

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2719

Huynh, Van

(1944 -)

Born 19440725, Binh Duong Vietnam

Occupation Public servant

Summary

Van Huynh was born and began school in Binh Duong, near Saigon, Vietnam. At seven she moved with her family to Saigon where she completed her education despite her family's financial and housing difficulties. She and her husband Thiet worked in the Electricity Authority until April 1979 when they fled Vietnam by boat with their two small sons Thach and Kim. After almost five months in the United Nations-run refugee camp in Pulau Bidong, Malaysia, she and her family were accepted as refugees by Australia and were helped to settle successfully in Canberra by the Ainslie Church of Christ.

Details

Van Huynh (née Tran Thi The Van) was the daughter of Tran Quoc Thai and Huynh Thi Sat. She had four sisters and one brother. Before the 1939-45 War her father had worked as an overseer on a French-owned rubber plantation and subsequently operated a small cab service between Binh Duong and Saigon until the Viet Minh attacked one of his cabs and forced him to abandon the business. Years before, he had briefly fought with the Viet Minh. Two of his brothers were killed and one wounded fighting in their army.

Van's family moved to Saigon in 1954 where she completed her year 12 certificate, despite their housing and financial difficulties. She enrolled in law but pressures of work and the need to commute daily to Binh Duong, where her family had returned in 1966, caused her to abandon her tertiary studies. Her father died of wounds suffered during the Tet Offensive in 1968. She worked for a year in a small Saigon hardware firm before finding employment in the Electricity Authority where she met her husband Thiet Huynh. They married in 1971 and their sons Thach and Kim were born in 1975 and 1977. The social and economic changes following the fall of Saigon in 1975, and the restrictions placed on public servants employed during the previous regime, caused Van and her family to flee Vietnam on an overcrowded boat in April 1979. After a journey five days without food or water during which they were attacked by several groups of pirates, they landed on a small Malaysian island with their two desperately ill little boys. After three days there they were transferred to the United Nations-run camp at Pulau Bidong in Malaysia where they lived in crowded and harsh conditions from 1 May to mid-October 1979, before being accepted as refugees by Australia. They arrived in Canberra on 21 December 1979 under the sponsorship of the Ainslie Church of Christ which welcomed them, arranged their accommodation, and helped them settle into the community. Thiet eventually found work with the ACT Electricity Authority and Van at the Royal Australian Mint. Their sons were educated in Canberra. Thach is now an actuarial consultant, and Kim, a lecturer at the Australian National University in Politics and International Relations, has written a Ph.D. and a book based on Van's experiences .

Published resources

Book

Where the sea takes us: a true story of family, fate and Vietnam, Huynh, Kim, 2007

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

[Van Thi-The Huynh interviewed by Ann-Mari Jordens \[sound recording\]](#)

Author Details

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