanted to become successful in life but unfortunately there was no school where he lived. All his knowledge came from his parents, who taught him.

He married my mum and decided to move to Australia to start a new life in a new country, as life was very difficult in Vietnam. They came to Australia by boat. The trip to Australia was uncomfortable. There were many storms and many people on the boat were sea sick. Sicknesses were infecting people slowly. But luckily the people who worked on the ship gave everyone a journey pack which contained masks, books, stationary sets, etc. Everybody wore the masks and waited a long time to reach Australia.

Eventually the boat reached Australia. My dad and mother felt happy and free. My dad thought what it would be like if he had been born here.

Everyone who had just come to Australia lived in tents in refugee camp. About five years later, my dad found work and saved enough money to buy a house. That’s when my dad’s life became much easier, in a clean, new environment.

Depressing start, bad journey, and new life.....

My Mother’s Trip to Australia

My mother is one of seven children. The seven consisted of four brothers and three sisters. They were raised by my grandparents. In 1968, when she was only eleven months old, unfortunately her father passed away fighting in the Vietnam War. As the years went by, she lived a very normal Vietnamese lifestyle. By the
age of sixteen, she met my father. Then at the age of twenty two they married. It took four years for her to come to Australia to start a new life. During this time, my mother encountered many horrifying events. Here is her story.

Her first attempt was to travel by the most efficient transport - boat. She only made it to the mouth of the Mekong River before her boat was caught by the police. She spent six months in jail before being released. After several months of decision making, she decided to give it one more shot. Her second trip was also another failure but she made it further than her previous attempt. She was captured at Ca Mau and was forced into jail for the next three days. During this time, she became very ill due to the limitations of water and food supply. After realising how sick she was, the officer guarding her jail cell took her to a clinic. After spending some time there, she returned to jail. Luckily for her, the officer forgot how sick she was so she ran as fast as she could.

After running a fair distance, she came across a small village. While there she went around begging for food and money. The locals realised that she had this distinctive look about her that just didn’t make her fit in. They soon became suspicious. She knew she had to find a way to go back home. She met an elderly man who was taking his granddaughter to school. My mother asked him for a lift to the nearby ferry wharf. After several hours on the ferry, she arrived in Saigon.

After months of deliberating, her family decided that it was best for her to take the safe route to the beautiful country, Australia. This was by plane. While all this was happening, my father nervously waited for her arrival. Finally she arrived here in 1990.

She recalls this experience as being very traumatising. She considers herself very lucky that she didn’t die at sea and that she has a new life in such a beautiful country. After hearing her story, I’ve realised how fortunate I am to have been born and brought up in Australia. Knowing that she risked her life to be where she is today, makes me feel very thankful.

**The Journey**

My parents, as children, lived a very poor lifestyle in Vietnam. Everyday their parents would set out and work for long hours and come back with very little money. Each day was a struggle just to provide the family with fresh food and water.

In the 1960’s, the Vietnam War occurred. This made things much harder. Money was much harder to find and the freedom and rights they had were all taken away. Unemployment soared, leaving the people homeless and starving for days. This was a very bad situation. People believed that nothing could get any worse.

To escape the War, my father took a ship to Australia. This took months and the space on the boat was limited. At this time, my parents didn’t know each other. The food, as you can imagine, would have been disgusting. There were only
biscuits and water, and it was not in the best condition. As the days went by, many people got sick. This was very serious, because they were not treated and the sickness could spread very quickly since they lived in such a small amount of space.

My mother had travelled to the Philippines and stayed at a refugee camp. This was basically a camp built by the government to accept refugees who had come over the border. It was designed to help provide the basic human needs, temporarily. The way they lived was at least better than how they had lived in Vietnam. There was food supplied, and clean water. As a result of the war, my mother’s siblings (two sisters and a brother) were still in Vietnam, having to cope with the War the communist invasion.

**MY PARENTS JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA**

While the Viet Cong were in control of Vietnam, many people tried to escape their reign. The majority of Vietnamese people escaped by boat. These people are known as boat people. My parents were among thousands of boat people, who successfully escaped the Viet communists.

My parents, along with their friends, travelled in a small fishing boat to Thailand in 1988. The sea was very dangerous at the time, not because of the rough winds and strong waves, but because there were many pirates, lurking and waiting for prey. The pirates would raid boats for jewellery, money or anything valuable. Many boat people were killed because of the pirates. Women were usually raped and later thrown into the sea.

After the sixth day at sea, my parents finally arrived in Thailand. They were dehydrated and starving. In Thailand, my parents stayed at a Refugee camp. After entering the camp, my mother quickly wrote a letter, sending it to her family in Vietnam. They were over-joyed to know that she was still alive.

The huts which my parents lived in while in the Refugee camps were extremely small. Each hut had an approximate width of 2m and was 3m long. My parents would be given food such as rice, and 40L of water each day for living purposes such as cooking, drinking and washing.

During their time at the camp, my mother wrote many letters to a French church, describing her life at the camp. Donations were made to my parents, with the help of a French man, who worked at the church. He would make monthly donations to my parents, usually giving $US30. During Christmas at the Refugee camp, the church would send my parents presents, so my parents would be able to enjoy Christmas.

In 1990, after living in the Refugee camps for one and a half years, my parents were sponsored and boarded a flight to Australia.
Currently my parents are living in Canley Vale, with their son and daughter. Each year my mother gives gifts and writes to the French man to thank him for his help. My parents are still thankful for their sponsors.

**MY FATHER’S JOURNEY**

When my father was sixteen, he was put onto a boat with his two elder brothers, who were twenty one and eighteen. He knew where he was going because he had been sponsored by a relative from Australia. They were the only three children who were able to be sent to Australia for a new and peaceful life.

My father took a boat to Malaysia. He knew it was going to be a harsh ride but he had his two older brothers to keep him company. It was a very boring trip as there was nothing to do other than eat and sleep.

As the boat pulled into the dock. A man shouted in Vietnamese,” GET OFF THE BOAT! WATCH YOUR STEPS! FOLLOW THE OTHERS & STICK TOGETHER!” My father and his brothers held hands and told each other not to let go. They were unfamiliar with the conditions of Malaysia, and said that everything was different to life in Vietnam. My father and his brothers were very paranoid that they might get pick-pocketed by the people in the Malaysian docks. Even though they only had clothes and barely any money.

After a week or so, my father and his brothers travelled by aeroplane to Australia. My father told me that the trip was very comfortable, and more relaxing then the one on the boat. As they got off the aeroplane, they were very lost. This was because no one could speak English, but there were worse things that happened to them. Their luggage which contained their most important things, such as their passports, birth certificates, and Australian citizen approval certificates, were missing. Luck struck them as fast as lightning as they found their luggage, and their sponsor (who is related to my grandpa).

They were then driven in a big maxi–taxi to Gosford, when they lived for a few years. When my father and my uncles were able to afford to live in their own house, they moved into the Canley/Carramar/Cabramatta area.

Now this history is in my hands to send out to my next generation…

**FAMILY STORY**

At first I didn’t know much about my family. After asking, I knew that there was so much to learn. One thing was that there was a Vietnam war. During the war everybody was scared. Vietnam was a very poor place. The war was so big that people from different families had to come and support it. My uncle and some other people (like my grandparents) had to go to the war. The war was very dangerous but my uncle and grandparents survived. They said that the war lasted for many days. Nobody got much rest because the war lasted for so long that they had to wake up early to go to the fighting area. The war was a communist war
against South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese came to the south to fight. My parents lived in the south.

Many people escaped by boat. My dad was a boat person. Many people suffered because there was little food to eat. My aunty was another person who travelled by boat. After arriving in Australia my aunty sponsored my mum who came from Vietnam over to Australia by plane while the others were still in Vietnam. Then my grandparents were also sponsored by my aunty. Everybody in my family survived the Vietnam War and they still remember what happened. Since the war ended there has not been another war in Vietnam. My parents told me that it was frightening. But now the war has ended it is safe.

**MY SO-CALLED FRIEND**

It was 1960 and I was twelve. I lived in the urban streets of Saigon. Dog asked me to go coconut picking with him. Dog was the neighbourhood bully and my so-called friend.

He told me to go and climb to the top of the tree, pick coconuts and drop them down. When I was very close to the top he ran to the old man who owns the house and shouted, “Sir! Sir! There is a thief! He is stealing your coconuts!” I was not the quickest runner and the old man soon caught me. He tied me to one of his many trees. Then he phoned my parents to pick me up.

This reminds me of another time when he “invited” me and all of the gang to go, let’s call it “swimming”. We went to a river. There he found a big stick and held it like it was a sceptre. He told everyone to line up at the river’s edge. He shouted “When I count to three, anybody who has yet to jump will be pushed off! Yes, you heard me. Anyone who has not jumped, I will push him off!” When he got to the count of two, of course there was no one left on the edge.

Dog and his gang were the bullies of my neighbourhood. He became a refugee like many others. I missed him. Although at times he was mean, he was also my friend.

**THE ESCAPE FROM VIETNAM**

My mum has been through many hard times in her life. The worst was escaping alone with no one she knew on a cramped, small boat on her journey to find refuge in Australia.

This all started during the horrific Vietnam War. She fled alone with no one to support her. She travelled through treacherous storms and became sick on the
way. The people with her tried to do everything they could. After a few months, she was well and on her way to Sydney on the east coast of Australia.

In 1982 she arrived in Australia and searched for her family. A couple of days of searching resulted in her connecting again with her family. However, after all the horrific events that happened to her, my mum didn’t do well in school.

When I asked both of my parents, “How was school life?”. They replied that “It was very hard.” They are trying to educate me well so that I don’t go through as hard a life as they did.

**MY FAMILY’S HISTORY!**

It was the year 1970 when my mum was born. During that time of the year there were bombings happening in Vietnam, so her mum couldn’t stay in the family in fear of getting attacked. She was given away to her grandparents who lived in Vietnam as well. When the war reached their territory, my mum and grandparents had to leave and find another place to live. They went all the way down to Melbourne, Australia where it would be safer. This is how their journey to Australia began:

They travelled on a small boat with lots of other people who wanted to leave as well. My mum and her grandparents survived the whole way with only bottle of water and two bread rolls.

When they arrived in Melbourne not even half a year later, her grandpa passed away in a car accident. She was left with her grandma. Her grandma was old and didn’t know how to make money, so they had to go back up to Vietnam to live with my maternal grandmother. My mum’s brothers and sister had to pick coffee beans to earn money and my mum had to look after twelve pigs. The pigs were big and fat. My mum had to feed them four times a day so they would get big enough to sell in the markets.

About two years later my mum went back to Melbourne to earn some more money to help her family. It was hard to find money back then because she didn’t know how to do anything. She didn’t go to school because the family was too poor. She went to school for just three days because she couldn’t afford further education.

When she arrived in Melbourne she had to live with her cousin in an apartment. It took her three weeks until she could find a job. She had work on a farm looking after pigs because she had former experience back in Vietnam. She had to cut up vegetables every day for ten hours to feed the pigs. By the time she saved enough money she sent all of it back up to Vietnam so her family could live a better life.

**MY MOTHER’S LIFE EXPERIENCES.**

My mother was born in Vietnam. She grew up in a country town called ‘Mỹ Tho’. In this town many families grew different types of fruit so there was a variety of a
fruit all year round. When my mother was young, she had a pleasant and joyful life.

In 1994, my grandmother sponsored my mother and aunty to Australia. When my mother first came to Australia, she missed her hometown, friends and relatives. On the other hand, she knew that Australia would provide her with a better opportunity in life. When she arrived in Australia, she went to school to learn English. This helped her to get on with her life and settle in Australia.

Not long after she came to Australia she got married and I was born. My mother was a very hard worker and worked in many different places. At work, she was pleased that she had the opportunity to improve her English as this enabled her to expand her knowledge of the English language. With each job, she was able to extend her knowledge and improve her communication skills.

Her first job was in a textile factory which paid low wages. She worked there for a few months and then changed jobs to a sales assistant in a clothes shop. She was very pleased with this job. It helped her to improve her English further and increased her confidence. She worked here for a while before my brother was born.

During this period of time, she stayed at home and looked after my brother and me. When my brother was two years old, my mother went back to find a job and got a position working in Qantas. She worked in the ‘food catering’ section. This job gave her more experience to cope with others and to stand up for herself. With this job, she received a very steady income.

**When my dad was little...**

When my dad was little, he lived in Vietnam with his mum who was from a rich family and his dad who was a French soldier. Until the communists came, my dad learnt French, Vietnamese, maths and much more. When my dad was in primary school, he was one of the smartest students in his class. Back then, he was very cheeky because he was smart. Some of his classmates were very rich but also very dumb, so every time any of his classmates needed help he would offer his answer only when they gave him a toy or money. One of his sisters was so smart that they allowed her to go to England for one month to study English.

My dad also was very naughty when he was a little because he was always watching people having a fight. This was a bit naughty so his mum always hit him when she found out. Sometimes my dad had a corn fight with his friends and when he came home he had bruises everywhere.

When the communists attacked Vietnam life was hard. No one went to school because everyone was scared. Rich people would have to pretend to be poor so no one would find out. My dad would sometimes go into the streets and buy special medicine so they wouldn’t get hungry.

My dad decided that they could take no more of the communists and so they
decided to escape from Vietnam. Escaping Vietnam was hard because of the police and the danger in the ocean. My dad’s family was lucky, as they managed to escape on their first attempt without being caught.

Since my dad came to Australia he has had a better life. He started to go to an Australian high school and he finished year 12. After school he started to work as a stone mason. His work was a success.

**MY DAD’S PAST LIFE**

Before my dad came to Australia, he lived in Vietnam. When he was a teenager he wasn’t well educated because his family was poor and didn’t have enough money to support his high school fees. He had to leave school early.

He helped my grandmother to open a small business selling building materials. At night, my dad went to a tutor twice a week. Two years later my grandmother had enough money to buy a farm far away from Saigon city. It was a good and peaceful life for him because they were able to drink clean water and had better food than in Saigon city, until my grandfather started gambling. He gambled until he had no more money and they had to sell the farm. When they got the money from selling the house my grandfather used it all for gambling.

My dad’s life got even worse. Three years later was the north and south Vietnam war. He was in prison for three weeks until he escaped with my uncle in a small tunnel dug by another person who was in this prison. They ran away and stole a boat to travel far away from Vietnam, where they would be safe.

One year had passed and my dad and uncle were still on the boat. They were running out of supplies and were really hungry. My dad was sick and my uncle was thinking of drugs. They were starving and the next thing they knew a storm came and struck their boat. They ended up being supported by a large plank of wood chipped off from the boat. Sleeping on the wood for ten days they drifted to Thailand where they were kept in a prison for two years, and then looked after for another six months.

While in Thailand my dad was having a good life, but my uncle wasn’t having a good time because he was on drugs. Taking drugs was all he could do since he had no-one to talk to besides my dad. He didn’t really like my dad so he never talked to him.

Two months had just passed and my uncle had passed away because he took a lot of cocaine. My dad was alone and the Thailand people couldn’t support him anymore, so they sent him to Australia where he met his family. Now my dad works as a mechanic with his brother and has a family.

**FINDING HIS OWN WAY TO FREEDOM**

Freedom! This word means a great deal to human society. Without freedom society would be wrong. In this story I am going to tell you about my Father’s
heartfelt journey to freedom and human rights. It is not a long story, but it is an
unforgettable one.

It began in Vietnam, a republic of South Asia which is next to Cambodia and Laos.
Life there was either simple or tough. To start your life, you would go to a primary
school from years 1 to 5. High school would start in year 6 and continue to year
12. Then after leaving school you would either work for yourself or someone else.
However, life does not always turn out the way you want it to. Life is not a book
that you can follow; it is made up of choices, your choices. Some people may
leave school early to go to work while some may finish high school and continue
studying in college.

My father attended school up to year 11 and then attended college. My father’s
life is very different from mine and I am sure his story is worth recalling. It was in
1981 that my father’s life changed. He migrated to Australia. It had not been his
lifelong ambition to migrate to Australia but, he knew that there he would have his
freedom. Vietnam was a communist country where people had no basic human
rights. He could not choose his own religion; he did not have the right to vote for
the government and most of all he did not have freedom of expression.

He was first brought on a boat, approximately 11.5 meters long, 3 metres wide
and 3 metres high. It may seem unbelievable now, but it was definitely believable
back then. After five days, he arrived in Malaysia. If you think five days was
effortless, you are wrong. My father travelled with my uncle and there were
around seventy five people on this undersized wooden boat. There wasn’t much
to eat or drink and most importantly there wasn’t any space to move. Yet the
determination to find freedom kept my father from regretting this journey.

During his four and a half months in Malaysia, he studied English for his future
job. Afterwards he was brought to Australia and straight away he knew it would be
different from home. From this point on, life to him was not filled with boundaries
anymore. He had his freedom and his rights. He had “the right to freedom of
expression”. He soon got a job and was able to speak English very clearly. Two
years later he was officially known as an Australia Citizen.

Today, my father works in the air-conditioning business and is living happily with
his family. His younger brother (my uncle) also has his own family and lives close
by. This was my father’s heartfelt journey, on an undersized boat for five days to
Malaysia and then four and a half months later arriving in Australia. In the end of
everyone’s journey, there is always a happy ending.

A NEW LIFE

My mum was born in 1965 and lived with her parents, eight sisters and one
brother in Vietnam.

She arrived in Australia, with my dad and other relatives, in 1991. When she first
arrived, she and my dad had to live with her mother-in-law because my mum and
dad could not afford to buy their own house. As much as she loved her home
back in Vietnam she had decided to come to Australia with her sister and relatives to live.

My mum’s life back in Vietnam had ups and downs but she still loved her family and friends. She loved meeting with her friends after school, spending hours just chatting about all sorts of things. At school in Vietnam she learned different subjects including maths, textiles, Chinese and others. The subjects changed as she got older. Her school was from kindergarten to year 12. She also enjoyed spending time with her older sisters and brother at home, playing and just enjoying each other’s company.

When she came to Australia my mum first stayed at my grandma’s house for a few months to get used to the new lifestyle. During her stay at my grandma’s house she learnt how to cook different recipes and also learnt how to be a housewife. Then she moved to my uncle’s house to stay for a while. At that time she took classes to learn English and other studies too. Then she and my dad moved into her sister’s house to live for a longer period of time. My mum moved a lot because at that time they didn’t have enough money to buy a place of their own.

Life in Australia was different because of the language, people and weather. But after a few years of living in Australia my mum got used to all that. She got used to the Australian celebrations, even though they were very different to those back home in Vietnam. My mum did miss her home in Vietnam but she knew that living in Australia was better for her.

By 1999 my mum settled down and, having saved enough money, she bought a place to live and had two daughters. My mum’s journey coming to Australia was a big change for her because she had grown up in Vietnam and when she arrived in Australia she didn’t know much about the place. But as time passed my mum learnt a lot about Australia. Her journey to Australia has had a big influence on her life.

**MY MUM’S JOURNEY**

My mum lived in Vietnam with her family of twelve. Her parents had nine daughters, and only one son. She wanted to go to Australia for freedom, so she decided to go with her elder sister, Lan. On the day of her departure, she said her goodbyes hoping she would make it out alive.

The boat was at least eleven metres long, but only carried fifty one passengers on the day her life was going to change. One day, on the way to Australia, supplies were low. People were tired and starving to death.

There was one couple who made my mum feel really sad, and they will never be forgotten. The wife became really thirsty and could not take it any longer. The husband could not see his wife like this, pleading for water, so he gave her sea
water to drink, even though the water was extremely salty. A few hours later, a mysterious ship saw the small boat, helped them on board and gave them food and drink. It was too late for the wife; she had already died. The husband was heartbroken and wanted to suicide. When the ship men were busy caring for the passengers, he held the wife’s body tightly and jumped down into the sea. When he jumped, he caught the captain’s eye. The Captain demanded that the shipmen go and rescue him. They grabbed fishing ropes to pull him in, but due to the freezing water, he fainted and let go of the wife’s cold body. The shipmen had to let the wife’s body go because they knew she was dead. When the shipmen grabbed hold of him and pulled him on board they used CPR to revive him. They used wine to warm up his cold body. The man then coughed and spluttered. He woke up, but after he remembered what happened to his wife, he became mad. Till this day, my mum still doesn’t know if he is still alive, or if he recovered. This was one of my mum’s scariest moments in life, but it makes her sad when she thinks about it because the man truly loved his wife.

**JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA**

In the year 1998 my dad and his sister were about to leave Vietnam (their homeland) to go to Australia. They both packed the equipment that they needed for the journey and went to the dock.

A few minutes later the boat started to go. The boat trip was very long; long and slow like waiting in a traffic jam. My dad and his sister only ate porridge for the whole trip. That’s what the all the passengers ate. They ate porridge for breakfast, they ate it for lunch and they ate it for dinner. My dad and his sister didn’t feel good while on the boat trip. That’s when they found out they had the flu! But the flu didn’t last for a long time; it only lasted about two days. They felt kind of homesick because they were leaving their homeland for a new place but a few hours later they felt better.

They finally made it to land and that land was Malaysia. My dad suggested that he and his sister should stay in Malaysia and learn English. They stayed there for one year and learnt all they could. Then they went on another journey to Australia but this time it was by plane. What a relief that was! A plane, so no more porridge! The plane ride took ten hours but it was worth it (better than a boat trip). They finally made it to Australia.

**PERSONAL FAMILY HISTORY**

To start off, this is a story about my mother in the Vietnam War.

One day, she told me, she was woken by gunfire. My mum had been asleep in a bomb shelter and was told by her father to run to safety with her mother. They reached the door when they spotted some South Vietnamese army troops heading towards them.

That army was battling with the North, where my mum and her parents were staying. Her father told her to run and told her mother to look after her. Her dad
stayed back to attract the army troops’ attention. The soldiers were about to open fire but my mum’s father screamed out to stop. He told them that he meant no harm and was only present to find his daughter some clothes. The soldiers did a frisk search and found nothing, so allowed him to go.

He ran to my mother, who was standing near a boat that was strapped to a tree to stop it from floating away. They climbed on board the boat and untied the rope to free it. Since there were no oars, they hoped that the wind would take them to another country or somewhere far from where they were sleeping.

According to my mother, about three days later, they were in the south of Vietnam and the war was over, so they hurried to shore. There were people lying dead and many others injured. My mum spotted a patrol and alerted her father. They ran back to their boat, climbed back in and hurried back to sea.

After a long and boring journey at sea, my mother saw a large ship heading towards their boat. Her dad saw it too and took a chance that might have resulted in the deaths of everyone onboard, and their bodies lost at the bottom of the ocean; he screamed out for help. My mum had a sudden stroke of fear because it might have been pirates but was lucky to find out that it was only some refugees heading to Australia. They allowed my mother and her parents to go with them.

**MY DAD’S STORY**

I grew up being the youngest boy in the family. I had three older brothers, two older sisters and one younger sister. I lived with my grandparents and my mother. My father divorced when I was only one year old. I continued normally but my family had tough times. My family didn’t have a lot of money and we struggled many times, but we still kept together and supported each other.

When I was young, I experienced many things I thought I would never go through. I remember one time, when I was twelve years old, I had a dreadful incident. At that time, I loved climbing. I loved climbing so much that I would climb anything, and so I climbed onto the roof. I fell down and I hit the water drum. I couldn’t move. I was on the ground, paralyzed. Fifteen minutes later, my mum came out and saw me on the ground. She then took me to the doctor to fix me up. That’s a memory I will never forget until the end of my life.

Something I thought I would never experience was coming to Australia. I was about twenty two and had to flee from Vietnam. I was on a boat with my whole family including uncles and aunties. There were forty two people on board. The boat was called ‘Camau’. It was a boat we all built together. We left Vietnam in the early morning and were at sea for about three days. We prepared everything – food, water and medicine. On the third day, we were found by a French boat. There were many other people on the boat as well as Vietnamese people who
were also escaping. Unlike all of us who were healthy, the people on the boat were sick. We were worried that they could have given their sickness to us. Most of them were on the brink of death. Others were wet and had red spots on their bodies. It was freaky and scary. The red spots were due to being at sea for a long time and they didn’t have water, food or medicine. Many people couldn’t take it anymore and gave their life to the sea. I don’t know how many people lost their lives, but I know there were many.

I was still on the French boat and was healthy. The boat then took the rest of us to the Palauan Refugee Camp in the Philippines. I lived there for one year and I studied English. I was then accepted by the Australian Embassy and moved here, to Australia.

**JOURNEY OF OUR FAMILY**

As the bombs and guns fired away between the north and south of Vietnam a ship fleeing this broken country had a young couple on board. This man was a young, twenty three year old country boy who had lived there his whole life, and next to him was a young woman of about nineteen.

The rough seas were very dangerous and at the same time the area was known for many pirates. The ship headed towards Australia. It was a very long and sickly journey. Of course along the way the man and woman got to know each other. When they arrived in Australia they shared a house as it was too expensive to rent individually. A few years later they got married and had two children. I was lucky enough to be one of them.

Years on my parents are still together but so much has changed. My dad tells me the biggest change of all has been technology. When he first arrived in Australia the computers were huge and regular people didn’t have access to them, only the government did. Another change my dad told me has been the cars. The cars are so advanced now and fewer accidents occur. There has also been a change in our everyday life with the GST being introduced. Every time my parents shop they, as do all Australians, have to pay GST.

My parents say the past is better than now but I don’t think so. Gee, a lot has changed.

**MY FAMILY’S JOURNEY**

Years ago, Vietnam was attacked and didn’t have enough soldiers to fight in the war so the government got all the men around Vietnam that were old enough to fight. Only the sick or disabled ones could stay.

My grandfather was taken and every night my grandmother would pray for him to come home safe and alive. My dad’s side of the family tried making an escape to Australia and their first attempt didn’t work out. They learnt from their mistakes and so the next time they tried they made it past the guards patrolling the beach. In the boat there were people from Saigon. When they set off that night there was
a storm and people thought that this little two metre canoe wouldn’t make it and everyone would die.

I came from Mien Trung in the middle section of Vietnam. It is a place for fishing, sea foods, crops, food and where they make canoes and boats. They believe that whales are peaceful and helpful creatures. My grandfather was a fisherman. He knew everything about fish and boats.

So as the storm rose and got bigger and bigger my dad and my uncle held the canoe so it wouldn’t flip over. They rode the waves as the whales guided them. The next day people woke up to a peaceful day but they ran out of water. They couldn’t drink sea water so they had to live without water for a couple of days. Some people even tried to drink it but it didn’t satisfy them and it just made them even thirstier. Luckily it rained. They screamed and shouted and yelled out happily with their open mouths trying to catch it. Some people held up bowls and dishes into the sky and some just put their hands out.

After those weeks of suffering and scarcity of food and water, they arrived at the Philippines where they stayed in a camp for a few days. One day my uncle, dad and two aunts saw a small tent and on the top hung a picture of God. They went in, and started to go every Sunday like people go to church here. Just before they left to head to Australia in a ship they got baptised. When they arrived my dad got a job, a house and good money. He went back to Vietnam and luckily my grandfather came back alive. Everyone was safe. My dad met my mum and got married. My sister and I also follow my dad’s religion of being Christian.

MY MUM’S LIFE BEFORE SHE CAME TO AUSTRALIA

Before my mum came to Australia she lived with her cousins and she was a very good student, but life was very difficult for her because she came from a very poor family.

In Vietnam my mum would have to do a lot of chores like washing the dishes, doing the laundry and so on. After that she would have to go over her work and study even though she was very tired. Since she was from a poor family they did not have any lamps so she had to use candles to study, and sometimes she would fall asleep. Once, her hair caught on fire. Even though she came from a poor family she was a very good student; she always got good marks for her exams.

When my mum was in high school she found it difficult because the teachers were very strict, but after a while she got used to it. At the end of each week she would go out and have fun with her friends, but when she got home she would still have to go over her work and study for her exams.
When she was in year 12 she went to school for ten hours and she would study harder. For her end of year exam she got really good marks and gained entry to university to study to be a doctor, but her family could not afford it. She had to get a job and could not go to university.

When she was thirty she got married to my dad and then came to Australia. Life in Australia was difficult for my mum at first because she did not know anyone and could not speak any English. After a few years she met new people and had lots of friends. Now she has a job making food in a shop and she has a good life here in Australia.

THE JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA

This is a story based on my mother’s life.

Twenty eight years ago, my mother, father and brother were stuck in the Vietnam War. When they tried to escape from Vietnam they risked getting caught, being put in jail and having to do hard work. This is their story.

My father said to my mother, “Take our child and leave the country first. I will find a way to get out of here”, as the soldiers took him away. My mum clutched my brother who was only two and ran onto the boat. The captain only let one hundred people on. After every one boarded, the boat started and set off. My mum, worried about my father, thought of ways to bring him to the country they headed for.

The boat they boarded was very small. To get everyone in the cabin, no-one would have been able to move. While at sea, diseases spread throughout the boat. Some people died, and many were seasick. The bodies of people who passed away were thrown out to sea.

After months of travelling, they were caught in a furious storm. Everyone helped scoop the water out of the boat. While people were busy taking the water out my mum ran to the cabin and grabbed any piece of cloth she could see. Carrying the cloth she ran to the captain who was steering the ship and asked him to burn it explaining that it will signal any other ships or planes nearby. After the cloth was burnt she went to check on my brother who was in the cabin. My mum, who trusts her religion, prayed that they would survive the storm, giving up her favourite food which was beef just so they would get out safely.

Just like a miracle, a ship headed towards their boat. The boat was called the HMAS Melbourne. They sent down a ladder and ordered every one to go on. A person aboard the same boat my mum was in, helped to translate Vietnamese into English. The HMAS Melbourne crew supplied new clothes and did health checks on everyone. They supplied them with food.
The people who were rescued were so grateful to them that they offered to do housework and help with whatever needed. They had a supply of food for everyone and did regular health checks.

After they arrived in Australia they were sent to a refugee camp. They learnt English there. After they left the camp everyone was ready to start a new life. My mum bought a plane ticket for my dad so he could fly over. He was so glad that they were safe.

My mum and dad were happy and curious about life in the future. My brother is getting married and my parents are very proud of him.

**MY GRANDPA’S JOURNEY**

It all started when my grandpa was a Vietnamese “boat man” and escaped the Vietnam War. My grandpa told me that he wasn’t the only one on that little boat escaping from the war but there were many others too. On that little boat he met many new people and they talked and talked.

My next question was, “When you arrived here in Australia, what did you do?” He couldn’t remember much, but one of the things he did remember was that they were gathered together. A man came up on a stage and started talking. Then they were all sent to have dinner. My grandpa told me that he was sent to a cabin with four strangers and was given a sleeping bag. He told me that it was the most wonderful sleep he had ever experienced.

My grandpa said sadly, that he left something really important behind and doesn’t think that it’s still there. I wondered how he left that important thing behind and he told me the war was happening so fast that he didn’t have time to go back and get it. He just ran onto that little boat.

I asked him if he had a chance whether he would go back and live in Vietnam. He graciously said, “I will, but as a holiday”.

I came to the last question which was, “Is living in Australia the best experience you ever had?” He said happily, Yes it is. I have learnt so many things here and will live here forever”.

I would be sitting here writing this story if it was not for my grandpa. He had a great, extraordinary journey!

**Mum’s Journey to Australia**

My mum used to live in Vietnam, along with my other relatives, including my grandpa, grandma, uncles and aunties. My mum and her family lived in a region full of Chinese/Vietnamese people in Saigon, the capital of Vietnam, which is now known as Ho Chi Minh City. They lived in a three storey house. In Vietnam, they used motorbikes for transport. My mum, aunties and uncles went to a school
where they learnt Chinese. They lived a normal life, like so many other people, until the Vietnam War reached their area and the communists started to take over.

During the Vietnam War, which started in 1959, many families went into lockdown and had to stay in their houses for days at a time. As an alternative, most families who disapproved of the communists evacuated Vietnam, in order to live peacefully in less dangerous conditions. My mum and her family were amongst them. In mid 1985, my mum, grandpa, two uncles and an aunty left Vietnam as Vietnamese refugees, leaving their houses, jobs, relatives and livelihoods behind.

They travelled for five long days on a small boat, carrying dozens of other passengers, across the Indian Ocean to Indonesia. This was a dangerous time because the boat was too small for the number of passengers aboard. The waves were usually hitting the boat with extreme force and there were many pirates raiding the boats which passed by their ships. They searched for jewellery, money and other valuables. Sometimes beating or even killing the people who retaliated. It was a miracle that most people survived that treacherous journey.

My mum and other relatives reached their second hurdle when they arrived at a refugee camp on the coast of Indonesia. It was nothing like the life they had left behind in Vietnam. They lived in small huts close to the coast. In the afternoons, when there was no tide and the land was completely dry, my mum and uncles often walked to some small islands nearby. They had to depart at a certain time in the morning and arrive back before evening to avoid the rapidly rising water and the piranhas snapping at their ankles. Every evening they were only given small amounts of plain rice to eat, and occasionally they were given sweet potatoes. They lived at the refugee camp on the island for one year.

The next year (1986), they travelled again by boat to Singapore Central, where they stayed for a week, travelling across most of the small country. Then they boarded a plane and headed to Australia.

In 1986, my mum, grandpa, two uncles and an aunty, arrived in East Hills, New South Wales, Australia, where they stayed in a hostel for a brief period. They then moved to Carramar, where they started to rebuild their lives in a different country, learning English, which was completely new to them. A few years later, they were joined by my grandma, two uncles and two aunts, before moving to Auburn.

Shortly after this, my parents got married and moved to Cabramatta West. My mum and dad are currently living in Cabramatta with their son and two daughters. After that long journey and all that my mum and relatives went through, they finally arrived in Australia to find peace, a new home and closure.
HOW MY MUM AND DAD MET!

The first person in my family who moved to Australia was my aunty Tina. Tina and her family lived in Ho Chi Minh City. She went on a boat to Australia and stayed in refugee camps for a while.

When she arrived in Australia, she first worked as a chef in a restaurant and rented an apartment in Ashfield, near the city. When she had enough money, she started her own career as a salesperson. She opened a supermarket in Summer Hill and earned some money. When Tina had saved enough money, she sponsored her brothers and sisters to Australia to have a better life and education. They worked for Tina for a few years and later went to work for another person and bought houses.

My dad rented an apartment behind the supermarket at Lakemba. One night he went to a party, and his friend who was my mother’s eldest brother, allowed my mum, who was in Vietnam, to talk with my dad on the phone. Her name was Diem. My dad then sent her letters. My mum replied each time she received one.

One month later, my grandfather died. My dad was very sad and he flew to Vietnam to attend the funeral. In Vietnam, he went to visit my mother and they soon became attracted to one another. He sponsored my mother so she could come to Australia. My family lived in a house with my aunty and cousin. It was a crowded house and we were all very poor. My cousin tried to sell an old car for $50 so we could buy some food. My family then moved to Cabramatta because the houses were cheap and we could have a better education and life in an Asian community.

WITH LOVE, HOPE AND FAITH, AS WE JOURNEY ON TOGETHER, ALL WE HAVE TO DO IS TRUST IN HIM

“The journey began after sunset in the middle of a mild winter in 1978.” My mother’s thoughtful eyes stared at the white catfish in the fish tank ahead of us as she sipped the warm comforting cup of tea. She continued, “My older sister, Aunty Dao, and I received permission from my mother, your grandmother, to sail on a boat with other parishioners to get away from the devastating war of Vietnam.”

“At the wharf, my family members and I stood, making the most of our time together, tears streaking down everyone’s faces, including the young ones. As I climbed into the boat, clutching my small bags of belongings and supplies for each of us, memories of many wonderful and unforgettable times we had together as a family flashed through my mind. A final goodbye and off we went, fourteen people on this boat, with ten days of food supplies for each of us.”

“As we floated aimlessly away from the coast, my will of hope, love and faith overpowered my fears. Together as brothers and sisters in Christ, we prayed five times a day for God’s help and protection. It’s amazing how these people have
unending hope. On the sixth night of our travel, we saw a ship and hurried towards it, hoping to be rescued. As we drew closer, we found out that they were the Communist supporters and in a panic, we paddled the boat away. Thank God the Communist didn’t spot us."

“The next day, a Malaysian ship found us and by God’s grace, we were rescued by them. The crews on the ship gave us food and recorded any personal information available. Communication was not a problem since a few of the people on our boat knew how to speak Malaysian.”

“In a matter of hours, we arrived at one of the Malaysian wharfs and were taken by bus to the refugee camp. I was so ashamed of sitting on such a clean bus while I hadn’t had a proper bath in a week! We were then assigned cabins, six people in each one. I shared one with my sister, her husband and her three children. After settling in and resting, I went around the camp and was astounded to find hundreds of other Vietnamese refugees, even some of them were people that I knew!”

“For two years, I lived on that island in Malaysia before I migrated to Australia. There were many Catholics there like myself and also, a Vietnamese priest. Everyday, Mass was celebrated at a Church nearby and they were well-attended. The Rosary was prayed on Friday at 3pm, the hour of Jesus’ death.”

“That was a great time of my life, adventurous and thrilling, though very dangerous! It has shaped my life significantly by showing how and what it feels like to be in refuge. With the great unending hope that everyone I travelled with and had lived with would be safe, I finally know that with love, hope and faith, God will always be with everyone and all we have to do is trust in Him. Trust is the key.”

**MY MOTHER’S JOURNEY TO AUSTRALIA.**

In 1980, my mother escaped from Vietnam. This escape was caused by a conflict between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. In 1954, Vietnam was divided into two parts. The south was governed by the Republic of Vietnam. The North was governed by the Communists. A few months after the country divided, the war began. The communists invaded South Vietnam with the help of Russia and China, who were also Communists at the time. The South was an ally of America and Australia.

After twenty years of war, millions of Vietnamese civilians were killed. Hundreds and thousands of Vietnamese soldiers from both sides were killed. Sixty thousand troops from America have lost their lives in Vietnam. A number of Australian soldiers also died.

In 1969, the Australian soldiers retreated. In 1972, the American troops withdrew from Vietnam. Without help from any allies, on the 30th April 1975, the South had complete control. The Communists took over the South and controlled all Vietnam.
All the civilians of Vietnam had their rights taken from them. Members of my family were in jail, because of our involvement with the past government. The communists considered my family to be criminals. This was the reason my family decided to escape Vietnam in search of freedom.

After five years of living under the complete control of the Communists, my family attempted to escape. They tried many times, but the results remained the same. They felt like they were trapped in Vietnam forever. So they decided to go separately as it would be more difficult for the Communists to arrest them. My mother travelled on a wooden fishing boat with one hundred and seventy seven other escaping civilians. There, my mother, who was fifteen, travelled to Thailand alone.

Arriving in Thailand, my mother and the other escapees, waited for a UN officer to process everyone's files. After that, they were transferred to a refugee camp. After a month, with the help of officers, my mother received contact from my grandpa. My mother learnt that my grandpa had settled into Australia safely.

After fifteen months, living in a refugee camp, my grandpa sponsored my mother. This allowed her to live in Australia. During my family's stay in Australia, they endured many difficulties and hardships. Starting a new life empty-handed was tough. But with the help of the Australian Government, my family was able to overcome those hardships, and rebuild their new life, as legal Australian Citizens.

**The Vietnam War and My Dad**

Guns firing, people screaming, blood pouring. This was during the Vietnam War. My story takes place in Vietnam, 1973. My dad at that time was 19.

I have to say; when I first heard this story, I thought it was horrific. Recently I had the chance to talk with my father while he was resting on a hammock. I asked him what it was like to go through the Vietnam War. He replied “It was a time that I will never forget”.

In 1973, my dad and my grandfather were enjoying a pleasant meal on a regular Tuesday evening, when suddenly people came running out on the streets yelling and screaming. To my dad’s disbelief he saw people covered in blood. My dad then heard a distinctive sound, a buzzing sound. It was not a regular buzzing sound but something else, something he could not describe. Out of nowhere, behind the buildings, a gigantic plane came swooping down in the sky. Everyone in the house fell to the ground, but not my dad. He wasn’t scared but mesmerized.

At that moment, my dad knew his life would change. He went to his room and packed all his clothes. He grabbed as much money as he could and ran out the door. My grandfather stopped him. “I want to help our country father, I want to fly”, my father explained. My grandfather looked at him and put both his hand on his shoulders. Then they hugged. As my grandfather hugged him, he burst into tears and said “Remember that I will always love you.” My dad knew that he would fight in order to make his father proud.
It took my dad two days to get to the Vietnam military base by foot. When he got there he was not allowed to fly a plane but took a position taking care of the weapons. He wasn’t well educated like we are today, but he knew something about weapons. My father eventually fought for Vietnam. During that war, he saw destruction and catastrophe. He was brutally beaten and damaged his back. A fellow soldier saw this and came to my dad’s aid, but he got shot in the chest. My dad screamed “NOOOOOO!!” and tried to crawl up to him. Dad steadily got back up. He jumped to grab a sharp metal piece and reached out. He said in a sorrowful tone, “Please stay with me. Please, please, please!” But there was nothing, no pulse, no reaction. My dad yelled out, “Please, can anybody help me!” Some men came to help and they were safe.

MY FATHER’S EARLY CHILDHOOD

In the past, life was very difficult for my father. His family was very poor and money was not that easy to come by. His father was from China and his mother was originally from Vietnam. The family lived in Vietnam for most of their lives, although it was hard work.

When my father was born, there was a huge and dramatic war against the Communists and Freedom in Vietnam. It was very dangerous at that time. On the day that my father was born, members of the Communists ran into the hospital where my father was born, and killed hundreds of people. My grandmother had no choice but to take my father and the rest of the family and run away to find a safe place to stay. The family arrived in an area which indeed was very safe. The population was about 10,000 and the people who lived there were very nice and kind.

After many years of hard work for the poor family, my father grew up to be a very handsome looking boy. At the age of seven, he went to school and had many friends to play with. By the age of fourteen, life was very difficult. As the family did not have enough money, my father had to quit school and stay home to help his parents.

He would often help his parents do the chores, for instance, clean the floor and wipe the tables and chairs. If he had free time he would go out and play with his friends. My father lived a very happy life during his early childhood although there were difficulties.

Living the days now, he is a great father who works extremely hard as a process worker. During the weekends, my father and I share some fun times together. He is a wonderful man and I am very grateful to have him as a father. He has lived an extraordinary life through the good and bad times. I wish him all the best in the future.
**Mum’s Journey**

It was a beautiful spring morning to have a little celebration at home for my mum and dad’s seventeenth wedding anniversary. Everyone present at the party was just as happy as mum and dad were. Normally you wouldn’t have to celebrate your wedding anniversary but this year was a surprise. After all the balloons and party poppers and presents, our friends, family and relatives were all happily munching on their fruit cake slices and sipping their tea. Soon everybody left.

Tired and exhausted, my family and I sat at our round white-marble dinner table, on big blue tiles. All of us still had our piece of cake. There was a long silence. No one was talking. All you could hear was the crunch of the crispy nuts, the slurping of the whipped cream and the sound of spoons and forks clattering. I broke the silence by asking a question. I asked my parents what their life was like back in their country seventeen years ago.

Mum and dad looked at each other. They looked a little clueless. Dad smiled and nodded. Mum muttered a few words in Vietnamese (which I didn’t understand) and then began to talk in our home language, Cantonese. This is what she said…

“When I was only very young, the Vietnam War started. It was North Vietnam against South Vietnam. People from North Vietnam weren’t very nice. They came to our houses and took our belongings and money. The war lasted for more than a decade. By the time the war had finished, I was already in my mid twenties, which was a little too late to live a life that a normal girl would live. Before I moved to Sydney with my family, my nine siblings and I all had English lessons. That was where I met your dad. I fell in love because he was very kind and caring.”

Mum stopped and looked at my father as if it was the first time they were out on a date, happy and excited. Dad smiled again.

She continued, “When my family and I moved to Sydney, seven years after the Vietnam war concluded, I missed seeing your dad. But that wasn’t for long. He came to Australia and we got married soon after. Unfortunately, my family missed out on the wedding but back in Australia years later we had a party. It was like another wedding but no ring was exchanged. Everybody was too interested in the story that most of our cake slices were still on our plate.

**My Uncle’s Trip to Vietnam**

My uncle is now forty and went to Vietnam when he was around twenty years old. He went on a plane and had contact lenses. He couldn’t see well without them. On the plane he put on his contact lenses.

When he landed, his friend took him on his cart, pulled by horses. In Vietnam, most people didn’t have glasses or contact lenses. They also didn’t have cars, so they either had a bike or cart pulled by horses. My uncle asked his friend to show him around. His friend agreed, but he stopped to eat for a while.
As the journey continued, my uncle spotted some people working in the field. They were all standing in the rice fields, harvesting rice. Once his friend stopped in front of the centre of the town, some other familiar faces to my uncle’s friend came out. They greeted my uncle with respect, since he looked richer than them. (Most people in Vietnam were pretty poor.)

After about half an hour, my uncle decided to take out his contact lenses for a while. When he took the contact lenses off, people started looking at him, and then suddenly started yelling “He took out his eyes!” My uncle was about to say they were contact lenses, but he decided to have a bit of fun. He said he could see through their clothes and read their minds with the contact lenses on his eyes. (Remember, people had never seen contact lenses before.) They were all frightened, and about to run away. In the end my uncle quickly told them that they were something called contact lenses.

So this is my uncle’s history of a little visit to Vietnam.

MUM’S STORY IN VIETNAM

My mum is from Vietnam and could not speak English really well. My mum’s mother did not want her to study. Whenever she would, her mother would hit her, so she always went to her friend’s house to study. She loved to study for school and was one of the top students in her school. She lived in Ho Chi Minh City.

When she graduated she became a teacher and taught maths and Vietnamese were her favourite subjects. She owned a two storey house and invited a friend over because she wanted company. They were good friends, but her friend was jealous and greedy and wanted the house for herself. She tried to steal items from the house and even tried to steal the keys. One day, she went up to my mum and confessed. I think that Mum’s friend couldn’t bear the guilt any more, but my mum was understanding and let her stay.

Mum went to the temple one day and was surprised to see none of her students there because it was traditional for Vietnamese to pray in temples. She went home and saw her students there with food and drinks. It was a party. Her friend explained that she got a job at her school and invited all the students to celebrate and to say sorry for trying to steal. Mum said that she didn’t have to but she was happy anyway.

The next day at school, she saw her friend and saw that she had the job of a helping teacher. Mum was surprised and happy. She got to see her every day and her friend was more joyous because she was able to save money and buy her own food.
The Journey of the Boy Refugee

As the sun slid behind the horizon, the journey of a boy and his mother begins. In the year of 1981, the 11 year old boy fled from his Saigon home. With the evil Vietnamese communist invading the south, dread spread across the country. The war created madness and controversy.

Creeping from Saigon, they had to hide from the communists. If they were caught, they would be killed instantly. They reached the bus. They travelled for three days straight on a bus to reach Ca Mau to get onto a boat. The trip was long and scary. They had to scan for communists every minute of the day. Mother and son finally reached the destination, Ca Mau, the escape from hell. Ca Mau had boats. The boats were used to escape.

Late at night, they slowly crept behind the stalls and boats. Finally, they reached their boat. Roaring the engine to life, the passengers boarded quickly. It was very crowded with 52 people on the small boat. The child witnessed something horrific along with the other passengers. The captain’s daughter had been sucked into the engine removing her scalp and killing her instantly. Her body was thrown into the ocean and the voyage to Thailand continued. After a day or two, a different ship encountered them. It was a pirate ship. The pirates were from Thailand. They stole food, water and personal belongings. As well as raping the girls and women, they stole all the navigating devices. More bad luck occurred. They were sailing straight towards a communist ship. The communist stopped them and threatened to throw them overboard. The boy’s mother begged and begged. All the other passengers prayed, hoping that the evil communists would let them go. The communists finally let them go. The mother told the boy that because they prayed, Buddha helped them surpass the communists.

After precisely three days and two nights, they reached a totally new country. Different people, different atmosphere and the different air struck them. Everything was new to the boy and the other passengers aboard. Mother and son entered a refugee camp and stayed there for almost three years. Surviving on fish and rice, they slept on thin mats every night. To go to Australia, they had to pass a test. The test required them to have at least one relative in Australia. Luckily, the boy already had a cousin who had escaped earlier. Fortunately, they were able to go to Australia.

On the 26th November, 1984 the family reached Australia. On arriving in Australia, they were given food, money and education as well as a place to live. They stayed at West Ridge Hotel in Bass Hill.

This is the story of my father and grandmother’s journey to Australia.
My Parents' Journey

In 1989, my parents lived in Vietnam, my mum was 27 and my dad was 31. At that time, Vietnam was torn apart by the Vietnam War. The war was fought between the communist North Vietnam, and the government of South Vietnam from 1959 to 1975. The war left the Vietnamese people living in poor conditions, the unemployment rate had increased rapidly, food was limited and buildings, roads, houses and schools needed to be rebuilt.

My parents’ life was very harsh. They lived in a small hut with my oldest sister, who was just one year old. My mother was pregnant and both my mum and dad wanted a better life for their children so they decided to migrate to Philippines to start a new life. But the problem was the boat fare to Philippines. It was expensive. It had taken many months for my mum and dad to save enough for the ticket. My grandparents and their friends helped.

The cost of the boat fare was about two cubes of gold which is the equivalent to about $1000 today. The conditions of the boat were very poor and disgusting. The boat was small and crowded with over fifty people. My parents had only the clothes on their backs and small amounts of food. Food was limited on the boat, so they had to starve for the last couple of days. The journey had taken about eight days but for my parents it was eight days of exhaustion, dehydration and starvation.

When they arrived at the shores of the Philippines, they found a small, abandoned farm in a Vietnamese village. My mum and dad had to start their new life because they had left their whole lives behind them in Vietnam, including their home, friends, family and their daughter (my sister), who was too young to survive the boat journey. They stayed in Philippines for about two years where my dad earned money teaching Vietnamese and maths at a local school.

Life in Philippines was similar to Vietnam but with only a minor improvement. So in 1992, my parents and sister migrated to Australia because my uncle, my mum’s brother, had sponsored them. They had arrived in Australia by aeroplane. My parents applied for citizenship and began their new life.
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