



# Library podcast

## Seattle Reads presents Thi Bui

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[00:00:36] Good evening it is amazing to be here twice in a day. I had a meeting this morning and had a auditorium but it is amazing to look up and see the overflow field. So this is really a testament to the great programming that we do. I'm MT and I'm your Chief Librarian and we're so excited to have you here today for this wonderful event for our Seattle Reads main event. Before we get started I'd like to acknowledge that we are gathered to game today on the ancestral land of the Coast Salish people. We honor their elders past and present and thank them for the stewardship of this land. Welcome to our 2019 Seattle read event an evening with Thi Bui and Julie Pham and I can truly say this whom I just had the pleasure of meeting. It was like five minutes ago. This is the 21st year of the Seattle Public Library's renowned Seattle Reed series. Reading a book as a community brings people together in powerful and sometimes unexpected ways. These shared experiences have proven so valuable that hundreds of one book community reading programs have spread all over the world and we're proud that the project originated back here in 1998. Seattle reads as one of the many reasons that Seattle is such a vibrant city of readers and one of the many reasons that Seattle was designated a UNESCO City of Literature back in 2017. We'd like to thank this year's sponsors the Wallace Foundation, The Seattle Times for their generous promotional support for library programs and media sponsor KUOW F.M.. We're also particularly grateful to this year's Community Partners the Vietnamese Friendship Association the Wing Luke Museum the University of Washington the Asian Counseling and Referral Services Northwest African-American museum short run Seattle and Elliott Bay Book Company.

[00:02:39] Please join me in thanking them oh gosh they're still coming.

[00:02:49] Oh yeah it's great. Finally special thanks to The Seattle Public Library Foundation and thousands of people in our community who make gifts to benefit our library that's private support makes Seattle reads possible in addition to the hundreds of free library programs and services every year so to library foundation donors who are here with us this evening. We say thank you very much for your support. Now let me turn things over to Stesha Brandon our Literature and Humanities Program Manager who directs our Seattle Read series to introduce the rest of tonight's program.

[00:03:28] Thanks so much. Empty wow I have a lot of announcements.

[00:03:35] So now I'm excited because I actually get to talk about the program out of curiosity how many of you have had a chance to read the best we could do. Oh that's awesome. That's gonna be good. That's great. It's been such a joy to work with this book and to deepen my understanding of it through this program. And you know I was really excited that we have had the opportunity to work with such amazing community partners this year and even had the opportunity to have a section of the book translated into Vietnamese. And this is the first time since 2004 that we have been able to engage a non English speaking audience in the Seattle reads program and we're profoundly grateful to the support of the community and to the support of the staff that helped with the translation. So you haven't seen that already.

[00:04:24] Yeah let's give them a round of applause Honestly it's beautiful.

[00:04:26] Applause applause if you haven't seen it already there are a few copies on the table there as well and if you know somebody that's a Vietnamese speaker that you think would enjoy that feel free to take one. So tonight's event is a little bit different from some of our other programs in that we are going to feature staged readings of excerpts from the best we could do. Adapted by local playwright Susan Liu and directed by Kathy Shea. The excerpts will provide a jumping off point for conversations between TB and Julie Pham and we'll alternate between excerpts and their conversation at the end of the evening. We'll have time for your questions. So now it's my just deep pleasure to introduce tonight's guests. TB was born in Vietnam three months before the end of the Vietnam War and came to the United States in 1978 as part of the boat people wave of refugees from Southeast Asia. In addition to creating the best we could do we is also the Caldecott Honor winning illustrator of a different pond a picture book by the poet both V and T's short comics can be found online at the nib pen America and boom California.

[00:05:42] We taught high school in New York City and was a founding teacher of Oakland International High School. The first public high school in California for recent immigrants and English learners since 2015. She's been a faculty member of the MFA in comics program at the California College of the arts. She'll talk tonight with local luminaries and putting it back in there Julie. She'll talk tonight with local luminary Julie Pham and Julie heads the ion program at Washington Technology industry association with her family. She Coke co owns the Northwest Vietnamese news the oldest private Vietnamese language newspaper in the Pacific Northwest. She managed the newspaper from 2008 to 2011. Julie earned her peach deep in history at Cambridge University as a Gates Cambridge Scholar and graduated magna cum laude from UC Berkeley. Her undergraduate thesis there war the perspectives of the South Vietnamese military in the words of veteran emigres was based on 30 original interviews with veterans of the Republic of Vietnam military who now live in Seattle San Jose and Sacramento. So without further ado please help me welcome tea boy and Julie Pham

[00:07:10] Hello.

[00:07:13] Oh great. Here we go. Yay. And so super honored to have you here with local luminary. I told them to not say that said local. And if I sound nervous it's because I am because I'm just so excited to and honored to be privileged to get to have this conversation with you. So when I was 2 months old I left Vietnam with my parents in a boat. One year after you did. Mm hmm. And so when I first read your memoir I saw myself in you and I saw my parents in your parents. And and so I learned so much about my parent's struggles through reading your memoir. And I think that your what the best we could do.

[00:08:06] It's it's not just so valuable for those who are outside the Vietnamese community but also those within the Vietnamese community because it says so much across generations as well.

[00:08:18] So thank you. How many Vietnamese people are here. Hi everybody. The book was for you.

[00:08:28] Yeah looks more so I'm gonna start with the I'm gonna start with a question I probably get asked very often how do you come up with the idea for this memoir.

[00:08:38] Well I had parents who were talkers. There's a lot of people whose parents didn't talk about the war or like life before America. My parents talked all the time about it and it was sometimes really disturbing and sometimes like you weren't ready for it because you were getting ready for school or something or you know that you just weren't emotionally ready for all this heaviness. But my parents talked about it anyway and so I think I needed personally I needed a place to process all of that stuff as a sensitive artsy kid. And then also later on as a you know a politically minded person who like felt upset

[00:09:18] At the many Vietnam War movies and documentaries and representations of the Vietnam War they were that are out there. None of them seemed to like accurately depict the experiences of my parents or anybody who was Vietnamese American. And so I you know I just felt like I needed a place to put all of that rage and then all of the access to knowledge that I had to do something about that rage well that rate is beautifully portrayed in in the best we could do.

[00:09:49] Oh thank you I mean it took so long to do that I mellowed out over the process. The rage mellowed in the marriage. By then you were. I was like I was I wasn't tired mom. That will definitely be a lot more mellow now redirect the rage I think.

[00:10:02] Yes.

[00:10:05] So now the book is an international bestseller. You're on all these lives you're winning all these awards. And I heard that you've gotten offers for films and TV and you've said no to all of them. Why is that. Why do you say no.

[00:10:20] Well I mean there are so many bad Vietnam war movies that it would break my heart to make another one with my own family stories. And it's not that I don't think it can happen because

clearly I've said yes to tonight staged reading but that's because I trust Susan and the other actors who are in it. And I trust the Seattle Public Library for doing this thing that like no one is making money from. So at least if we do a bad job like no one is making money from it.

[00:10:47] Money is not bad. Well I mean you know I just don't want to you know make money off of doing a bad job of telling the story. So I don't know.

[00:10:59] Maybe one day Hollywood will change. But Hollywood needs to like had better than good intentions. Hollywood thing to change is like hiring practices like put Vietnamese American people in charge before I will ever trust it with the Vietnam war story.

[00:11:14] So this is actually the very first time that there is going to be a adaptation at staged adaptation of your work. You are about to watch a world premiere here.

[00:11:25] Yeah yeah.

[00:11:26] I mean to be honest I actually do like it like live readings with audience members all around the country but they're they're not pros.

[00:11:36] Yes these are professional actors. Yeah. How are you. How are you feeling. I feel so nervous. I mean Susan Lou's playing me. This is so surreal. I mean I had a couple of drinks earlier. Well with that why don't

[00:11:55] We talk about that.

[00:11:59] I. I've got to write this down so I can say it well I'm delighted to welcome. Actors from book it book at Repertory Theatre which is a local theater that adopts books into plays to perform a stage work reading from the best we could do. Adapted by Susan Liu and directed by Kathy she let's welcome the actors to the stage we have to

[00:12:38] Teach voice Diego California nineteen ninety nine.

[00:12:44] Once upon a time I was young and moving to New York to be an artist too and live with my artist boyfriend. Are you going to live together.

[00:12:54] Yes I see my mother didn't disown me for an immigrant kid that's living the dream a few years earlier when my oldest sister Ling left for medical school and moved in with her boyfriend and later husband.

[00:13:12] Ring HELLO. Click ring. Hello. Click ring Hello.

[00:13:21] It's your mother. Our mother believed that living a boy with a boy before marriage was something you just didn't do the first time one of her daughters did this man fell apart. My other sister

Bick was in college. She'd have a boyfriend since high school but my brother Tom and I weren't supposed to talk about him. If Beau or Matt asked just say it was the three of us at the park OK. This secrecy didn't work out very well.

[00:13:52] It led to a deep rift in our family.

[00:13:55] Was that boy with you at the park. No. Yes. OK. Yes. Mandy not stop until she found the truth.

[00:14:02] How could you read my diary. How could a daughter of mine lie and do such dirty things. I'm sorry. Promise me you'll never see him again. It went on like this until big ran away from home.

[00:14:14] Our mother went to bed and took a whole bottle of pills. Why didn't we call an ambulance. Would have but she moved out the year before because of problems with ball. So at home it was just my little brother and me alone with Bill. He didn't know what to say or do.

[00:14:29] You don't have a sister named Benton anymore. She's dead to us.

[00:14:35] I don't know what we would have done. Ma had never gotten out of bed again.

[00:14:38] We avoided ever talking about that incident to the point that my thought I didn't remember it. I don't know if I ever told you I was there. How do you think I could forget something like that. Almost 30 years longer later I didn't know I was still angry.

[00:14:57] These are the people I come from. Matt but I prefer to be called Man all and these are my siblings and Big B I C H no T

[00:15:13] I have figured out more or less how to raise my little family but it's both. Being a parent and a child without acting like a child that eludes me. We're such assholes we're the lame second generation. My parents escaped Vietnam on a boat so their children could grow up in freedom. You'd think I could be more grateful. I am not older than my parents were when they made that incredible journey but I fear that around them I will always be a child

[00:15:46] And they are a symbol to me two sides of a chasm full of meaning and resentment Travis and I moved to California in 2006 to raise our son near family trading the life we had built and loved in New York for a notion I had in my head of becoming closer to my parents. As an adult I don't know exactly what it looks like but I recognize what it is not and now I understand proximity and closeness are not the same.

[00:16:20] By American standards we live like a tight knit multigenerational family mine our backyard. My sister Lang and her family two blocks away both in the senior apartment four blocks away.

[00:16:33] My brother Tom and his family in the same town and my sister big and her husband only two towns away. It's like Cheers. My parents are retired in good health and free to do as they please but also still lonely aging and quietly wishing we'd take better care of them.

[00:16:58] In Vietnam they would be considered very old in their 70s in America where people their age run marathon or at least live independently.

[00:17:07] My parents are stuck in limbo between two sets of expectations and I feel guilty I didn't grow up with my grandparents around my parents came to the US when I was 12.

[00:17:19] They live two hours away with their oldest son high from that relationship. I learned how to pour tea and give presents but nothing about how to be close to my parents.

[00:17:30] My father always said he had no parents. In my 20s I learned that my grandfather was still alive in Vietnam and wanted to meet us. Will you go with us both.

[00:17:41] There's no point in Vietnam.

[00:17:45] I met a whole family of half aunts uncles and cousins as well as my father's father. We all tried to convince my father to visit them.

[00:17:54] He never did. My grandfather died a few years ago. Soon after that trip back to Vietnam our first since we escaped in 1978 I began to record our family history thinking that if I bridge the gap between the past and the present I could fill the void between my parents and me and that if I could see Vietnam as a real place and not a symbol of something lost I would see my parents as real people and learn to love them better.

[00:18:26] I asked an endless questions about their lives the war and the country that once was mine.

[00:18:37] Always the practical one would rather we laughed more went shopping together humorous me with stories and then asked What should we do about dinner.

[00:18:46] I don't want to talk about dinner when there are so many more important things we haven't said to each other.

[00:18:54] I suppose for my mother I love you. Sticks in the throat so she buys gifts.

[00:19:00] Trade I won't say it. Just try it and Cook's mom. Really. We can take care of dinner.

[00:19:07] I've already made dinner. Any green vegetables like white rice again.

[00:19:16] I suppose I don't say I love you either. How did we get to such a lonely place. We lived so close to each other and yet feel so far apart.

[00:19:30] I keep looking towards the past tracing our journey in reverse over the ocean through the war seeking an origin story that will set everything right.

[00:19:53] Katie initial reaction in one word.

[00:19:58] Just like the Jerry Springer Show. I've never seen this this before and I'm I'm trying really hard not to cry. I need a tissue shoe got one in my pocket.

[00:20:11] All right. This is amazing. Thank you so much.

[00:20:17] That's what that that excerpt what really stuck out for me was the void. And this that that how do you fill the void and people being so close and yet so far away and when there's a void in our narrative and uh. I know I do this I make up stories I make up stories when my own explanations when there aren't explanations for me. And sometimes those stories are also like secrets. So could you talk about how you went about finding learning about discovering these secrets in your family.

[00:21:01] A I happened upon oral history as a really cool tool for getting my parents to talk to me by telling them that they could help me on a school project.

[00:21:16] Asian parents love to help kids with school. That's right. So it was my.

[00:21:23] My Trojan horse for getting my parents to open up about things and then be willing to talk and talk again and again and again about really uncomfortable subjects like while being recorded because it was offers for grad school and because it was for grad school and there was like a finite amount of time in which I had to get it done it also pushed me to go past my comfort zone too. And you know really nail down the chronology of like a really painful series of events in my dad's life and my mom's life as well later on. And then go through the painful process of like transcribing every single word of those recorded interviews and then often translating them from Vietnamese to English as well. So all that's like a lot of labor that you might not necessarily do if it's just like a side project for your family history.

[00:22:16] But if you're doing it for school then you know there's an external force driving you to to get it done. And then the presentation was a whole other question because I realized that after I got it done and compiled it for my my oral history final project that there was all this amazing material that I really wanted to share with other people and my my own family members were really excited about it.

[00:22:42] They were more excited about it than anything that I've ever done as an artist before that. So I knew that I was like holding something really really precious but no one was gonna read it except for my thesis advisor and my family. And so to find a way to share it with a broader audience was then like the next step and as they were.

[00:23:03] So it's great that they were actually also really excited about you sharing all those secrets too.

[00:23:08] Oh well you know they weren't so much the secrets at that point.

[00:23:11] Oh okay.

[00:23:13] So there are times where and what your parents remembered and what your siblings remembered how they remembered those stories or different how do you reconcile that.

[00:23:24] Well that that that was one of the things that like actually researching oral history was helpful for because oral history is like notorious for being kind of unreliable memories really unreliable. But you know in the face of like dominant narratives overshadowing other perspectives like oral history is a really important tool to reset the balance. And so you know then I had to deal with it in a way to deal with it was to have like not one but multiple voices. And this was like a really amazing embodiment of how important it is to have multiple multiple voices telling a story because there is no single truth there's no single story. And the more that the more you can work against the single story the closer you get to telling the truth.

[00:24:08] That's one of the things I love about your book because they will see different perspectives on how may I remember this and how Bill remembered this and yeah just put it side by side like that and all of that is influenced by their gender their class their age their their life experience the truth and what we want to remember is the truth. Yeah. All right well let's um let's watch some more storytelling home the holding pen.

[00:24:39] Berkeley California 2015.

[00:24:43] My parents have been separated since I was 19. They remain friends and take care of each other so often it looks like they are still a couple until it doesn't. Both Do you remember when we were born. Did you really go to the movies. Like I said What

[00:25:03] I never Your mother always saying things to make me look bad.

[00:25:07] You went to the movies.

[00:25:10] I was there for Tom's birth. I know about that I drove you to the hospital for the other birds except forbid because I was living in the town.

[00:25:21] Then I was in the waiting room. It was Vietnam. Don't let men come in. Put on a surgical mask and watch and if I did go to the movies it was because I was scared. I was scared my wife would die. And I'd be left alone. You went when Zan Wynn was born

[00:25:49] I was both so terrible.



[00:25:51] It's hard to remember. My memories of him live in an orange apartment building in San Diego California.

[00:25:58] I remember blinding concrete in the rectum linear shapes of lawns and parking lots followed brush and Cypress those stairs and the claustrophobic darkness inside our home. I remember streets named after states and schools named after presidents and imagine each block each day and thus a little more American.

[00:26:20] The same month we moved into the orange building a 16 year old girl San Diego aimed her rifle at the elementary school children across the street from our help. Killing two people injuring nine San Diego was a naval and Marine Corps base where the wounds of the Vietnam War was still fresh.

[00:26:41] And not everyone welcomed our presence.

[00:26:44] I learned about America mostly through books and TV and from what my sister learned in school. Every morning we have to say I pledge allegiance to the flag. One nation under God indivisible. And so as this induction into American hood needed any more nudging you stupid gook.

[00:27:09] There were reasons to not want to be anything other from my parents or already fully formed in another time and place to which they could never go back home becomes the holding pen for the frustrations and the exercise demons that had nowhere to go.

[00:27:31] In America's finest city any luck with the Board of Ed is impossible. They don't recognize old degrees here.

[00:27:38] There's a job at the company where my sister works. It's a minimum wage but it's full time. You'd be putting circuit boards together that sounds terrible. Fine then I'll take it okay.

[00:27:57] Looking back it was a bad decision for ball to be the one to stay home with two small children at the time.

[00:28:04] I only knew that man would be gone before the sun was up and thumb would be at the window crying if he missed her. She forgot to look up and wave goodbye. My sisters got themselves ready and walked to school on their own leaving thumb and me alone with bull and the TV. I remember he smoked a lot and sometimes he played with us and it was good.

[00:28:23] Well five smoke rings in a row.

[00:28:26] But the problem was we never knew when his anger would strike.

[00:28:31] Vroom vroom boy. Or what sinister thing you would bring home to live with this ball.

[00:28:41] Hung up a new portrait of a woman in a grassy field.

[00:28:45] And we hide under blankets looking at it wondering why is she naked. Is that a ghost boat to the scary stories not to entertain but to educate if you hear a voice calling your name that you don't recognize.

[00:29:02] Don't answer it. It is the spirit trying to trick you into open your mouth to enter your body.

[00:29:10] To know that he. Terrified us. Knock knock knock.

[00:29:14] We'd all look as the shadows became bigger and bigger on the frosty glass on the front door.

[00:29:19] Just pretend we're not here.

[00:29:21] And then Bush would leave the living room leaving the kids to knock knock the glass panels in our door meant to let light into the dark apartment only made it harder to ignore the shadows outside.

[00:29:31] Some would hold his breath till he couldn't hold it any longer but even his hiding place was fraught with danger.

[00:29:37] The naked ladies hand would reach for me in the closet. I was never safe.

[00:29:41] Don't develop the habit of hiding in the closet for hours holding my bowel movements and try not to mess my pants.

[00:29:47] I conversely became obsessed with the supernatural. I read and reread both books about paraphernalia studying the pictures until I had memorized every disturbing detail and so we spent the days.

[00:30:01] We didn't go outside to play until land came home and then we see out as long as we could something into mass. Afterwards when she got home was the best part

[00:30:11] In the evening. We would often watch a movie together. I remember watching The Exorcist when I was 5. We didn't have restrictions on what we could watch and we didn't have a bedtime like other children did. In my sleep I dreamt of how terrible it would be to not find my way home. I never had dreams about flying or thoughts of running away from home.

[00:30:34] I remember both told us about astral projection. A friend of your uncle's was known to protect in his sleep as a joke. His friends dressed him up while he slept. His spirit didn't recognize his

body when it tried to return all this. He was possessed him. So afterward it was as if he was gone. Same for slept alone in his bed at night in practice leaving his body I practice being brave.

[00:31:08] Once I realized I could impress others simply by pretending not to be scared acting tough became a way to overcome the terror. I'm so thirsty.

[00:31:17] Me too. But the kitchen scary in the dark. I'll go. Really.

[00:31:21] No way the dead aren't supposed to talk to us. We're on different planes. If we could open a door between worlds we can also shut it and I can close my eyes and turn away. If I could close my eyes I could sleep and if I could sleep I could dream though my world was small. I would sometimes dream of being free in it.

[00:31:49] Blood and rice me and Bo.

[00:31:53] Where are you now. Just stop being scared of him.

[00:31:57] I grew up and went away and now that I've come back we can sit in my mother's studio. Both of us visitors. Neither one owing the other to understand how my father became the way he was.

[00:32:12] I had to learn what happened to him as a little boy. It took a long time to learn the right questions to ask.

[00:32:21] When I did the stories pour forth with no beginning or end anecdotes without shapes wounds beneath wounds.

[00:32:32] Shall I begin the story of the pond in hyphen in 1951 when Vietnam was still a part of French. No China. My grandfather and great uncle Bill a street in the northern city of Haiphong Haiphong was a seaport. The most important in the north. Two hundred kilometers from the border of China.

[00:32:55] First they built the row and named it after themselves then they begin to dig the dug the clay for the foundations of houses that they built on smaller nine metres long and three metres wide. The more houses they built the bigger the hole got. Rains came and fill the hole. People planted water hyacinth water spinach and morning glories and stopped upon with shrimp and fish.

[00:33:23] It was there that Bo taught himself how to swim. My father fish for small shrimp which was so plentiful.

[00:33:31] One morning his grandparents deck were covered with hundreds of shrimp that had caught up during the night a fabric Dyer moved into one of the houses. Eventually the dyes he poured into the water.

[00:33:46] You are the pond life and there was no more fishing each of Bo's stories about childhood has a different shape but all the same ending when Bo got very sick. What's wrong with him now.

[00:34:04] He's burning up and he has boils all over his body.

[00:34:07] Keep him on what leaves and keep changing them. It could die out here. The jungle is no place for a child.

[00:34:14] We'll have to go back to the city war cause shortages and inflation why other people have less to eat. The French and Japanese army hoarded the rice and even burnt it as fuel for trains when oils were scarce farmers were forced to uproot their rice and plant food which was used to make sandbags ropes and other army needs.

[00:34:45] I remember waiting all day for food dinner water spinach that's it.

[00:34:53] Now officials even quiet. What do you contribute every once in a while.

[00:34:59] My mother will scrape together a few cents and run out and buy a blood sausage.

[00:35:05] Just a small piece wrapped in banana leaf. She sneaked home crawl under the cover of the bed curtains and called to me.

[00:35:14] She lowered the curtains and we'd eat in secret.

[00:35:19] My mother and me when I was five my father fell in love with the neighbor pretty at the end of the street.

[00:35:30] Why do you always leave us. Stay out of my business.

[00:35:36] And then one night Bo watched as his father beat his mother badly and threw her out. That was the last time Bo ever saw his mother.

[00:35:47] This was in 1945 at the height of the famine.

[00:35:52] Where did she go.

[00:35:53] How did she survive the dead piled up in doorways. Haven't Southern them a place to rest at night.

[00:36:02] By day they will haul away on Open Court the Family disbanded my father and grandfather each focus on his own survival when separate ways.

[00:36:14] His father joined the Viet Minh because they would feed him and lie down under his grandmother's protection.

[00:36:21] Bowe escaped starvation but many others still suffered post father came only to announce his departure.

[00:36:31] I'm off to fight for the revolution. Where's my son. Tell my boy to come here. Here Papa boy's father kicked Bo square in the stomach throwing him onto the floor.

[00:36:41] You're not my papa.

[00:36:43] And in the dark apartment in San Diego I grew up with the terrified boy who would become my father afraid of my father craving safety and comfort.

[00:36:56] I had no idea that the terror I felt was only the long shadow of his own when I was working on this book. He visited my studio and I showed him a drawing of his childhood.

[00:37:13] You know how it was for me and why later I wouldn't be so time for that tissue.

[00:37:34] While watching that scene reminds me when I first read your book and I kept thinking she experienced that too.

[00:37:47] Wow that happened to her too. Even there was like the the scene with a creepy neighbor for the end. And the way that our parents try to express love in a way that's so different from what looks like on TV and just all the stories that we come up with with our siblings. And reading your book I just felt I'm not alone.

[00:38:13] And there's so many things that are so similar so um I though can't imagine sharing all the things that you shared all the secrets that you shared so earlier you talking about in the beginning your parents who are your family. They were really excited about it.

[00:38:31] They were proud and what did they how when. When it was clear that you were going to have to hear stuff that was really. That could bring shame. Or at least that's the way I would look at it. How did they feel about. Did you hesitate. First of all did you hesitate. And then how did you go about getting there. There permission slash blessing for sharing those secrets those family secrets.

[00:39:02] I guess I should make it clear for everybody that it took me over 10 years to get this sucker done and part of that was you know the learning curve and you know teaching and raising a kid at the same time. But the other was fear of doing further violence right. And like although I was doing it for school and that helped my thesis advisor was also a very conscientious politically minded person who had quote Edward's side to me and say all forms of representation are violent which didn't help. I was really paralyzed with fear and I think it was actually when I gave birth to my son that I went through something very real and very concrete that was like scary. But you know you have to get the baby out

right. Like it doesn't go back in. You can't stay there. And and so I got the baby out and I figured well if I can get the baby out I can get the book out and that one other baby.

[00:40:06] Yes.

[00:40:08] Right. So it was like a like life taught me that. Like sometimes you can do stuff that you're not prepared to do. And that taught me what my parents went through.

[00:40:17] Like it's not you know I don't think it was ever in their life plan to like uproot themselves and throw their lives and their children's lives to the wind and take this huge risk and go in a boat illegally to another country and then like you know start new lives on the other side of the world. But they did it.

[00:40:40] So I guess it was. It was all part of that same trajectory.

[00:40:43] Was it easier for you to get acceptance from one parent over the other or from some siblings and not. Or is it depending on what you shared or were they. I mean how did that as you kind of start to share pieces of the work with them.

[00:40:58] My father was a he was a big collaborator and he was of course you know the one who stood to lose the most because he's not portrayed in the most flattering way at all times. But I think that. He gets it in that like he's he's been writing he's been like sorting his affairs and getting ready for the long goodbye for the last 30 years. And there is something about that that makes you ready to tell your story because you want to sell your debts and you want to like make the jumbled mess that is your life like a coherent narrative. And so he was actually really willing collaborator in the telling of his life story. And I think you really enjoyed it. My mother I believe will live forever or she believes that she will live forever. So yeah. Yeah. So she's you know she doesn't really want to. She didn't really want to do it but I think she was actually she's actually oddly enough like more politically minded. So I think like the idea that we were doing something that was gonna be important for Vietnamese people really motivated her to go beyond her comfort zone. And like you know tell her story in a way that was not always like super flattering to her and maybe compromising.

[00:42:13] But it was gonna be good for Vietnamese people how did they feel about it now that you're getting flown everywhere and the book is so famous and are they. Oh yeah I knew all along or. What was it.

[00:42:26] I don't know. You know they say look. OK good job you know but they don't they don't make much didn't they don't let me get a big head about it.

[00:42:38] I mean I think they probably say some nice stuff behind my back. Yeah right. But not to them. So I wouldn't know what they think about it.

[00:42:45] Yeah so this is the best we could do it's there on one hand I think about is feeling this this void of the the story of your parents this the personal narrative. But it also fills this other void this void in the historical narrative of the of the Vietnam War.

[00:43:10] Because in this you you offer a different perspective than the perspective that is and usually in American films and history books.

[00:43:20] And I think that the next excerpt gets that really well yes that means heroes and losers Saigon Vietnam 1976.

[00:43:37] My parents began to talk of escape my friend to know someone who has the boat escapes had to be planned secretly and one needed connections. The boat owner got caught and there's something else that worries me how our next door neighbor has been spying on us. He mentioned we might be getting paid a visit soon.

[00:44:00] We can't have these novels around the house. The Congress call this capitalist filth.

[00:44:06] Yes ma'am you can read any of our books you like read it all before it gets burned.

[00:44:12] Hey where's the last chopper to Heavenly Sword and Dragon sabre. Oh. Yeah. No

[00:44:19] No I never know how it ends. You just gotta read faster.

[00:44:23] One evening my parents got the first of many visits from our neighborhood monitor.

[00:44:29] The country smells good in here. What are you eating. You always eat this well.

[00:44:35] My daughter herself we're eating half portions. Wow.

[00:44:39] White rice there was a war for our cane wheat. It means false lying deceitful. It could be applied to anyone in the south.

[00:44:50] It meant constant monitoring distrust and the ever present feeling that our family could at any moment be separated. Our safety jeopardized. And then ball was let go from his job. Around the same time the currency changed.

[00:45:06] Those bastards no matter how much you exchanged all you get back is two hundred done.

[00:45:13] That was all we had. And now it feeds our family for less than a month.

[00:45:19] I'm gone now.

[00:45:19] I need a smoke map out left alone to provide for our family and both fell into a deep deep depression.

[00:45:29] Which man had no sympathy for there's no future here. Even my kids won't be able to get a more than a sixth grade education.

[00:45:40] One day in 1976 we received an unexpected visitor bringing news from the north father. It had been more than 20 years since ball had seen his father.

[00:45:53] Your mother came to high farm looking for you. She came once before in the fifties but you'd already left all this time.

[00:46:01] I thought she was dead. Why didn't you tell me.

[00:46:06] There's a lot you don't understand. It was war time all anyone was trying to do was survive. Let's forgive and forget and why I'd be a happy family again.

[00:46:15] Well no you see your wife's family. Are just two Wait.

[00:46:23] I can't risk being associated.

[00:46:26] That was the last time they saw each other. Will you write to your mother.

[00:46:33] Would I say after all these years your father gave me his ring.

[00:46:37] Sell it possessions sold to northerners relocating to Saigon through my diligence turned into food the daily fight to survive wore me down while the constant surveillance riled me up.

[00:46:50] What's wrong now. Oh. I'm just tired and worried about your uncle Hi. It's been over a year since he was arrested and we're not sure where he is school. It's OK.

[00:47:04] What are you learning. We're learning how to report suspicious behavior.

[00:47:11] They said we should even report our parents close friend to try to organize another escape.

[00:47:17] But on the day we got busted or scouts never show up Matt was running out of things to sell Bull's grandmother was very old and sick and to complicate matters more.

[00:47:29] I'm pregnant new family planning rules require Matt to get an abortion but Matt remembered her two lost babies.



[00:47:40] The doctor took pity you don't want to do this do you I'll say it would be dangerous to your health.

[00:47:48] Thank you just as a future seem impossible and no chance I'll get it out.

[00:47:55] Wait up Gail. Is anything wrong. He was the life of mass brother Hi. It's not my brother is it. Oh hi is alive.

[00:48:04] They finally let me see him. It is something else. Can you come by the house tonight.

[00:48:11] Highs and Lows had found a bull for sale and wanted to escape the country.

[00:48:16] Matt knew a person with enough money to buy it. The in-laws would sell places on the boat and repay the investor for her role as an in-between.

[00:48:26] Matt would receive a space was for all of us on the boat.

[00:48:31] What about your grandmother. She's all alone now.

[00:48:34] There's no way she survived the trip I see. And what if she cries and gets us all caught tell her we're going.

[00:48:44] We arranged for my parents to look after her gas and food were brought. It's not it's not on the boat. A letter at a time. Spaces on the boat were boring go bars or promises of repayment.

[00:48:58] And finally in March of 1978 my brother Hai was released from prison.

[00:49:04] We lived next week. Are you in or out.

[00:49:07] By then my was eight months pregnant.

[00:49:10] What choice do we have.

[00:49:12] We packed out papers and one change of clothes for each of us in the middle of the night. We woke up the children to go.

[00:49:20] It's time you're not coming back.

[00:49:24] Are you don't be silly. Grandma will be back in a few days.

[00:49:34] We took the early morning bus from Saigon to come to where we were supposed to meet our contact. We sat.

[00:49:41] We stood we waited.

[00:49:44] It was very late. Finally at dusk we arrived at the dock where the boat and the rest of the passengers were anxiously waiting for us. At last. I was worried we'd have to leave without you. Hi.

[00:49:57] I'm so glad to see you. Go on down and get settled now. Can I show you something.

[00:50:02] Look girls don't be scared I'll point out the people that we know there is Uncle Hai on you and your cousins. Oh Mr. Joe is the pilot. He was in the Navy and then in prison with Uncle Hai one eyed high is also a friend from Uncle of uncle's highs from prison dinner here sis saved you one try to eat something. Try to sleep. Taking

[00:50:29] A crash. What have you done. I don't know. Do the river islands. We must have had one. Keep your voice down. The patrol boats have come in general. Outside Chicago has just jumped in the water all we can do now is wait for the tide to rise. Not well. Mr. Joe

[00:50:50] From the water. Are they gone. All well. I look look pulled the algae off the rudder and there is enough water now to get my mom move in.

[00:50:59] Coast is clear. We've got a problem. He just lives there shivering. I can go back to

[00:51:05] Prison. Can you drive a boat.

[00:51:09] Whose lights up ahead. You class you moron. That's the same river we draw while off.

[00:51:15] We need to elect a new pilot someone capable I think now could do it. Yes ma'am. You drive.

[00:51:23] Show me what I need to know to get us to Malaysia.

[00:51:26] You're a quick study Nan one hundred kilometers east to international water seven hundred kilometres south west to Malaysia. Got it.

[00:51:40] Look bigger ships. Let's

[00:51:43] Let's fly them down to rescue us. Those are Thai fishing boats could be pirates.

[00:51:47] How do you know. I don't. But we still have gas food and water. We stay away the hell away from them. Look when I turn in their turn.

[00:52:00] They follow. Oh God

[00:52:01] If they catch us don't you think I want to protect my wife and family as much as you do yours.

[00:52:10] Oh now you did it. They're not following us anymore.

[00:52:16] Water. Go get some water for yourself and your sister. Lang walks over to the water tank. Drink it and then throw up all over the floor.

[00:52:26] Keep it down. We tried to keep the ball running over here. I don't feel good about pouring fuel near a flame. We could turn it off first. Yeah.

[00:52:35] Okay now we light it up I guess what's going on. Was the engine off. I tried to give those pointing sails but hurry up. Try again. Those compass starts to spin or shifts both in the boat in a safe direction and then I'll go high pull

[00:52:55] The hatch to the bottom deck open.

[00:53:00] It's night. We can leave this cover off. Why

[00:53:03] Not. Oh it's the belt of Orion.

[00:53:08] Keep your eyes on it and you'll feel less sick.

[00:53:12] On the third day my I walked over to the water tanks melted and how could you pass in the washing water.

[00:53:23] It was dark. I was sleepy. Hey I see land. Land. Land. We're close to land.

[00:53:34] I've been saving these. But now I can make you lemonade to give us a little energy and to celebrate fishermen.

[00:53:42] They're leading us to shore. They're signaling to us later later. Hey everybody get ready. We're almost at the shore.

[00:53:50] And then an oar hit balls body and he fell into the sea.

[00:53:55] But he was lucky because he knew how to swim. He arrived to shore and guns were all pointing to his head.

[00:54:04] I am Vietnamese from boat.

[00:54:08] They're letting us land who we reached Malaysia was getting ready to go.

[00:54:15] Don't lose your shoes what I really appreciate about this part is how it feels fills in that void for that historical narrative because not only do you tell the story of your your parents and your family but you also tell the story of the Vietnam War from the perspective of the South Vietnamese refugee community.

[00:54:53] I remember when I was studying history and reading about the Vietnam War and what I saw was oh the Vietnam war is between Vietnamese and Americans. Mm hmm. But the Vietnamese they're only talking about the communists and so actually the South Vietnamese really had no voice no place.

[00:55:16] And it was until I actually started talking to my dad who served in the Navy for three years and then served in the Navy and then went to reeducation camp for three years and that's that's the reason why we fled Vietnam did I begin to understand a different perspective a different side of the war and also recognized while there's the all the stories that are in American media are so are so one sided and you bring up this and you bring up the word we and I think that's such an interesting word because it means traitor.

[00:55:51] It means enemy. And in this you talk about it meant for everyone in the South during the war the communists would use it to describe anyone who is affiliated with the South Vietnamese government the South Vietnamese military because they were said to have been puppets of the Americans but actually what you show is schoolteachers. Anyone in the south. What the the the danger that your parents felt even though you're your father hadn't served and and often when we think about the Vietnamese refugee experience it's okay. The Americans pulled out of this war that they really shouldn't have been in and refugees are coming to the U.S. because that's the right thing to do. But we actually don't talk about why did they leave so this this part it it reminds me of there's this um there's this poem called home and it's written by this uh work on shire who's this Somali British writer. And the poem home is it's kind of an anthem to the refugee community. And in this poem there's this line and it says you have to understand no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land. And what you what you showed was why how the land was so dangerous. I think that's what's missing. We don't know why people left. So I think part of that is because my parents didn't talk about until I started asking them explicitly so many for parents generation. They didn't talk about it. How did you get your. How do you get your and your parents to talk about that part about the part where what life was like after the war ended. What is known in Vietnam as reunification. And yet by South Vietnamese as loss of country.

[00:58:09] Well actually it wasn't very hard to get my parents to talk about it my friends talked about all the time and my experience of like other Vietnamese refugees who are here and all around the world is they want to talk about it.

[00:58:21] But the bigger question is why why doesn't anybody listen to them right. And I think the thang win is very succinct in his non-fiction book. Nothing ever dies. He says that all wars are fought twice once on the battlefield and a second time in memory. And the U.S. has successfully won the Vietnam War in memory by making itself the main character of the story of the Vietnam War. And so

in doing that it has successfully erased the experience of the Vietnamese people who fled Vietnam after the war and it has raised the fact that it was a civil war that tore it apart. I mean it was a civil war that was made much worse by foreign intervention of course. But the fact that it was a civil war means that there were more than two sides. If there was the US also and it's not that we want to keep taking sides in fact we want to move beyond the taking of sides 40 years later. But the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of people whose story can like year after year generation after generation is ignored and invisible sized and often complete portrayed completely wrong. They're called puppets and traitors by one side. They're just completely overlooked by the other or mistaken as commies or gooks or no as as the people who who they fought or who were they were defeated by.

[00:59:43] That is so dehumanizing and so upsetting for people that it makes them sort of like ghosts like they can't move beyond their own demons. And so I'm more interested in helping people heal at this point but in order for them to heal their stories have to be heard and you have to acknowledge where their wounds come from. So it is very important to go back into the archives of this war that is so old now and correctly name who the players were who was affected and then maybe move into the next step which would be to acknowledge that wrongs were done on all sides and so aside from the interviews the oral histories that you did well with your family what kind of other research did you do to to cause you show so many different aspects I mean actually really love.

[01:00:30] There is that one part in the book where you dissect the the photograph by Eddie Adams that famous photograph where he shows a general killing a Vietcong leader and then you actually tell the story behind that. Like how did you go about doing your research.

[01:00:46] Well there a documentary on it the on on Eddie Adams and you know he is on camera talking about all of his regrets around the effects of that that photograph and that he did he didn't feel like he deserved a Pulitzer for it and he was really upset that it had like ruined the general's life and he actually went to find the general and was really sad that he was in America working at a pizza restaurant.

[01:01:08] And he regretted that there were like efforts to try to deport the general here in the U.S.. And then third there's a lot of reading to do. Some of it's good like that documentary and some of it is just like you know same old same old crap. And and so it's just like upsetting. And then therefore motivating to try to offer an alternative based on things that I did have access to a lot of it was in Vietnamese.

[01:01:35] Published by the Vietnamese language press and publishing here in the U.S. and some of that can be a bit biased in its own way too. I know run a newspaper very very. So you just have to like keep balancing all of the many voices to like that again like I try to include as many voices as possible to try to get to the truth.

[01:01:57] Yes. And like you said earlier there is no one single truth that either multiple truth.

[01:02:02] So are you ready for the less already.

[01:02:06] Theme fire and ash we eventually found ourselves in California in 1979. I found us our own apartment acts as quickly as possible. We received food stamps and assistance for families with children at first but we get off welfare as soon as Ma

[01:02:29] Who support us with her job.

[01:02:31] On three thirty five an hour and countless sacrifices little by little. My parents built their bubble around us our home in America. They taught us to be respectful to take care of one another and to do well in school. Those were the intended lessons the unintentional ones came from there an exercise demons and from the habits they formed over so many years of trying to survive we learned what was important to survive.

[01:03:01] Lock the door always be the best in your class and what was not. Where's my magic sleep.

[01:03:08] We're all like Dr. Seuss books. I gave him away. You're too old for them now.

[01:03:13] I am always amazed at the amount of stuff some people have in their lives. My family kept sparse records of our existence. Our most important possession was this unassuming brown file folder in which my parents place the most essential pieces of our identity our birth certificate translated and notarized our green cards and our social security cards. When we began school we were each given a brown folder of our own into this folder. When our report cards certificates and awards and the annual class picture no individual school pictures.

[01:03:55] Those were too expensive when I was 9 my parents passed the test to become American citizens and our naturalization papers went straight into the important documents folder.

[01:04:06] Eventually Lang's folder reached capacity and the wards became wooden plaques and shiny trophies that adorned her bedroom. By the time Lang graduated high school went to college Ma had acquired her own certificates piecing together lunchtime workshops and night courses to build up the career she had begun on the assembly line at three dollars an hour hung.

[01:04:30] You're such a good student would you stay on as a teaching assistant next term.

[01:04:35] What do you think it means I have to keep driving you at night. I have my license is different here. You won't be able to do it.

[01:04:45] I can drive you know you can use the course credits I earn and learn and study something you like. Paul tried his hand at graphic design while my continued courses in mathematical drafting I love looking at the drawings each made. But what I love more or the nights when they were at school because Lang would come home from college to watch us. I remember two kinds of spaghetti while meat sauce and squash and mushrooms and bedtime stories from the earlier after Paris deals Helen. And runs away with her Agamemnon leads the Greek fleet to attack the city of Troy. I lie there

savoring the luxury of spending time together the marvel of being told stories and dead and the curious freedom of being home without our parents one night when I was 14. T do you want to watch a movie all rented die hard OK. It was bad. That's why my parents happen to be at home. Crash. The normal response might have been to go to see what was happening.

[01:05:52] Ours was immediately locked the door and rushed to the bedroom to hide.

[01:05:57] But then boom what would a normal 14 year old respond to. Then some kind of freak out maybe.

[01:06:03] All I know is a switch flipped in my brain and I acted purely by reflex evacuee. I grabbed the important Brown documents folder. What a rag put on my shoes. Give the folder to bowl covered my nose with a rag and walked out of the apartment building to a scene of oncoming fire trucks.

[01:06:21] The fire had started downstairs see old couple smokers with emphysema fell asleep with a little cigarette. Their

[01:06:28] Oxygen tanks exploded.

[01:06:30] This is the night I learned what my parents had been preparing me for my whole life.

[01:06:35] That not any particular piece of Vietnamese culture is my inheritance but the inexplicable need an extraordinary ability to run when shit hits the fan.

[01:06:48] My refugee reflex when they say we could we went back to our smoke filled home that same night seeing that the inside of our apartment was still intact and the danger passed.

[01:07:00] We put away our important documents and then went to sleep ebb and flow.

[01:07:10] New York Methodist Hospital November 2005. T has just given birth to her first son.

[01:07:19] I don't think I was prepared for this. There were so many things I didn't know about being a parent until I became one

[01:07:27] I didn't believe that babies actually eat every two hours sometimes more both day and night that no matter how natural it may seem it is not easy to feed a baby from your breast. Oh that's so

[01:07:42] It takes three people to wrestle your baby into place. I've got his legs. Oh. I need a genius grip on me. Oh move his head that

[01:07:51] Differences to my struggle could cause me to feel so helpless and alone. Are we done yet. The baby's due for a checkup. I didn't know about jaundice. What does she mean. Our baby is yellow. He's half Asian.

[01:08:07] Or that they would keep my baby in the hospital and discharge me.

[01:08:12] Photo therapy will help with the more fluids he passes through him the more toxins you can flush out. It needs to be mother's milk or formula a nurse some how long.

[01:08:22] It's hard to say I thought about the mortality of my infant son. What was it like with Zan going was sick in the hospital.

[01:08:37] I mean at the end I remember they had her in a sealed box like an incubator to help her breathe.

[01:08:46] She slept most of the time because she was so weak but suddenly she woke up and when she saw me her face lit up with a smile.

[01:08:57] It was like she was making me a gift of our last moment together. My mother and I hugged about the daughter she lost my sister I never knew Travis and I rented a room across the street from the hospital.

[01:09:13] He set the alarm so we would sleep in 90 minute intervals rising to sleep on our coats and shuffle across the street. Let's walk faster to warm up.

[01:09:22] Can't make stitches. Oh right sorry.

[01:09:27] Feed our baby as best as we could in the 20 minutes allowed and returned to our room to repeat the process over and over.

[01:09:35] That first week of parenting was the hardest week of my life and the only time I ever felt called upon to be called heroic. However much my body wanted to rest a force pulled me onto my feet with a clear and simple directive. Keep him alive. When the hospital finally released our son it still too took both of us holding him down to get him to nurse. In the last moments at the hospital I waited for Travis to get the car. The lactation consultant gently asked me one last try well OK great.

[01:10:17] Here's how it works. Sweater off pillow shop on the ropes off rest. Oh and. Baby

[01:10:25] Latches I'll leave the two of you alone. Alone with my son and feeling competent about it

[01:10:36] For the first time I relax and I started to speak to him.

[01:10:46] Mandy child its mother.



[01:10:50] I could hear echoes of my mother's voice speaking to me in my own childhood but I could feel the voice coming from my own throat.

[01:11:02] As a child I thought my mother's voice was beautiful. She hated it but I loved its raspy ness  
Millsap beef the hey we are about to go home. Men said

[01:11:18] The way we are going home when my mother spoke to me she spoke softly the tones of Vietnamese giving it music not high and reedy but scratchy and bluesy.

[01:11:34] I always wished I had her voice when my mother spoke to her children.

[01:11:40] She called herself man. The term used in the north. A weighty serious more elegant word for mother.

[01:11:49] We preferred the Southern Word Man a joy a jolly bright sound we insisted fit her better.

[01:11:58] I wonder now how I would feel if my son did something like that to me having a child taught me certainly that I am not the center of the universe but being a child even a grown up one seems to me to be a lifetime pass.

[01:12:19] For selfishness we hang resentment onto the things our parents did to us. Or the things they didn't do for us and in my case call them by the wrong name to accidentally call myself man was to slip my self into her shoes just for a moment to let her not be what I want her to be but someone independent self determining and free.

[01:12:58] How do I let go of all the anger I put away.

[01:13:03] I wasn't ready to lose my mother when I was 13 but now at 40 I know that our time on earth is finite what becomes of us after we die do we live on and what we leave to our children.

[01:13:21] How much of me is my own and how much is then into my blood and bone predestined.

[01:13:30] I used to imagine that history had infused my parents lives with the dust of a cataclysmic explosion that it had seeped through their skin and became part of their blood. That being my father's child.

[01:13:43] I too was a product of war and being my mother's child could never measure up to her but maybe being their child simply means that I will always feel the weight of their past nothing that happened makes me special but my life is a gift that is too great a debt I can never repay.

[01:14:24] That was the world premiere of the staged reading with professional actors.

[01:14:33] What do you think T. Good Seattle's gift to you.

[01:14:39] You'll come back right. We have ten minutes left for Q and A and I have cards that are coming. OK. Yes. If you can hold up the cards and so I just want to end with this question between us which is do you think that writing this memoir closed the void for you.

[01:15:05] No there's no happy endings.

[01:15:08] That's the that's the spoiler. It just does the the the the arc of the immigrant story as it is known to us where you know our characters overcome insurmountable obstacles to make it to the promised land and then life is lived happily ever after is not true.

[01:15:29] It is also not true that the story of a search for one's origin and closeness over proximity ends all happy. There are moments definitely of real connection and understanding but Joy is ephemeral. Understanding is ephemeral. And then we just have the memory of it later. So luckily books let us freeze those moments for ourselves so that we can remember the lessons and the feeling and pass it on hopefully or share it with other people. But you know stories are essentially lies. They're not exactly the truth. My mother will tell everybody that you know we told you the truth. And she wrote down whatever she wanted.

[01:16:23] So again this is my telling of my family's story and it is limited. But you know what. It was the best I could do.

[01:16:34] Applause So after we not ask this question.

[01:16:47] What did you. So this is about the artwork. Um. Because this is this is a graphic memoir. What did you hope to achieve by limiting colors to red orange in squashes. Um what is the color scheme guiding us to. I'm I'm just gonna rip off the veil of like you know symbolism and stuff and just reveal that it's cheap

[01:17:15] Practical dress. I mean I'm a refugee. So like the refugee reflex also I had to stay within budget like them.

[01:17:23] The book was budgeted for black and white. And then I asked the publisher halfway through the process if I could have any color. I was like I learned about duo tone and I was like could we do duo tone. And they did some research into how much it would cost. And they came back and said you can afford one color so I had to you know I went through the entire Pantone encoded library and I found a few different things that I tested out on like different shades of white paper and I found like the right shade of like warm sunny afternoons in south San Diego the orange apartment building the color of old Kodak prints from the 1970s and 80s that are starting to fade. Mm hmm. It's the color of nostalgia.

[01:18:12] It's actually as you say it kind of reminds I'm thinking that almost that sepia. Yeah just a little warmer than sepia. Okay. So this is a long question. In your book you discussed going back to your parents about the war and their stance on it which was confusing for you. Have you made any new developments on your stance on the war. I ask this because as a Vietnamese American teenager trying to find my identity that is made more confusing with media and school portrayals of the war I don't know. What to believe.

[01:18:49] Additionally any tips on how to talk about the war and refugee experience with parents that are afraid of exposing me to it to fill the void.

[01:19:01] Read widely. Do more than watch the Ken Burns documentary. Also to take everything with a grain of salt because experience is limited and it was a highly divisive war. People had to take sides often because of circumstances that really didn't have much to do with their actual beliefs. And just understand that it was a complicated situation people fought their brothers. People switched sides. People were just trying to survive and often didn't take sides but had to. And then also people were hurt. And even if you know we have the luxury now of looking back and you know taking intellectual sides people then didn't and they also suffered so their wounds are real. And that's something that I have to remember when I talk to people who experienced the war from different perspectives than my own is that I have to respect that their wounds are real even if they're political stance is not like my own. And I think that respect will help us do a better job of listening to each other's stories and I hope that that actually extends to the Vietnamese government. Now I'm actually trying to get the view the best we could do translated and published in Vietnam. But it's difficult because there are pages that the government would like to censor but they don't know how to do that with a graphic novel. And there are stories from Vietnam from Vietnamese writers like the amazing wind fund Gray my who's novel The Mountain seeing is actually going to be published in English in the U.S. next year.

[01:20:53] And she tells a very similar story of three generations that experience the same history. But from the side of the North. I read it in an early draft and I cried and cried and cried and we wrote to each other about why we hadn't heard these stories from each other before. She grew up not knowing that there had been refugees leaving Vietnam and the first time she encountered books from the diaspora she didn't believe them because she'd never been exposed to them and she does believe that they were probably U.S. propaganda but slowly over time as she was exposed to more and more stories she realized oh these are actual real stories that I just never knew were real. And I feel the same realization could happen for for us about stories from the other side. And so we have a lot to learn too about the communists like this monolithic block that we've been taught to fear or loathe. And there's so much more to learn but it starts with one having access to each other's stories and listening with an open heart and open mind. I think that's one of the fascinating things about the historiography around this war because there's a very different version that's that's believed right now in Vietnam and what you just shared it reminded me of when I was living in Hanoi 10 years ago and I brought a copy of Journey from the fall right which is about the Vietnamese boat people reeducation camp experience and I showed it to about 30 Vietnamese

[01:22:26] In my uh in my house in Hanoi. And when the movie ended they just their mouths were hanging open and they were just that didn't happen.

[01:22:39] I don't know that story and that was just 10 years ago. So it's really fascinating to see all of these different again multiple truths. So I'm going to uh end with this one last question where because we got three cards um in your opinion t what were the Americans real reason for being in Vietnam. Multiple truth.

[01:23:07] Well I mean the US President Dwight Eisenhower what I talked about you know the rise of communism and the idea that if if one country fell like many countries around it would fall to like the rising tide of communism and the West had like you know economic reasons to want to keep those markets open to it like this is all this is all documented. So I don't you know I mean I think that the real reason is is like it's recorded and then the reasons that we're told is something about freedom and stuff.

[01:23:46] So we just have to read right and pay attention to history.

[01:23:51] Q So with that let's just give a huge round of applause for tea and for the actors world premiere.

[01:23:59] Can we just.

[01:24:00] You're a part of a world premiere thank you so much.

[01:24:18] Thank you so much. Thanks to you for being here tonight.

[01:24:23] And before you go anywhere I just want to say thank you to tea and to Julie to Susan and Kathy Shay and book at Repertory Theatre and all the amazing actors here tonight. Thanks to our community partners the Vietnamese Friendship Association the Wing Luke Museum the University of Washington Asian Counseling and Referral Services Northwest African-American museum short run Seattle and Elliott Bay Book Company and a big thank you to our sponsors KUOW ninety four point nine public radio the walls Foundation the Seattle Times and The Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thank you everybody. This is amazing

[01:25:03] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.