

Escape to Freedom

Leaving Vietnam

By artist Chrystal Phan

Can you imagine leaving home on a dangerous journey and starting a new life in a completely foreign country?

That's the real-life story for thousands of refugees who came to BC after the end of the war in Vietnam in 1975. People escaped Vietnam because they feared the new government formed by the North Vietnamese government, who declared victory at the end of the war. Many were executed for supporting the losing South Vietnamese side. Entire families were imprisoned. Others simply feared what life would be like in a Communist Vietnam.

Most people chose to escape on boats. This is why they were sometimes referred to as "boat people." Some families paid smugglers to take them on large shipping freighters bound for port cities like Hong Kong. Many more found passage on small fishing vessels belonging to friends and family. A small minority attempted to escape by walking through the jungle in the hopes of reaching Thailand. All of these options were dangerous. Between 200,000 to 400,000 are estimated to have lost their lives during this great escape.

Lucky survivors found their way to one of the 70 refugee camps set up in countries and territories around the South China Sea. At these refugee camps, they applied to immigrate to other countries. It wasn't only Canada on a mission to help. The United States, Australia and Sweden were some of the other countries that welcomed refugees.