

Failed Escape

Kim Ly

BEFORE YOU READ: Share what you know about the U.S. war in Vietnam.

First, My Brother

When North and South Vietnam were unified in 1975, many people tried to leave the country to find freedom. My family was one of them. In 1979, my older brother escaped. For the price of twelve golden bars, he could leave Vietnam by ship. That was expensive for my family; therefore, my father could only send him.

Then, My Turn

Two years later, my father told me and my youngest brother that he had a plan for us to join a group that was escaping from the country. We paid a deposit on the trip, and we would pay the balance after we reached a new country.

On the night of our escape, it was dark. There was no moonlight. My group was my little brother, my best friend and her younger brother, and our teacher. We followed our guide deep into the village and waited until dark to go out to the beach to join the other groups. At the beach, our guide told us to hide in the bush and wait for the signal.

**“Shhh...! Be quiet!”
someone said.
“Do you guys want
to get caught?”**

I was hiding and waiting for one hour, then two hours. Suddenly, I heard whispering. Someone said, “The plan is not working.”

“Shhh...! Be quiet!” someone said. “Do you guys want to get caught?”

And then it was quiet again.

“You’re Under Arrest”

After a while, I wondered if anyone was there. Was I all alone? It was dark and quiet. I could



In this photo, Vietnamese refugees wait to be taken aboard a U.S. ship. They are being rescued from a 35-foot fishing boat 350 miles northeast of Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam, after spending eight days at sea. Photo by [manhhai CC 2.0/Flickr](#).

hear insects flying around me. My heart beat faster. And then a strict voice of a man said, “Everybody out! You’re all under arrest!”

I thought I would rather get caught by the police than get lost in this dark place. I wanted my father to be able to find me. So I left my hiding place with two hands over my head. The policeman shined a flashlight in the bushes, and slowly, one by one, people appeared. I was happy I found my little brother, my friend, and her brother in that group, but I couldn’t find my teacher.

The policeman directed us to the police station about five miles away. We had to lie on the

grass in front of the station waiting for the next morning. At 8:00 am, the station’s door opened, and they let us go inside. I felt better when I was in the room because it was too hot outside, and

Imagine what would have happened if we all got on the boat!

we were thirsty and hungry. They gave some water to the children because they cried a lot. I was surprised to see all the people were

women and children, no men. All the men must have run away.

A Lucky Failure?

The police had 95 of us. They processed us, and then they put us in trucks and transferred us to a prison camp in the next city. At this prison camp, they set us free because the prison camp was too small to hold so many people.

I felt lucky to get caught by the police because our guide said there would be 35 people on the boat. In fact, there would have been more than 95. It was a small boat. Imagine what would have happened if we all got on the boat!

Eventually, my family made it to the U.S., but as you can see, it was a dangerous journey.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does the author feel about her failed escape? How do you know?
2. Notice the use of “therefore” in this sentence: “That was expensive for my family; therefore, my father could only send him.” Write several of your own sentences using “therefore.”
3. Notice the phrase, “I would rather get caught... than get lost...” Write your own *rather/than* sentences.
4. Compare this story with the one on pp. 28-29.
5. Was there a time in your life when you had a “lucky failure.” Tell the story out loud and then write it down. Get feedback and write a second draft.

Kim Ly is a student at Alameda Reads in Alameda, CA. She appreciates the teachers and tutors who give their time to immigrant people in need. She feels lucky to live in the U.S. where there are good programs to support people. She is a daughter in a family with nine children. She is proud her family because they always support each other. She believes, “Together, we can be strong!”



Coming Home from War

Read more *Change Agent* articles by students affected by the war in Vietnam, both Vietnamese refugees and U.S. veterans of the war. Find stories by immigrants from other countries who were also affected by war, such as the one on p. 53, “War and Emigration Break Up Families.”

“Coming Home from War” (Issue #30) can be found here: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-30/>. To access the issue, you need to subscribe: <https://changeagent.nelrc.org/subscribe/>.