

A Dream Come True

Coming to America from Vietnam—1975



M. J.
Cosson





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1973—Pleiku, Vietnam

Cammy's dad began.

"I was 20 when I was **drafted** into the army. I was a soldier during the Vietnam War. I was sent to the center of Vietnam. In the mountains. Near a place called **Pleiku**.

“The war was like the U.S. Civil War in one way. The North fought the South. Sometimes people in the same family were on different sides.

“But in Vietnam, other countries helped both sides,” he continued. “The battles weren’t like the battles of the Civil War. Back then, it was clear who the enemy was. In Vietnam, it was sometimes hard to tell.

“My job was to look for the **Vietcong**. They were fighting for the North. The Communist side. But a Vietcong could be anybody.

“We checked villages. We had Vietnamese **interpreters**. We asked questions of the villagers. Our interpreters told us what the people said.” Cammy’s dad paused a moment.

“The men in my company had to go through each hut,” he said. “We had to look in every hiding place. It was our job to keep the villagers safe. It was our job to kill or capture the Vietcong. And they were hard to find.”

“Why was that?” Cammy asked. When

her dad got to this part, she always asked that question.

Cammy’s dad looked at her. This time he didn’t answer.

“Why do you think?” he asked.

“Because some were the brothers of the people in the huts. Because they didn’t all wear uniforms. Because they had secret hiding places. And because they were very smart,” Cammy answered.

“Yes. All of those reasons. And one other thing,” her dad said.

“What’s that?” Cammy asked.

“The Vietcong may have been hard to find because they weren’t even there,” he replied.

Cammy laughed.

“It sounds funny now. But it wasn’t funny then,” her dad said. “We never knew when we might get **ambushed**. We always had to be on guard. It wasn’t just a walk through a village. It wasn’t a game of hide-and-seek.”

“What about the people?” Cammy asked. She always asked that question too.

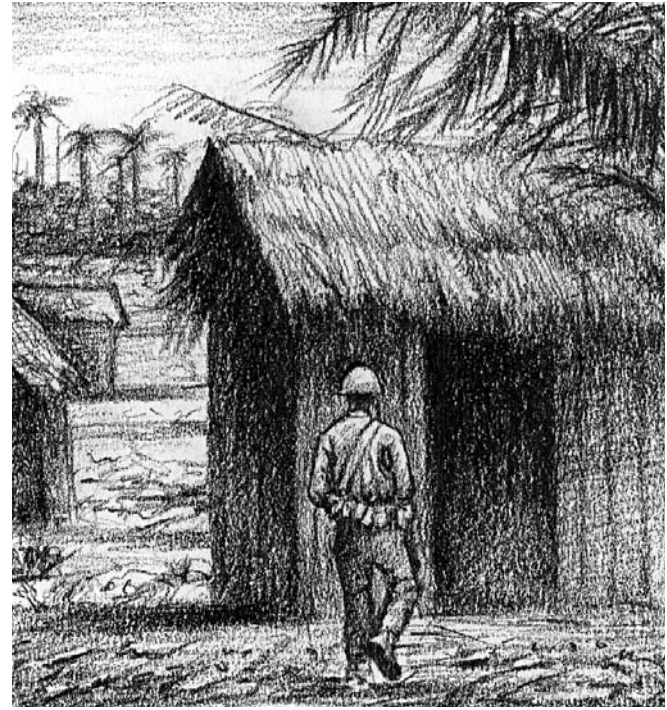
“Your turn again,” her dad said.
“How do you think the people in the villages felt?”

“I think they were scared,” Cammy said.

Her dad nodded. “I think they were scared too,” he said.

Cammy looked at her dad.

“Now tell about that day. Please,” she begged.



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About That Day

Cammy’s dad looked up at the sky. He took a deep breath. Cammy could tell that her dad was glad to be on this side of the world with her. He was glad to be safe in a fishing boat on a sunny day.

For a minute, Cammy thought her dad was going to say something like “Isn’t it a nice day?” But he didn’t. He took another deep breath. Then he began again.

“One day, we visited a village high in the mountains. We knew something was wrong right away.

“We walked down the road,” he continued. “It was too quiet. I went into the first hut. No one was there.

“Then I heard a sound. Like a kitten mewling. I went to the next hut. The sound came from under a mat. A baby was there. A little girl.

“The baby was very tiny,” he explained. “She lay under that mat. All by herself. Who knows how long she’d been there. She didn’t cry. She just made the mewling sounds.

“We found some bodies in the other huts. They had been shot.

“We never knew what happened. Did the Vietcong attack the village? Did the people just run away?

“Some of us took the baby back to

the base. Others went to check nearby fields and forests.

“I held the baby girl on the way back,” Cammy’s dad said. “When we got to the base, I mixed some powdered milk and fed her. We didn’t have a baby bottle. I fed her from a soda bottle.

“She was very hungry. She stared into my eyes as she drank the milk. Then she fell asleep. She woke up a couple more times and stared at me.

“The baby never smiled. Not even a little grin. And she never cried. She just stared. I’d never seen such a sad look. It’s almost as if she knew something.

“I held that baby girl until the next day. Then a helicopter took her to an **orphanage in Saigon**. I hated to let her go. I felt like it was my job to protect her.

“That night, I wrote your mom about the baby. I said I didn’t think I would ever be able to forget how she looked into my eyes.”