

*“A long time ago, in a Vietnam far, far away...”*

By Jonathan Tran

The story of my family begins at the crumbling of a republic. For a time, it was good and there was peace. The shroud of the dark-side, which created misery and poverty throughout China, would shatter the peace. My grandparents fled south as growing uncertainty clouded the entire region. In Vietnam, they found some solitude as the world around them trembled with turmoil and building fear. In search of political and economic freedom, my grandparents came to Vietnam as part of a wave of immigration following the Chinese Communist revolution. My grandparents were like visitors to the barren lands of Tatoonie, and as ethnic Chinese in Vietnam they faced persecution from the dominant Vietnamese culture. Viewed as second-class citizens, they struggled but managed to scrape together a small business selling sewn goods while raising eight children. And for a time it was good — and there was peace. That peace would be violently disturbed by the expansion of two empires. From the north came the Viet Cong and with them economic and political oppression. From the east, the metal juggernauts of the United States military began arriving off the coast and along with them, the coming of an imperial army filled with arrogance and ignorance.

Because he rarely talks about it, I only found out recently that in an effort to escape the Viet Cong, my father was thrown into a re-education labor camp for over 13 months. He was lucky to stay a short period as the war continued to escalate around him. The family sold a large proportion of its possessions in order to bail my father out of jail. Shortly

after, the family sold the rest of its possessions and set off to America in hopes of finding a brighter horizon. Along with my grandparents and two of my cousins, they began a journey shared by thousands of Vietnamese immigrants. Carrying twice their maximum capacity, half the boats that left Vietnam's shores never made it to their destination. Like my father, my mom's journey from Vietnam to the refugee camps left scarring memories of despair. Traveling with an older sister and older brother, my mom left behind the majority of her family to face the uncertainty of an ever-changing world.

My very existence is a testament to history's impact. While I am not bold enough to compare my birth with the immaculate conception of Anakin Skywalker or Jesus, I would argue that my beginning was quite miraculous. My parents ended up in separate camps — my father in Indonesia and my mom in Malaysia. Having no idea of each other's existence, my parents overcame astronomical odds, only C3PO could calculate, to fall in love in America. Both my parents were sponsored to America by Christian churches — my mom ended up in frosty Ohio, while my father arrived in sunny Southern California. Their lives in America began in two very different worlds. Using federal funding that would soon be cut by the Reagan Administration, my father relished the diversity community of Southern California and attended Los Angeles City College while working full-time to support his family. My mom, in a predominantly homogeneous area, never pursued an academic career, and instead joined the workforce to fulfill the same purpose. Reaganomic's destruction of the job market would drive my mother west as the cold climate and low pay took its toll. My parents met somewhere between Los Angeles and San Diego; in a couple of months my story begins.

The immigration of my family is a story shared by millions of people displaced by war and poverty. However, the stories are reduced to mere murmurs and sandwiched in our high school history books between how Nixon took it upon himself to end the Vietnam War and how Reagan single-handedly tamed the Orient while winning the Cold War. It is painful to see my parents reminisce about a time when things were good — and there was peace. That innocent life is a distant painful memory that they keep buried deep inside. Somehow, they find enough inner strength to work to support our family. My family's journey is a terrible lesson for two reasons: (1) the fact that men can commit such evils to one another is humanity at its worse; and (2) how quickly the stories like my parents' will be forgotten by the next generation.

As for what Mills describes as the “magnificent lesson,” I believe that I am the embodiment of my parents' struggle and sacrifice. I grew up in a life of absolute privilege — never exceptionally wealthy rather surrounded with warmth and support. I am the first son from the Tran Family, and along with my sister [non-twin]; we represent our family's “New Hope.”

I eagerly embrace the mantle of The Tran Clan's last hope. While my other cousins track into traditional careers and work for material gains, I feel a drive to be so much more than a mindless consuming capitalistic droid or clone. From my family's intersection with history, I find that we turn our backs to people in greatest need and in an attempt to justify our role as a superpower in the world, we constantly seek an elusive and

transparent enemy. Aggression and ignorance can only be met with compassion and understanding. More violence only breeds more ignorance and it is a lesson our country pays too high a price to realize. I wish to embody what Gandhi described as, “the change you wish to see in the world.” I see myself becoming an educator, ensuring that the stories of millions of souls are never forgotten. I wish to see the good in all people, but I also understand that evil empires and their emperors exist in the shroud of the dark side. That darkness must be met with light, and I strive to be a strong voice of dissent in struggling for social justice and equality. Through social and political activism, I hope to spearhead the Return of the Progressive Movement and withstand any Revenge of the Conservative/Nativist Right. By taking back our history and uniting with other communities of diversity, we can learn the terrible lessons of our past and change the course of history for the better... Jonathan Tran for President in 2040! May the force be with us all...