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Across the Pacific

Vietnamese, displaced by war, plant roots in the City of Trees.

By Kathleen Rubinow Hodges

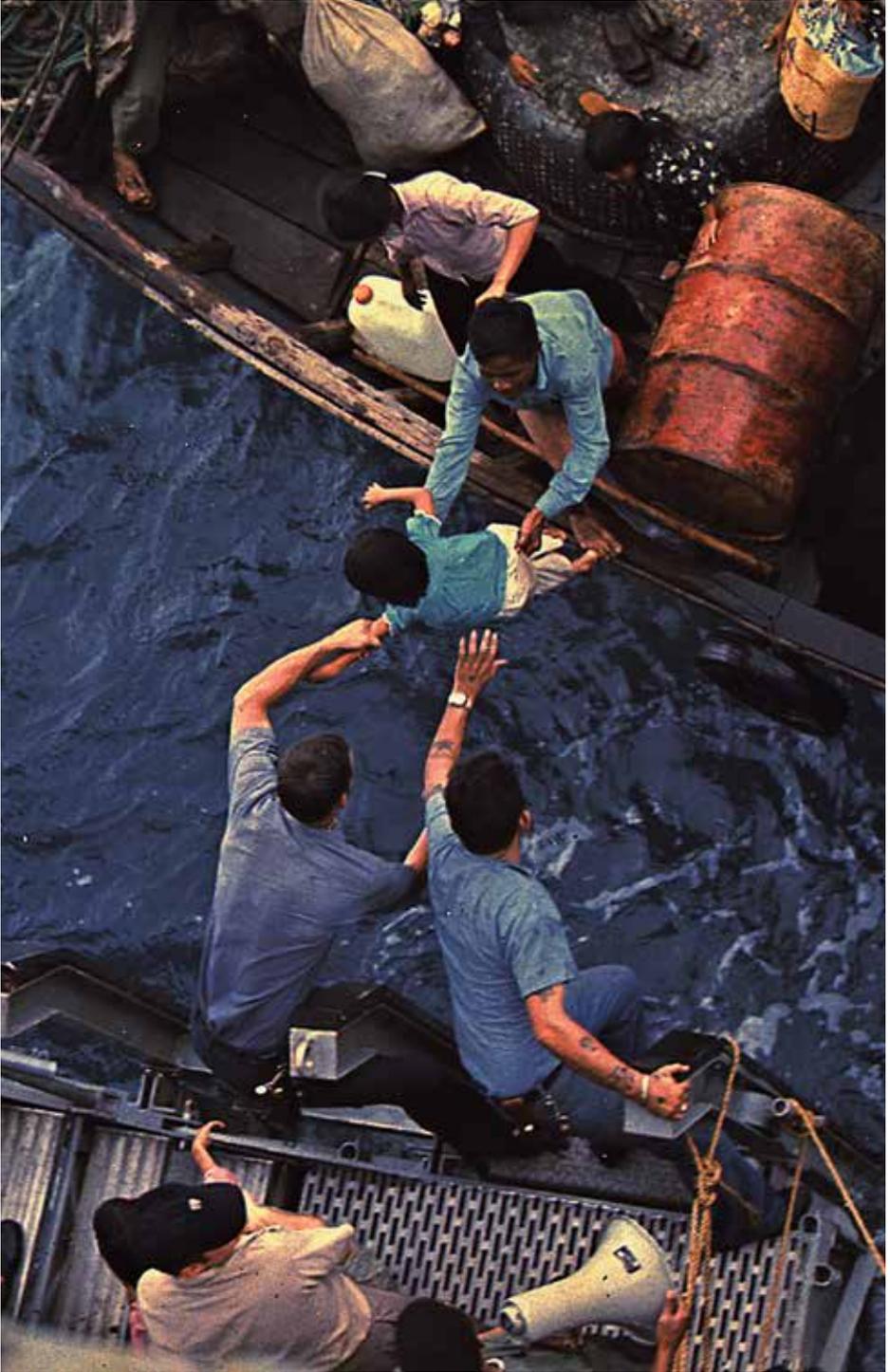
In 1975, at the end of the Vietnam War, thousands of displaced Vietnamese sought asylum in the United States. Several hundred ended up in Idaho. Those refugees paved the way for many others. Idahoans pioneered creative and humane ways of managing the influx. Although many Vietnamese later left for other regions of the U.S., those who stayed have made Boise home.

April 30, 1975

United States' involvement with the country of Vietnam stretched over several decades, gradually escalating from support of the French colonial regime after World War II to a full-on war against the Communist north in the 1960s. By 1973, the American public had had enough, and President Nixon pulled out U.S. troops. However, civil war between North and South Vietnam continued for two more years. In March 1975, the Communists defeated southern armies at Ban Me Thuot in the Central Highlands and advanced rapidly as southern soldiers and ordinary citizens fled. The quick collapse of southern defenses left many suddenly scrambling to escape. The frantic exodus included the last Americans (advisers, embassy workers, and contractors), their Vietnamese dependents, and members of the South Vietnamese government and military. On April 30, the South officially surrendered and the last helicopter left the roof of the United States embassy.

Among the Vietnamese trying desperately to leave were some future Boise residents. On April 30, 1975, Hung Van Tran was a 20-year-old soldier in South Vietnam's air force. His unit had been stationed in a new area south of Saigon City for just a few weeks. As victorious Communist soldiers marched through Saigon City, Tran, young and frightened, had to decide what to do. In an interview 15 years later, he explained his predicament.

The men at his base were given a choice by their commander: they could stay and fight to the last bullet, or they could go home to their families. Tran decided to go to his mother's house in Saigon. He got on a bus, but after a few miles it stopped because the



U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION



Uniforms abandoned by South Vietnamese soldiers, 1975.

Previous page: U.S. sailors rescue refugees from a barge in the South China Sea, 1975.



Helicopter pushed over the side of USS Okinawa to clear the deck for more refugees, 1975.

roads were blocked. He became separated from his friends, and not knowing what else to do, he returned to the place where his unit had been stationed. He said: "I go back to my barrack, everybody gone. There was a panic over there. The people, they come inside the air force to pick up anything the soldiers left over. So I didn't know who was Communist, because they be dressed the same, you know, and here I in the uniform. It was scary. So I went back to my room to find my clothes in there. Gone! And when I left, I just carried one pair of clothes I can have with me. So what I did was I changed in there, and I throw my uniform away. I was really panicked. In my uniform was my wallet. All the papers carried with me in the uniform. And I walk about half an hour, and I say, 'Where is my wallet?' I went back and gone. So I lost – I was there in a panic area without paperwork. I didn't know where to go. So I went around and I didn't know what to do, but I know one thing in my mind was if the Communists catch me, I rather kill myself because I can't survive."

Hung Van Tran managed to get into a helicopter and ended up with other refugees on the aircraft carrier USS Midway. So many helicopters were trying to land on U.S. carriers out in the South China Sea that many of them were pushed off into the ocean to make room for more. In that atmosphere of panic, Tran was given the opportunity to go to the United States. He accepted because he believed that his sister had also fled to the United States, and he wanted to find her. He was taken to Guam and from there to Camp Pendleton in California.

Another future Boisean, Kim-Phung Hoang, was 8 years old in 1975. She crossed the Pacific to Guam on an overcrowded Vietnamese-operated ship. Her entire family had planned to come to the United States, but at the last minute her mother became sick and had to stay behind. That left the father, formerly a proud career man in the South Vietnamese navy, with the responsibility of caring for six small children. On board ship, he had to beg for food.

Still another man tried to bring his savings with him, but there was a run on his Saigon bank. Loc Nguyen tried to cash his last paycheck, but could only change it for \$20 in United

States currency. He said: “I didn’t know. I thought maybe that was a lot of money in the United States.” When he and his wife left from Tan Son Nhut Airport in Saigon, she carried their baby daughter and Nguyen carried an armful of diapers and canned formula.



CAMP PENDLETON ARCHIVES

Refugees, however they managed to leave Vietnam, ended up first in a temporary camp set up on Guam and then in one of four reception centers on the United States mainland: Camp Pendleton, California; Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; Eglin Air Force Base, California; or Fort Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. In order to leave the camps, refugees had to be sponsored by an individual, a family, or an organization like a church. Sponsors agreed to take responsibility until refugees got on their feet. In order to alleviate pressure on any one community or state, sponsorships were deliberately set up all around the United States. After a stay on Guam, the Hoang family was sponsored by an individual in Caldwell. Loc Nguyen and his wife were fortunate because they were able to arrange a sponsorship in California through their church, the Seventh-day Adventists.

Nearly 20,000 refugees were relocated to Camp Pendleton in 1975.



Vietnamese refugees arrive at the Boise airport, 1975.

(He got a job with Pacific Press, the publishing arm of the church, which several years later opened a branch in Nampa, Idaho, at which point the Nguyens moved here.) Hung Van Tran was sent to Texas, but a year later, he met some friends from Camp Pendleton who had been living in Idaho. “They say, ‘You want to see real snow? Come to Idaho.’ I say, ‘What the heck, to me it doesn’t matter where I go.’” And so he also ended up in Boise.

As the war ended, public reaction in Boise, Idaho, was a mixture of relief and anger. The pages of the *Idaho Statesman* reflected a debate. In the first weeks of April, some Idahoans wrote letters to the editor: “I would have used nuclear bombs and made a Grand Canyon out of that Ho Chi Minh Trail.” “If the United States would have squished the Communists like a spider the first moment we became involved in the Vietnam situation, hundreds of thousands would be alive today.” However, newspaper articles also quoted people who were willing to be done with the war. “We’ve finished over there. We shouldn’t start again. We have our own problems, our own people to look after.” “After all this time, I’m relieved ... to have an end to the whole thing – the bloodshed, the plunder of the land and the people.” A Vietnam veteran expressed bitterness: “I don’t think we accomplished anything over there. It was all a waste of lives and money.”

Some Idahoans, including Governor Cecil Andrus, were reluctant to accept refugees, saying Idaho should “help its own first,” but others welcomed them, mostly for altruistic

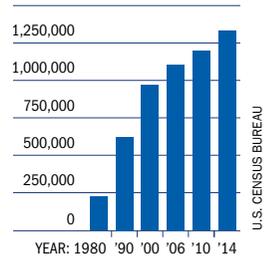
reasons (though one man hoped the refugees could move irrigation pipe). Official numbers are hard to come by for 1975 to 1977, but a substantial number of individuals and churches volunteered to sponsor refugees. In August 1975, an *Idaho Statesman* article estimated about 50 refugees had arrived but also quoted the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, which gave a figure of 65. Later the newspaper quoted Pastor Van Hoogan of the Christian Missionary Alliance who thought perhaps 200 Vietnamese people lived in Boise. The Boise School District had 46 Vietnamese students in September 1975 and more by December of that year.

Services Established

The first organized efforts to help refugees in Idaho on more than an individual basis began almost by accident. Helen Huff was director of adult education at Boise State University. One late night in May 1975, she was alone at the Adult Learning Center catching up on paperwork. She heard a knock on the door and opened it to find a group of refugees with their sponsors. Quickly, she phoned her husband who brought some neighbors to help serve tea and coffee, and a refugee program was born. English classes began in July. The program, though it eventually channeled state and federal money, was run as part of BSU until 1983. According to Huff (interviewed in 1990), Idaho was the only state where refugee resettlement was set up as part of an educational institution.

Huff explained that the program provided people with tools to become self-sufficient and independent. From the beginning, it had a practical focus and made heavy use of volunteers. Refugees and other adult learners studied “survival English,” focusing on the vocabulary needed in daily living. Staff encouraged the refugees to find employment as quickly as possible. Employees and volunteers followed newly hired refugees to job sites, wrote down relevant vocabulary, and then taught the words and phrases to their students. When a Vietnamese woman bought a car and drove it through a fence, a gate, and a garage door, the refugee program developed driver education classes. Huff worked with the Department of Transportation, finding someone to translate the Idaho driver’s

Vietnamese Immigrant Population in the United States, 1980-2014



Vietnamese children learn basic English.

U.S. ARMY



Idaho's refugee center at Boise State University, 1975.

manual into Vietnamese so she could use it as a training tool in English classes. She recruited George Nakano, a high school teacher, to serve as driving instructor.

In her interview in 1990, she emphasized that her program kept a clear line of separation from any religious influences, even though over the years much refugee work has been done by churches. It is true that the aforementioned Pastor Van Hoogan of the Christian Missionary Alliance helped to set up classes in 1975 when some Vietnamese members of his church moved to Boise, but it is unclear how long he was involved. In any case, Huff said that she tried for a wide community base for the newly organized Refugee Center, cooperating with various businesses in addition to state agencies. The Simplot Company hired many refugees. Retired Boise business owners Ken and Ethel Farnsworth helped with transportation and with teaching basic home economics like how to shop for groceries in American stores. A local bank allowed classes to come in and play-act all the steps of setting up an account and cashing a check.

Meanwhile, the Boise School District response to refugee students was quick and flexible. In the fall of 1975, the district put 10 elementary students in one class with a Vietnamese woman as an aide. At Boise High, refugee students attended a pull-out class for English two hours per day. By December, a Vietnamese man began work as a high school aide. Programs in the schools continued as additional refugees arrived. When the semester began, news articles about the Vietnamese students assumed that they would fit in quickly, with headlines like “Enjoy Pep Rally, Football, TV.” As the months went by, school and community officials realized that resettlement was not an easy process.

Certainly, 1975 was not an easy year for the refugees. Traumatized by their flight from Vietnam, they struggled to cope with a new language, strange customs, and inhospitable weather. Many worried about family members left behind. By the end of 1975, the four refugee reception centers in the United States closed their gates. Approximately 120,000 Vietnamese refugees, plus a smaller number of Cambodians and Laotians, had resettled in various parts of the United

States. According to a Health, Education, and Welfare report submitted to Congress in June 1976, about 400 of those refugees had come to Idaho.

Boat People, 1978-1980s

Over the next two years, a few more Southeast Asians arrived at various locations in the United States assisted by several international humanitarian agencies (called “voluntary agencies,” these groups aided refugees around the world). Then in 1978, numbers increased dramatically as two more groups of people fled.

Soon after assuming power over a unified Vietnam, the Communist government imprisoned men who had served



CAMP PENDLETON ARCHIVES

Refugees await rescue from a fishing boat 350 miles northeast of Cam Ranh Bay, 1984.



Refugees in a Malaysian camp are interviewed to determine resettlement eligibility to the United States, 1979.

as military officers and government officials for the South. In 1975, former first lieutenant Yung Ha had to report for meetings, also called “re-education.” He was prevented from returning home and spent several years in prison, followed by forced labor on a farm. After five years, he escaped and bought places for himself and his son on a small boat with 32 other people. After four days, he arrived at a refugee camp in Malaysia. His wife and daughter got out on a different boat to Thailand several months later. His wife’s boat broke down and traveled very slowly; Ha had a close brush with Thai pirates. Nevertheless, he described himself as “lucky” because they all survived, arriving in Boise several years later. He explained, “Nobody wants to leave your native country, but you can’t live with your enemy.” Many former military and government officials had similar experiences.

In addition, Vietnamese of Chinese ethnicity were persecuted by the Communist government. Many Chinese, often second or third generation in Vietnam, had owned independent businesses and saved a considerable amount

of money, which the Communist government confiscated. They also left the country. In 1989, Boise State University student Ben Luu explained: “In Vietnam most of the Chinese control the economy: export, import, contracting with the government, is in the Chinese hands. In Vietnam, the Chinese don’t deal with politics. Whatever government is in control, they still okay as long as their business running smooth. ... But the Communists, at first they let these businesses keep going. Later on, everything shut down, everything taken into the government hands.” In 1978, the government began forcing Chinese to leave Vietnam, extorting high cash payments from them in the process. Chinese people made their way to refugee camps throughout Southeast Asia, where they waited for months or even years to be admitted to a third country where they could settle. Luu, as the oldest son, traveled alone to Hong Kong and then to Boise, where he began paperwork to bring the rest of his family after him.

Another Chinese Vietnamese man, Victor Quang Hang, was the fourth generation of his family to live in Vietnam, but he still retained a strong Chinese identity, having gone to Chinese language school as a youth. The government jailed his father for two years and confiscated most of the land in the family’s once large and prosperous farm. In 1982, when Victor was fifteen years old, his father paid for his escape, and he walked overland through Cambodia to Thailand. He spent two and a half years in a refugee camp that he described as a jail, because as far as the Thais were concerned the refugees were illegal immigrants. Inside, the camp was inhabited by both Cambodians and Vietnamese. The United Nations and the Red Cross supplied water and small amounts of food. The camp moved as fighting ebbed and flowed across the border area during the dry season. Immigration officials came to the camp, interviewing people to decide who could come to the United States. They made Hang so nervous he forgot his own birthday. Nevertheless, he passed the interview, eventually joining a friend in Boise in 1985.

By the end of 1978, people were escaping from Vietnam by the tens of thousands. Some traveled overland across Cambodia to Thailand, more traveled by boat to Malaysia



Postage stamp from Galang Refugee Camp, home to 250,000 Vietnamese, 1979-1996.

DR IWAN/INDONESIA NATIONAL MUSEUM

and Hong Kong. This new exodus came to be known as the “boat people.” They arrived at squalid camps in neighboring countries, which did not have the resources to take them in. Eventually, they numbered hundreds of thousands. Refugees from the political turmoil of Cambodia and Laos joined refugees from Vietnam. Like Yung Ha, Ben Luu, and Victor Quang Hang, they petitioned for admittance to the U.S. or to other countries such as Australia, Canada, and France.

UNHCR/K. GAUGLER



Refugees wade ashore in Malaysia, 1979.

The aggregate numbers of people fleeing by small boat, drowning at sea, and existing precariously in overcrowded refugee camps horrified the world. In the summer of 1979, an international conference tried to find solutions, and U.S. President Jimmy Carter agreed to accept a large number of refugees. In March 1980, the United States passed a refugee act that put the United States definition of refugee in line with international definitions and set up a regular process, with an annual number of incoming refugees to be agreed upon by the president in consultation with Congress.

Meanwhile, the Refugee Center in Idaho had obtained some grant money through the Adult Learning Center at BSU and extended outreach programs around the state under a program called Adult Basic Education. However, most work was still done by volunteers. In August 1979, religious

leaders, responding to the world situation, called for action. Governor Evans reluctantly appointed a task force (headed by Employment Department Director Glenn Nichols and Lieutenant Governor Phil Batt), which obtained a hefty federal grant from the U.S. Department of Labor. In November 1979, the state established an official Idaho Refugee Center. Continued funding, to come from U.S. Health and Welfare, would still be channeled through Boise State University with Helen Huff as the head of the agency. (The structure was convoluted – Huff was officially a Boise State employee but also reported directly to the governor.)

At the international level, a new program, called Orderly Departure, or ODP, was set up by the Republic of Vietnam and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The government of Vietnam agreed to limit departing refugees (it had been in fact accepting bribes and therefore encouraging people to leave). In return, countries of first asylum in Southeast Asia agreed to stop pushing boats full of refugees back out to sea, and the United States and other countries around the world agreed to accept yearly quotas of refugees until the camps emptied out. In Boise, this meant that Vietnamese people here could now file paperwork to bring family members. Ben Luu, for instance, was able to bring his parents and siblings, although the process was long. He began filling out forms in 1982, and his family finally was able to fly directly to Boise seven years later, in 1989.

The Refugee Center continued to go through organizational changes over the decade of the 1980s, resulting in diminished numbers of refugee entrants in the years 1983 and 1987. In 1983, the Refugee Center moved from BSU to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. Helen Huff moved from the Center to head a voluntary agency called the Idaho International Institute, and then retired in 1986. Also, during the 1980s, refugees began arriving from Eastern Europe: Poles, Czechs, and Russians.

A Community Develops

In the 1980s, the number of Vietnamese and other Indochinese refugees entering Idaho trended upward. The



Refugee identification photo, 1977



Boise's Orient Market on Emerald at Orchard, founded by Vietnamese refugees.

earliest arrivals began to settle in, though life was still very difficult. Many of the 1975 refugees had been professionals in Vietnam. In Idaho they suffered downward mobility, working at entry-level jobs in several trailer factories, as restaurant dishwashers, as teacher's aides, or in electronics assembly. The psychological adjustment was difficult. Son Dam, a former soldier who arrived in 1975, explained that the boat people were "already aware before they left [Vietnam], they may have some learning English background before they start. For us, we just – boom, here! And everything just, you know, just upside down, just like that. We didn't expect it, anything. And that, I think, was tougher." The boat people, as they began to arrive, had a different story that could include years of imprisonment, preparation for an escape, sometimes multiple escape attempts, and perilous situations in leaky boats and overcrowded camps. On the other hand, they had more time to get used to the idea that they would be starting different lives in new surroundings.

Son Dam and Ben Luu both said that social activities in Boise began to pick up in the 1980s. That would make sense, as more refugees arrived in those years. In fact, Luu specifically mentioned that one of the aims of social get-togethers was for the earlier residents to meet the new people, to get some information about what was going on back in Vietnam.



ALLEN R. ANSELL PHOTOGRAPHY

Checkout at the Orient Market, 2016.

Over time, earlier arrivals were able to help later refugees. In 1989, Philip Dao, owner of the Orient Market, organized a Vietnamese Friendship Association. The Association met new arrivals at the airport, organized Vietnamese New Year celebrations and other parties, published a newsletter, and gave Vietnamese language lessons to Vietnamese American children. Dao got the names of Vietnamese families from the Refugee Center and added to the list by talking to customers who came into his store. The Vietnamese lessons had the goal of keeping the community's children literate in their first language.

Several groceries and restaurants helped to hold the community together. The first of these began as a grocery store, which sold imported Asian food. Opened in 1975 by Nhu Lofstedt, the business did well and moved in 1979 to larger quarters at Franklin and Curtis. Lofstedt, the wife of an American man, came to the United States shortly before 1975, so she was never technically a refugee, but her business helped to anchor the fledgling refugee community. Gradually she transitioned from groceries to casual prepared food and then to a formal restaurant. Called simply the Vietnamese Restaurant, it appealed to a clientele that was a cross-section of Boise, and it was in business for several decades. Another



NICOLAS R./YELP

A taste of Saigon on Franklin at Curtis.

Vietnamese woman, Dao Nelson, opened a grocery store called Bien Hoa in the mid-1980s. Located on Fairview near Five Mile, the store had a clientele that included both Asian shoppers and, as her daughter put it, “American women with their cookbooks.” It also had a back room where young people gathered to play French billiards and drink pop. Philip Dao opened a third store, the Orient Market. It was located at first behind a furniture store on Orchard Street and then moved to a larger space on Emerald Street. Dao, a former officer in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam, arrived in Boise in 1984. He went to work for Micron Technology but felt more comfortable going into business for himself. He chose to open a market because he thought his English was not good enough at the time to “make business with the Americans, so I just make business with the Oriental people.” Dao gradually expanded, moving to a larger store space and finding wholesale suppliers who could provide the ingredients for a variety of Asian cuisines, including Chinese, Thai, Malaysian, and Indonesian cooking. He drove to Portland or San Francisco every two weeks to pick up a truckload of fresh produce. In 1988, he and his wife opened a restaurant near the market, named Nha Trang after his home town.

Vietnamese people who were not business owners found jobs in a variety of situations. Businesses that could use casual labor, such as several trailer factories in Nampa and Caldwell, hired many refugees. The Simplot Company hired during the early years. Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, many Vietnamese found work at Boise’s two high-tech firms, Hewlett-Packard and Micron Technology. Both companies were expanding (though Micron went through some ups and downs due to fluctuations in the price of computer chips). Assembly jobs at both places could be performed by people with little English. People with some command of English could easily do technical work that was more numerical than verbal. Micron had a policy of hiring refugees. One Micron employee in the personnel department explained that refugees were “willing to work hard, and they like to work overtime.” A Vietnamese woman confirmed that perception: “Some [Vietnamese] people, they took two jobs. Hardworking. I knew four people

who worked two jobs: one at Micron, and the other job at like restaurant or whatever, too. And like the other one I know, she told me she works overtime, so almost 12 hours per day, seven days per week. So they're really hardworking people. They love their jobs." Continuing a pattern that was established in the early days with Helen Huff, Micron cooperated closely with the Refugee Center offering classes in English for employees.



MICRON TECHNOLOGY, INC.

Vietnamese people also helped each other to find jobs. Son Dam described finding his first job in Boise: "A friend had Wednesday off, and going to take me, go find a job. And meanwhile he contact with another guy who work in a trailer factory. And then, that Wednesday come and he took me to this job, and he even fill the papers for me. And I didn't even speak English that much, you know. ... Usually we just help each other and make time, just drive around, drop application everywhere until you find a job. That what I used to do for friends, for people that even I don't know."

Vietnamese Americans suited up for assembly lines at Hewlett-Packard and Micron.

By the early 1990s, Boise's Vietnamese had gradually settled down and assimilated to some degree. Although they held on to Vietnamese customs and traditions, they learned to navigate in American society and culture. People interviewed in 1989 and 1990 were reflective and philosophical about the process. Ben Luu, who had been joined in Boise by his parents and all his brothers and sisters, did not miss much about Vietnam. He said: "I not pay attention that much about

Vietnam, you know, since my family over here. But in the past I always – anything about Vietnam I will take a second look or read about it. ... I just not that much – what do you call it? Anxiety. A big relief [to have my family here].” Son Dam had a brother and sister in Boise, but his mother and sister remained in Vietnam. He felt that he had grown up in the United States. He had some bad experiences in Vietnam during the war and did not miss that aspect of his old life. “I miss the beautifulness of my country. I miss the food, miss the place I hang out.” He emphasized that he felt “Americanized,” which he defined as being more direct and goal-oriented. He said he looked toward the future, not the past: “I am a survivor, and I want a new thing. I don’t want old things all the time. That’s done, so I want something new. I’m not going to recycle it all the time.”

In 1989, it was still not possible to visit Vietnam. Hung Van Tran, though working at a good job at Hewlett-Packard, married, and the father of two children, expressed a sadness that ran through his successful and respectable life, asking the interviewer: “Would you want to go to another country and have more than what you have today over here, but you never see your family again, without them, would you do it? Would you want to go to another country without knowing the language and society, their culture, would you do it? ... When you’re sick, you have nowhere to explain what kind of sickness you have. When you want to say something you really wanted, people could not understand you.”

Fast Forward: 2017

In the early 1990s, refugees continued to come to the United States and to Boise. However, efforts to slow the rate at which people left Vietnam, coupled with international resettlement, eventually reduced the number of refugees remaining in Southeast Asian camps to a very small number. After 1997, the U.S. no longer offered refugee status to Vietnamese people. It has now been 42 years since Saigon fell and the Vietnam War ended. There has been time for a generation of Vietnamese Americans born in the United States to come to adulthood. People who arrived as children are middle-aged adults, and their parents are senior citizens.



ALLEN R. ANSELL PHOTOGRAPHY

Buddhist nun Diep Nguyen escaped Can Tho via Malaysia, reaching Boise in 1982.



TRUYEN LE NGUYEN/AP

Since 1997, Vietnamese have continued to move to the United States, but they are immigrants – not refugees. First-generation Vietnamese in the U.S. now number around 1.3 million people.

Headlines about Syria recall the tragic past for Vietnamese refugees, 2015.

During the past four decades, though Vietnamese in the U.S. and in Boise have struggled against enormous obstacles, they have managed to save money, buy homes, start businesses, and send their kids to college. Nationally, although employment for the group is still disproportionately skilled blue collar, there are many professionals, including engineers, artists, scholars, authors, and business people.

Vietnamese Americans are entrepreneurial, starting small businesses because of a real drive to be self-sufficient. In Boise, in addition to Vietnamese restaurants and several Asian grocery stores, there are a number of nail salons. In 1975, the actress Tippi Hedren (star of Hitchcock's movie *The Birds*) got involved in refugee relief in California. She realized that Vietnamese women needed employment. Some Vietnamese women admired Hedren's elegantly polished long nails. She got the idea to train those few women in the art of manicure, and their businesses took off. Now, half the nail salons in the U.S. are operated by Vietnamese, and Boise is no exception. A quick look at the community bulletin board at the Orient Market on Emerald Street shows multiple handwritten help wanted ads, in both English and Vietnamese, advertising for nail artists. A Vietnamese American woman, Lynde Bailey, confirmed



Most nail salons in the Boise Valley are owned by Vietnamese, an entrepreneurial tradition that began in 1975 when actress Tippi Hedren trained refugee women in the art of manicure.

that most of the nail salons in and around Boise are owned by Vietnamese.

The movement of people within the United States, from the many scattered areas where the first refugees were sent to a few areas where large communities of Vietnamese now live, has intensified. Thus, the Vietnamese population of Boise is small, probably smaller than it was in 1990, although the Vietnamese population of the United States has grown in that same amount of time. Philip Dao, the grocery store owner who arrived in Boise in 1984, has witnessed over 30 years of Vietnamese life here. In 2016, he mentioned that most Vietnamese left Boise to move to a warmer climate or to be part of one of the large Vietnamese communities that have grown up in California, Florida, and Texas. Bailey remarked that probably most Vietnamese who have remained here are connected to one of several extended families in the Treasure Valley. She said those who did not have a lot of family connections moved away. Dao and Bailey both pointed out that there is no longer the level of community ethnic identity and activity that there was 20 years ago. For instance, Vietnamese New Year is celebrated only at the family level.

Relations between the United States and Vietnam normalized in 1995. It is now possible for Americans to visit Vietnam, and many Vietnamese Americans have made the trip. The older generation visits family and friends, while younger U.S.-born millennials travel to find their roots. Dao, whose family still owns a grocery store, the Asia Market on Fairview, has been back ten times. The first time, he was nervous, but then he got used to it. Although he enjoys the visits, he wouldn't want to move back permanently. He still doesn't like the Communists, alleging that the entire society runs on bribes, "so much that they don't count the bribe money, they weigh it!"

America's war in Vietnam created refugees, most of whom ended up in the United States, although considerable numbers also went to Canada, Australia, and France. Before the war, most Vietnamese didn't travel or move very far, but now Vietnamese people live all over the world. Pho, a spicy beef and rice noodle soup, is eaten on every continent. Boiseans, like most Americans, also eat cha gio (crispy fried rolls with lettuce

and dipping sauce), and banh mi (sandwiches with Vietnamese sausage and pickles on a French roll).

The list of international influences, in both directions, goes on. Vietnam and the United States have a trade agreement, and Vietnamese products (flower pots and clothing are the most noticeable items) show up in American stores. Vietnamese Americans, like most immigrant groups, send remittance money back to family members still in Vietnam. Vietnamese with American relatives try to arrange paperwork in order to legally immigrate to the United States. Boise State University professor Nancy Napier has arranged a student exchange program with a business school in Hanoi.

The Vietnamese refugees who arrived in Boise between 1975 and 1997 set a precedent for future relationships between Idaho and other groups of refugees. As time went on, the state received refugees from other countries: Laotians, Cambodians, Poles, Czechs, Cubans, and Russian Pentecostals arrived in Idaho in the 1980s and 1990s. At the national level, receiving refugees was one U.S. strategy to combat Communism. At the local level, Boiseans began by taking in the first group of people that arrived literally on the doorstep of the Adult Learning Center at Boise State. They continued to take in whoever came, and the emphasis was never much on what ideology people represented but more on the concrete process of helping someone in need. The community got good at working out the details: teaching practical English, giving driving lessons, conducting supermarket tours, helping to fill out job applications, making people feel welcome. From the beginning, Idaho's effort was ad hoc, improvised, informal, and bottom-up not top-down. Above all, it was practical and friendly.



WIKIPEDIA



WIKIPEDIA



N. SAUM, ENGLISH WIKIPEDIA

Pho (noodle soup), cha gio (crunchy rolls), and banh mi (baguette sandwiches) are Vietnamese favorites in Boise.



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