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Vietnamese Canadian Federation  
Fédération vietnamienne du Canada  
249 Rochester Street, Ottawa, ON K1R 7M9, Canada

Tel: (613) 230-8282, Fax: 230-8281  
Website: <http://www.vietfederation.ca>  
Email: [trungtam@istop.ca](mailto:trungtam@istop.ca)

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**FEDERATION NEWS**

**Special Issue: Celebrating the 25th  
Anniversary of Project 4000**

**Background**

Following the fall of South Vietnam in 1975, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, who either worked with, or were supporters of, the government of the former Republic of Vietnam, or simply did not support the newly-imposed Communist regime, were put in concentration camps (officially called "Re-Education Camps") or sent to the "New Economic Zones" in the remote areas of the country. In addition, ethnic Chinese Vietnamese were either forced to relocate or expelled from the country due to the political conflict between China and Vietnam at that time.

The flow of refugees from Vietnam reached a critical phase in late 1978 due to the refusal of some neighbouring Asian countries to admit them, then called "the Boat People" because most fled in small, leaky boats in the perilous South China Sea. Thousands were believed to have perished at sea by drowning or starvation, raped or

killed by pirates. Dennis McDermott, President of the Canadian Labour Congress at the time, summarized this situation as follows: *“It is crystal clear to us that the Vietnamese refugee problem has ballooned into a humanitarian crisis of global proportion and the only human way to react to such a situation is through decisive and immediate action.”*

In response to the plight of these refugees, Ottawa’s then-Mayor, Marion Dewar, called a meeting of community organizations, church groups, and social service agencies in the city in her office in June 1979 to find out how to help them. As a result, Project 4000 was formed with the objective of campaigning for the admission of up to 4000 Boat People to the city of Ottawa through private sponsor groups. Similar community initiatives followed elsewhere in Canada.

Subsequently, the federal government under Prime Minister Joe Clark decided to accept 50,000 Indochinese refugees, mostly Vietnamese, but including also Cambodians and Laotians who fled the new Communist regimes in their countries.

Project 4000 was a historical event, not only to the Vietnamese community, but also to all the citizens of Ottawa, since it shows that private citizens can work together to deal effectively with major humanitarian crises. It was a model to other cities and set a shining example of grassroots involvement and participation in civic initiatives for future generations.

The overwhelming public reaction to the plight of the Boat People in 1979 reflected the compassion of Canadians towards human sufferings, no matter where they happen.

To celebrate these collective achievements of the citizens of Ottawa, the Vietnamese Canadian Centre has organized, from November 11 to December 5, at the Plant Recreation Centre in Ottawa, an exhibition under the theme "Gift of Freedom" to show photographs of the exodus of Vietnamese refugees, their arrivals in the refugee camps in Southeast Asia, and their resettlement in Canada. The Centre also held a reunion dinner for the refugees, their sponsors, friends, and volunteers in the community, at the same location, on November 20.

Prime Minister Paul Martin, in his message of greetings on this occasion, underlines the contribution of Vietnamese refugees and Project 4000 to Canada as follows:

*“A quarter of a century has passed since this project was first conceived. In that time, the Vietnamese community has made an outstanding contribution to the cultural vitality and economic strength of both the city of Ottawa and our nation. Tonight, as you share your many memories and your remarkable stories of courage and determination, you may take great pride in all that you have accomplished.*

*To the many volunteers, sponsors and community members who worked to make this project a reality, I offer my thanks on behalf of all Canadians for your remarkable efforts”.*

#### Reminiscences of a Former Refugee

Remarks by Huong Nguyen  
at the official opening of the Photograph  
Exhibition "Gift of Freedom",  
November 11, 2004

One day in November 1978, a small fishing boat carrying me and 350 other Vietnamese

landed in Malaysia. The boat was too small and the passengers had to sit shoulder to shoulder throughout the entire journey, no room to move around. We were tired, hungry but relieved that we made it to shore.

We slept on the beach, and the next morning when we woke up, to our horror, the boat that had carried us across the sea had disintegrated into pieces of timber floating in the water.

At that moment, we did not know that had the boat been intact, the Malaysian police would have put all the passengers onboard and sent us back to sea. This was what happened to another boat which arrived about one week later. After it was not allowed to land in Pulau Bidong Camp, it capsized at the river mouth and drowned most of the 400 Vietnamese onboard.

Death, rape, starvation, that's the fate that fell on many Vietnamese who dared to escape life under the Communist regime. The pirates attacked the small boats, took money and gold, and anything of value, even the motors that ran the boats, raped women and girls as young as 12 years old. The pirates took the girls and women with them, exchanged them among themselves for pleasure, or sold them to prostitute houses. Many of us here have relatives and friends who departed Vietnam but who never made it, and our hearts ache when we think of them and of what could have happened to them.

We are the lucky ones who made it. And we made it to Canada thanks to the generosity of the Canadian people, of the private sponsors who put up money and opened their hearts and their homes to take us in. Without the private sponsors, many of us would not be here. The Canadian

government and the private sponsors brought us here and gave us a new life.

In the past 25 years, Canada has been "home" for the Vietnamese boat people. We have enjoyed true freedoms and we have benefited from living in a truly democratic country. We have learned many things, but we have also made contributions, large and small, to the growth of Canada. We participate in all levels of government. In Ottawa, during the high tech boom in the 1990s, the Vietnamese were a major work force in many of the local companies.

There are doctors, pharmacists, dentists, oncologists, surgeons, professors, teachers, lawyers, engineers, technicians and other service providers who are Vietnamese boat people or children of Vietnamese boat people. We are dedicated, hardworking, and caring. We are happy that we have the opportunity to pay back the community that has opened its arms to us, and we are happy to serve all the people in this community.

We are forever grateful to the people of Canada, and especially in this community, the private sponsors of Project 4000, who made it possible for us to come to Canada.

#### Comments on the Boat People Photograph Exhibition

I feel very honoured that you invited me to the ceremony for the 25th anniversary of the 'Boat People'. The ceremony has touched me profoundly and I'm proud that you are my friend. Congratulations for your involvement in planning such an important event. It was well balanced: speeches, exposition and banquet (and the food was exxxcellent!!). Thank you again for your invitation (Maria). Congratulations for making the opening ceremony of the Photo Exhibit very meaningful.

Huong's speech brought tears to many of us listening to her moving story. Flora MacDonald's and Marion Dewar's remarks were also meaningful to those of us who were not living in Ottawa in 1979. Thank you for inviting us to this memorable event (Monica)

Thank you all, for that splendid celebration. I thought the photo exhibit was beautifully organized and displayed - as was the entire event. And Marion, you had us in tears! (S.P.)

Very informative! Powerful pictures. Great way to teach the kids today (Linh).

I was 2 years old. We were there with our parents & grand-mother. 1979. Thank you for the picture gallery (L. S. Ho).

What a wonderful idea and Exhibition, so informative. Thank you. We love you (Viet Anh & My Hanh Campbell).

Fabulous Exhibit ... most enjoyable to me as I taught summer school to a number of these children when the Ottawa Board put together summer programmes to assist the cultural and linguistic adjustment for the "BOAT CHILDREN" (K.U.).

I gave orientation session to those accepted by Canada – in SUNGEI BESI Refugee Camp outside of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 1984. I also taught many Vietnamese children in the Ottawa Elementary School system. My admiration for their hard working parents was so great – they held down 2 and 3 jobs..... This is a moving exhibit (H.W.).

It was a good idea to have the exhibit to remind the young people of the importance of freedom (A.M.).

What a memory! Thanks Canada and many thanks to the sponsor group "Amicus" (V.D.)

We are so glad that Ottawa was able to help so many Vietnamese settle into their new lives. We remember the Irish famine (D.R., Knoxdale Presbyterian Church).

Your excellent exhibition brought back many memories of my connection with Vietnamese asylum seekers in Hongkong and also of my trip to Vietnam in 1991 (Dorothy).

Thank you for organizing an amazing exhibition. It was very nice to hear my parents speak about what it was like back then and read about others. My brother and I were very young; so it is so hard to believe this really happened. What a great idea to open the eyes of the young people who often forget (Jean's family).

I remember it well. I was a young woman at the time, and it made me proud to be an Ottawan and a Canadian. The Vietnamese people I met were an inspiration (Susan).

As a member of a sponsoring church, our "family" humbled me – this work ethic, their thankfulness. All five members have gone on to become contributing citizen of Canada. Let us continue to be a welcoming country (C.R.).

What a wonderful idea to remember those days. As an immigrant myself, it was very easy to make the decision to help sponsor a family. This is a good document for our children to learn community and acceptance (Antoinette).

Thank you for this awesome testimony to the desire of the human spirit to overcome and live. I give thanks for the spirit that joins us all and that Canada said yes. I am part of

the sponsoring church group that 24 years ago united Hien & Hoa Trieu family that had been separated for 18 months. This is truly a miracle story that they are together and a great contribution to Ottawa and to Canada their thankfulness and appreciation of being here is humbling and an inspiration to all. I look forward to joining in celebrating your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary (J.F.J.).

I am a member of sponsoring church and I am so grateful for our family – makes me realize how much it takes for granted. Just their devotion to their new country, their gratefulness and thanks and the great contribution they are making. I marvel !! (C.G.).

Congratulations on celebrating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of courageous and inspiring people who were sponsored by Ottawa citizens. May we continue to share our good fortune on being Canadians (J.U.).

Congratulations on providing this very interesting exhibit which brings back many happy memories of our teaching days and good friends (P.K., A. L., Pat, Alla, Willis College ESL).

A wonderful reminder of: “The Boat People” – Thank you (M.B.).

So important that we be reminded of those difficult times. Kindness can never be overdone. I hope that Canada remains an open door for all people in need of safety and freedom (J.B.).

Thank you for creating a fascinating look back on Project 4000 . Congratulations on your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations. The photos speak a thousand words (J.T., United Way/Centraide, Ottawa).

My tears came down when visiting those photos. They brought back so much the past. However, it has been over for 30 years. I said to myself, and we should look forward as we always do in this wonderland of Canada. Thank you Canada for your wide open arms.

Oh! Dat nuoc nay, xin nhan la que huong toi.  
Oh! Canada, we stand on guard for thee (a boat people refugee).

Thank you very, very much, Canada and Canadians for helping, caring and understanding. Special thanks to you for everything you have done for us. Love you all (HBL & family)

Thank you for showing me what my parents had to endure to come here and give me a better life. I was 4 at the time, so I don't remember much of the period. Seeing the photos of the boats really put it into perspective the stories my parents have told me about their journey. Canada is truly a wonderful country, filled with people who believe in kindness and justice. I am truly proud to be a Vietnamese person who was given a chance (Nik).

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to understand the hardships of the boat people. We were able to see the harsh experiences of our parents and truly be proud of our culture and achievements. This is a wonderful exhibit and expressed a great message to all Canadians. Thank you for the support and providing our parents and ourselves a chance to be free and be granted a better life. This makes us feel so much pride in being Vietnamese Canadians (Linh, Nami, Minh, and Ho).

I am a volunteer who was in Project 4000 from the beginning . We started on Laurier Avenue and almost 5 years later we finished

at City Hall. I worked on the Accommodation Desk for the first 2 years. It was a pleasure to work with all the Sponsorship Groups and to meet the Boat People as they arrive (D.R.).

Along with others like Martin Padgett, the late Grace Heard, Earl Jone, Marie Park Thorne and others, we sponsored 4 Vietnamese & 1 Cambodian. It was educational! (P.D.).

Thank you very much for displaying this exhibit. I was only 6 years old when I came to Canada in Nov. 1980. I don't remember my journey here to Canada but from viewing all these photos it really makes me appreciate everything that I have now. It also makes me feel very proud of what my parents have accomplished in the 25 years that they have been here. Thank you to all the families who sponsored the boat people. I hope they know that they have given all the boat people a second chance for a life of freedom (S.D.).

Special thanks to the world media without whom we would not have known what had happened to the Boat People. Thank you. You did save many lives, doing your job of informing the world community about the plight of those people on their exodus (S.S.).

I think that what the North Vietnamese made the South force them to do such a thing was very mean and insane (Jessica).

Thank you for the Exhibit. It brings back memories of when the Boat People arrived in our community years ago (Jo).

Our Ottawa personality who made tremendous contribution in the Project 4000 was the former Mayor of Ottawa.: Marion Dewar. The boat people should always

remember her and her followers in helping them to relocate in this new country (Tsin & Betty).

Very nice exhibit. Congratulations on your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations (Yvon).

Very informative and interesting display. Thank you for sharing your experiences. Congratulations on this anniversary!

Very nice exposition. Congratulations on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations (Melainne).

Thank you so much for all the efforts to put together such a telling display. It would be great for our community to have it repeated periodically (if not annually) and make arrangements for area schools to visit and do projects on it so that the next generation of Canadians understands something of this compelling history. It would also be great to do some photo essays of families 25 years later to show the wonderful ways in which they have enriched Ottawa and Canadian society. Thanks so much (C.S.).

Congratulations to our Vietnamese New Canadians – we are honoured to have you in our city – a credit to our society . Best wishes in all your endeavours in the futures. Sincerely. (A. & S. F.).

What pain! What joy!! What wonder!!!  
Congratulation (A..W.).

Your exhibit is beautiful. We adopted our daughter from Vietnam and we are glad for the opportunity to share a part of her heritage with her (J.G.) .

Your exhibit is great. I like everything! (M.P.).

Thank you very much for the beautiful exhibit. I remember well when the first

“boat People” arrived. They have contributed so much to our culture! (C. R.).

Thank you, Mom & Dad for participating and supporting the Vietnamese Community. Your efforts and dedication to bring awareness of our past is important to our culture and makes the younger generation remember where we came from (T.L.).

Thank you for mounting this successful exhibition which is full of meaning. To me, this exhibition is also a way to thank Canada and Ottawa. It is an invaluable lesson to my children who were born and raised in Canada (N.N.C., translated from Vietnamese).

A moving, informative display. Thank you ! (D. H.).

Chers vietnamien(e)s,

Merci pour le bel exposé de votre 25<sup>e</sup> anniversaire. Que Notre Bon Père du ciel qui vous a conduit au Canada continue toujours de vous protéger. Que Son Amour vous enveloppe et vous remplisse intérieurement de Son Amour et de Sa Paix pour partager avec toutes les personnes que vous rencontrez.

Je prie pour vous tous et s.v.p. priez pour toutes les personnes qui vivent au Canada afin que nous soyons tous des instruments de paix et d'amour. Unité dans la prière (B. D'Y.).

Quels souvenirs me sont revenus en voyant cette exposition de photos et articles publiés dans les journaux. Nous avons donné un petit coup de pouce (B. & N. S.).

## **MEDIA REVIEW**

### Project 4000: Ottawa's Boat People

### Moving pictures: 'The Boat People' look back 25 years

The Ottawa Citizen  
Monday, November 8, 2004

A photographic retrospective tells how more than 3,000 Southeast Asians made their way to Ottawa -- and freedom -- from their own turbulent land, Isabel Teotonio reports.

Freedom. It can be a difficult concept to explain to a 12-year-old, says Vietnamese refugee Liem Duong.

That's why he plans to take his Canadian-born daughter, An, to an upcoming photo exhibition chronicling the harrowing tale of the Vietnamese Boat People.

"I'd like my daughter to know what happened to me and of how the people of Ottawa opened their hearts to the refugees," said Mr. Duong, who fled Vietnam by boat in 1982 and spent eight months in a Malaysian refugee camp before coming to Ottawa. "It's important for the younger generation to know the story of how we arrived."

That story, told through a collection of 60 photos, will be on display for 10 days at the Plant Recreation Centre beginning Thursday.

The exhibit, "Gift of Freedom," is being organized by the Vietnamese Canadian Centre to mark the 25th anniversary of Project 4000, which was Ottawa's overwhelming response to resettle 4,000 refugees in the capital region.

Following the fall of South Vietnam to the Communists in 1975, hundreds of thousands either fled or were expelled. This set in

motion an exodus the world came to know as the crisis of the Vietnamese Boat People.

The term was coined because most fled in tiny, leaky boats, setting sail for freedom in the perilous South China Sea.

The outflow of refugees reached a critical phase in 1978 because some neighbouring Asian countries refused to admit them. This forced them to remain at sea, where thousands perished by drowning, starvation or at the hands of pirates.

In response to their struggles, Ottawa mayor Marion Dewar called a meeting of community organizations, church groups and social service agencies in June 1979.

The result was Project 4000, aimed at bringing 4,000 Boat People to the Ottawa area through private sponsor groups.

The plight of Southeast Asian refugees captured the hearts of countless residents and offers of food, clothing and housing began pouring in.

"It was unbelievable," recalled Can Le, one of the founding members of Project 4000 and also one of the exhibition's organizers. "Ottawa led the country and set an example for the world."

Barbara Gamble, who sat on the project's board of directors, was at the Ottawa airport to greet the first plane of refugees one chilly morning in August.

"They were so inspirational -- their struggles and what they had been through," she recalled yesterday.

"It was so humbling and inspirational to see how much these people had overcome and what they had given up for their freedom."

The groundswell of support for the project grew daily and inspired other Canadian cities, including Calgary, Vancouver and Toronto, to establish similar plans. About 7,000 sponsoring groups and organizations throughout the country pitched in to donate their time, energy and money to help these new arrivals.

The overwhelming response also prompted the federal government to boost its annual intake of Indochinese refugees from 8,000 to 50,000.

Between 1975 and 1978, Canada took in 9,060 Indochinese refugees through the Special Vietnamese and Cambodian Program.

In 1979 and 1980, a total of 60,049 refugees from Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia were resettled under the Indochinese Refugee Program.

Project 4000 was eventually dismantled in 1984. In those five years, it is estimated that about 3,600 refugees resettled in the capital region under private sponsorship.

The city's response to the project was one of its "finest hours," said Ms. Dewar yesterday, insisting it is the citizens of Ottawa who deserve the credit for its success.

"It was the people's finest moment, not mine. All I did was direct the traffic."

Ottawa is today a better city because of Project 4000, she said.

"It made us conscious of occurrences in the world where our fellow human beings were dying and we did something about it.

"But the greatest part of this story is that the country came together. It was the grassroots that came together and showed the power of what a few people could do."

The exhibition, she said, will act as a reminder of what ordinary citizens can do when they band together with a common goal.

"I truly believe in thinking globally and acting locally, and that is what Project 4000 was about."

The celebration of the 25th anniversary of Project 4000 begins with the opening of the exhibition Nov. 10. The exhibit, at the Plant Recreation Centre (930 Somerset St. W.) will be open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. A reunion dinner for those involved in the project -- volunteers, sponsors, refugees -- is scheduled for Nov. 20.

#### City Editorial : A refugee story worth telling

Twenty five years ago this city's heart went out to the people who were fleeing communism in Vietnam. We are the richer for it.

Project 4000 was an audacious endeavour: Ottawa, led by an eloquent humanitarian mayor, Marion Dewar, told the federal government that the city would take in 4,000 refugees from Vietnam. It would require the help of a small army of church and other community volunteers. People who were shocked by having to flee Vietnam, and spend time in refugee camps, were suddenly halfway around the world on the chilly streets of Ottawa.

But it worked. The refugees came, their Ottawa entries into Canadian life were very successful. Indeed, these industrious new citizens proved to be tenaciously entrepreneurial. Somerset Street was rundown. Many of these refugees saw that as an opportunity to set up businesses with low expenses. They transformed Somerset into a street where small enterprises thrive and the cautious public service palate of this capital could venture out for something new to experience on a dining night out.

As a *Citizen* team of feature writers described earlier this month, the work ethic of these new Canadians was often nothing short of remarkable. They started learning English right away. They worked extra hours and extra jobs and became well established in the community.

Writer Ron Corbett told the especially poignant tale of a privileged member of South Vietnamese society who worked from scratch to get a chip truck, then worked long hours in that truck to make a good living over 22 years, and had no regrets. Le Nguyen put it all in perspective when she said: "Freedom is the only thing you need to own. Everything else is a trinket."

Today, many of the families that risked their lives to get in a boat and head for freedom are now business and home owners in Ottawa. They are looking back on the whole experience of Project 4000, wishing to keep this amazing episode in this city's history alive in our minds.

They have made a start with an exhibit at the Plant Bath on Somerset Street, featuring photos and documents from the era. The Vietnamese Canadian Federation wants to do much more, by building a permanent museum to commemorate the exodus of these people from Vietnam and then-welcome in Canada.

This could be an intriguing addition to Ottawa, especially if it is in the Somerset Village area. Another alternative, however, would be to remember these events with a substantial, well-done book. The most compelling thing about the current exhibit is the amazing display of powerful pictures. There'd be plenty of room for many such images in a book, as well as a comprehensive narrative text. Publishing a book would not be cheap. It could easily cost \$300,000, but it would be far less than the estimated \$2-million cost of a stand-alone museum.

Either way, this is part of our history that should be remembered by us and taught to our children.

#### De Saigon à Ottawa: l'odyssée des Vietnamiens

Dominique La Haye

Le Droit, Ottawa, 13-14 novembre 2004

En 1975 l'armée communiste du Vietnam du Nord venait de conquérir le Vietnam du Sud. Des centaines de milliers de Vietnamiens ont alors fui leur pays et les camps de concentration, au péril de leur vie, pour trouver refuge en Occident. Dès 1979, le Canada en a accueilli des milliers, si bien qu'on compte aujourd'hui 175 000 Vietnamiens au pays. De ce nombre, 6000 vivent à Ottawa. Ils sont pharmaciens, médecins, informaticiens et restaurateurs. Le Droit vous raconte aujourd'hui une partie de l'histoire de ceux qu'on appelle les **Boat People** et le rôle important qu'a joué la Ville d'Ottawa, à l'époque, à travers son Projet 4000. Celui-ci visait à accueillir des réfugiés indochinois dans la capitale.

Le suicide ou l'exil. Ce sont les deux options qui s'offraient à Katherine Van Nguyen, lorsqu'elle a appris que sa ville Saïgon, au

Vietnam du Sud, venait de capituler devant l'armée communiste du Vietnam du Nord, en 1975.

Elle a choisi la vie, à tout prix. Instinct de survie qui l'a plongée dans une odyssée des plus amères, où elle a dû naviguer entre l'oppression du gouvernement communiste, qui venait de prendre le pouvoir, et les nombreux pirates rencontrés sur la mer de Chine méridionale, lors de sa fuite. "C'est le sacrifice à faire pour la liberté", lance la dame, arrivée à Montréal en 1979, après avoir fui le Vietnam, et qui vit depuis 17 ans à Ottawa.

"Le gouvernement envoyait les intellectuels, les riches et les militaires de l'ancien régime dans des camps de concentration. Ça a été un véritable cauchemar", dit-elle encore avec des trémolos dans la voix.

#### **Un nom chinois**

Heureusement pour elle, Mme Van Nguyen n'a pas connu l'enfer des camps. Elle a cependant dû attendre jusqu'en 1979 avant de pouvoir quitter le pays, à l'âge de 27 ans, avec son mari et leur bébé naissant. Une entreprise tordue qui l'a amenée à emprunter temporairement un nom chinois et à donner 5000 \$ américains au gouvernement pour qu'il la laisse quitter le pays. "Il y avait un conflit entre le gouvernement et les Chinois qui habitaient au Vietnam. Ceux-ci pouvaient donc quitter le pays moyennant une somme d'argent. J'ai pris un nom chinois et j'ai payé le gouvernement officieusement pour qu'il me laisse partir."

Elle est donc montée à bord d'un bateau de 13 mètres de longueur, contenant 180 passagers. Un trajet de quatre jours, entassés les uns sur les autres, qui l'a conduite en

Malaisie, dans un camp de réfugiés, où elle a vécu un an avant d'arriver au Canada.

Durant son séjour d'exil en bateau, Mme Van Nguyen a rencontré, à 17 reprises, des pirates thaïlandais sur son passage. Elle affirme les avoir vus violer les jeunes filles et battre les hommes qui venaient à leur rescousse. C'est, selon elle, le fait qu'elle s'occupait de son bébé qui l'a sauvée de ces atrocités. "Lorsque des pirates se pointaient, nous étions à la fois tristes et contents. Nous savions qu'ils allaient nous voler et nous violer, mais ils nous laissaient souvent de quoi boire avant de repartir."

Aujourd'hui, Mme Van Nguyen travaille en informatique pour le gouvernement fédéral et a trois garçons. "Ça a été un véritable cauchemar et ça m'a pris du temps avant d'oublier..."

### **Partir sans dire au revoir**

Un jour, le Vietnamien Liem Duong, lui aussi de la ville de Saïgon, a conduit ses parents à l'hôpital et leur a dit au revoir. Un au revoir comme on le fait des centaines de fois, après avoir passé un repas en famille. Sauf que le jeune homme, alors âgé de 30 ans, partait pour ne jamais revenir. "Lorsqu'on voulait fuir le pays, il fallait absolument rester secret. Je ne pouvais même pas risquer de le dire à mes parents. J'ai appris que mon père était mort un mois plus tard et ma mère 10 ans après mon départ."

Pour M. Duong, arrivé à Ottawa en juillet 1983, il n'était pas question de rester au Vietnam, après que les communistes du Nord aient pris le pouvoir. "J'ai perdu beaucoup d'amis durant la guerre civile entre

le Nord et le Sud, j'ai perdu mon pays et je sentais que je n'avais plus rien à faire là. D'ailleurs, personne ne voulait rester là-bas. C'était la propagande du gouvernement communiste."

Le jeune réfugié est donc monté à bord d'un bateau partant de Saïgon pour se rendre dans une ville voisine. Rendu là, il a marché pendant plusieurs jours dans la jungle, avant de remonter à bord d'un autre bateau qui se dirigeait en Malaisie, dans un camp de réfugiés. "Nous avons navigué pendant 10 jours sur la mer de Chine méridionale, avec pratiquement rien à boire et à manger. J'avais en plus le mal de mer", se souvient-il, ajoutant, avec une pointe d'humour, qu'il n'a plus jamais voulu reprendre le bateau depuis cette expérience.

### Projet 4000: l'histoire d'un défi du maire d'Ottawa

Dominique La Haye  
Le Droit, Ottawa, 13-14 novembre 2004

En 1979, le premier ministre canadien, Joe Clark, annonce que le Canada accueillera 8000 réfugiés vietnamiens. Pas un de plus.

Le maire d'Ottawa à l'époque, Marion Dewar, réplique immédiatement en annonçant que la capitale, à elle seule, en recevrait la moitié. Le défi était lancé, de sorte que le premier ministre a finalement décidé d'ouvrir les frontières à 50 000 *Boat People*.

"La télévision nous montrait chaque jour les images de réfugiés, entassés sur de petits bateaux, complètement désespérés. Nous nous sommes dit alors : "Why can't Ottawa do more ?"", se souvient Eleanor Ryan, qui travaillait alors sur le conseil

d'administration du Projet 4000, mis de l'avant par la Ville d'Ottawa. Celui-ci visait à accueillir 4000 réfugiés provenant entre autres du Vietnam, mais aussi du Cambodge et du Laos.

### **Des citoyens accueillants**

Il fallait agir vite. En moins de deux semaines, entre le 27 juin et le 12 juillet 1979 se sont organisées les principales campagnes de parrainage. "C'était le chaos", se souvient Sue Pike qui travaillait sur le Projet 4000. Les résidants d'Ottawa ont été nombreux à répondre à l'appel. Le mari de Sue, George, se rappelle avoir organisé, à titre de volontaire, une campagne de parrainage au Centre communautaire de Glebe. "Plus de 250 résidants d'Ottawa se sont pointés. Nous ne nous attendions vraiment pas à voir autant de monde. Les gens voulaient aider." Ceux-ci devaient trouver un appartement, un emploi, une école et des vêtements aux nouveaux arrivants.

### **Un sac en guise de valise**

Le Vietnamien Can Le était à Ottawa depuis déjà plusieurs années au moment des événements. Il se souvient être allé chercher, à l'aéroport, les premiers réfugiés arrivés dans la capitale, le 7 août 1979. "Il était 2 h du matin, ils étaient fatigués, n'avaient presque rien. Seulement un sac de poubelle en guise de valise."

Le Canadien Paul Bennett était quant à lui dans un camp de réfugiés à Bangkok, en Thaïlande, où il travaillait comme agent d'immigration. Il se souvient avoir vu des milliers de réfugiés sud asiatiques arriver au camp, prêts à tout pour venir au Canada. "Leurs histoires étaient toujours tristes et

différentes, ils étaient séparés de leur famille à cause des guerres et de leur fuite."

Pour souligner les 25 ans du Projet 4000, une exposition photographique sur le thème des réfugiés vietnamiens se tient jusqu'au 21 novembre, au Centre récréatif Plant, au 930, rue Somerset ouest, à Ottawa.

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**Additional copies can be obtained by writing to:**

**Vietnamese Canadian Federation  
249 Rochester Street  
Ottawa, ON K1R 7M9  
Canada**

**Tel. (613) 230-8282, Fax (613) 230-8281  
Website: <http://www.vietfederation.ca>  
E-mail address: < [trungtam@istop.com](mailto:trungtam@istop.com) >**

